

GROWING WHEAT IN THE BRIGHTON AREA (CONT.)

THE EARLIEST MOWERS USED SHORT PIECES OF SCYTHES FASTENED CLOSE TO THE LOWER EDGE OF A HOLLOW LOG PLACED IN A VERTICAL POSITION. PULLED BY THE TEAM, GEARS TURNED THE LOG IN A ROTARY FASHION, CUTTING EVERYTHING THROUGH WHICH THEY PASSED. ATTACHING GRINDSTONES KEPT THE KNIVES SHARP AS THEY ROTATED. IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE A HORIZONTAL BAR WAS DEVELOPED. THIS HAD THE KNIVES ZIPPING BACK AND FORTH CUTTING THE GRAIN IN A MORE EFFICIENT MANNER. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BINDER ALLOWED THE WHEAT TO BE BUNDLED AT THE SAME TIME. THE CHILDREN OF THE FAMILY HELPED GATHER THESE BUNDLES, STACKING THEM INTO SHOCKS FOR QUICKER PLACING AND ARRANGING ON THE WAGON FOR TRANSPORT TO THE ACTUAL THRESHING AREA.

HAND THRESHING WAS NOT A POPULAR ACTIVITY. FLAILING WAS ARDUOUS WORK, IT HAD TO BE DONE IN WARM WEATHER, AND NO MATTER HOW THE STRAW WAS TOSSED INTO THE WIND, A GOODLY AMOUNT FOUND ITS WAY INTO THE MOUTH, HAIR AND CLOTHES. WHEN THE THRESHING MACHINE CAME INTO BEING THE INTENSITY OF THE LABOR INVOLVED, FOR THE AMOUNT OF GRAIN HARVESTED, WAS GREATLY EASED. (HOWEVER OTHER CHORES SOON FILLED THE VACUUM.)

STEAM POWERED THE EARLY THRESHERS. THE STEAM ENGINE ITSELF WAS PLACED SOME DISTANCE FROM THE THRESHER. THIS WAS AN ATTEMPT TO REDUCE THE EVER PRESENT DANGER OF FIRE; DRY STRAW IGNITES EASILY. A LONG, WIDE, HEAVY BELT TRANSFERRED THE POWER FROM THE ENGINE TO THE THRESHER, TURNING ITS GEARS, ETC. THE BUNDLES OF WHEAT WERE TOSSED ONTO A CONVEYER AND THE THRESHED GRAIN POURED INTO BAGS WHILE THE STRAW AND CHAFF WAS BLOWN FROM THE END OF A TUBE. THE WONDERFUL, SOFT, GOLDEN PILE, OFTEN 12-15' HIGH, USUALLY PROVED AN IRRESISTIBLE MAGNET FOR CHILDREN. THEIR STRUGGLE TO THE TOP RESULTED IN A SWIFT SLIDE TO THE GROUND. HOWEVER "PA" USUALLY DIDN'T WANT THE STRAW STACK SCATTERED ALL OVER AND ONE WAS SURE TO COME AWAY WITH A MOUTHFUL OF STRAW AND CHAFF WHICH ALSO TANGLED HAIR AND SLID DOWN INSIDE ONE'S SHIRT WHERE IT IRRITATED MIGHTILY. THESE DRAWBACKS WERE USUALLY CONSIDERED INCONSEQUENTIAL COMPARED TO THE FUN OF THE SLIDE.

DURING THE EARLY PART OF THE CENTURY SEYMOUR KELLOGG OWNED A MODERN TRACTION ENGINE AND SEPARATOR COMPLETE WITH A SELF FEEDER (WHICH WAS ALWAYS READY TO TAKE AS MANY BUNDLES AS FOUR MEN COULD TOSS IN) AND A BLOWER TO AID IN STACKING THE STRAW. HE HAD A COMPLETE CREW OF NINE MEN AND HAULED A BUNK HOUSE FOR THEM TO SLEEP. ONE COULD HIRE HIM AND HIS CREW, LEAVING ONLY THE CARE OF THE GRAIN TO THE FARMER. OFTEN THE OWNER OF SUCH A MACHINE HIRED OUT TO THE FARMERS WHO THEN HELPED EACH OTHER. NO WRITTEN RECORD WAS KEPT OF HOURS WORKED BUT EVERYONE NEEDED EACH OTHER SO ALL WORKED TOGETHER. IF A MAN WAS INJURED THERE WERE NO LAWSUITS OR INSURANCE. IT WAS CONSIDERED BAD LUCK AND, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, THE OTHERS HELPED WITH HIS CHORES UNTIL RECOVERY.

WHEAT IS READY FOR HARVESTING DURING THE HOTTEST DAYS OF SUMMER. GRAIN HAS TO BE CUT ON HOT, DRY DAYS. HORSES ARE AS SUSCEPTIBLE TO HEAT EXHAUSTION AS PEOPLE. A GOOD FARMER NEVER OVERWORKED HIS HORSES. A NEW TEAM WAS PUT TO WORK IN THE AFTERNOON. A HORSE DEAD FROM THE HEAT WAS OF NO VALUE. (BY MARIEANNA BAIR. TO BE CONTINUED.)

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 481
BRIGHTON, MI 48116-0481