

public by traveling across the country and presenting programs in a bus which he had painted with the words "Suppose this POW Were Your Brother!" And when Mike was released, members of his family from all over the country and abroad returned to Decorah to be with him and to rejoice.

This is family cohesion.

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Golden Harvest

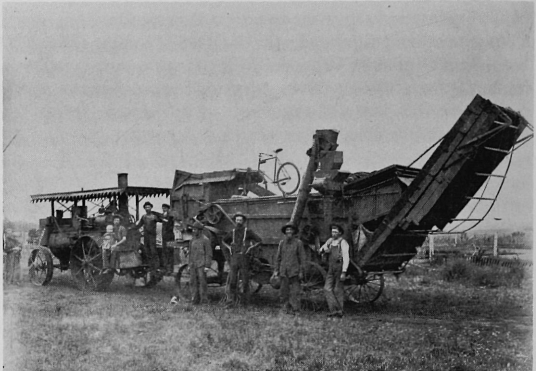
by Phil Einspahr

WILLIAM ASK'S FATHER AND BROTHERS were the owners of one of the first threshing machines in northeast Iowa, which they operated in an area with a radius of five miles around their farm next to the Glenwood stone church. Mr. Ask, presently a contractor, has been a farmer, and once owned a milling business. Much of our conversation centered on the operation of the Asks' threshing rig, and I found him to be an excellent source on the finer details of the process.

In an age of air-conditioned combines and diesel tractors, many people fail to realize the hard work that threshing once entailed. Neighbors helping neighbors took many days, often weeks, to bring in the harvest and store it in granaries. Insects, rust, and crop failures resulted in the elimination of wheat in the area, and hay was threshed for the seed only. Oats, therefore, was the main crop threshed.

In the fall, when the grain had properly ripened, the "golden harvest" was ready to begin. The binder, drawn by three or four horses, cut and tied the grain into bundles and laid the bundles in windrows. They were then shocked, heads together to shed water, and cured for anywhere from two days to about a week.

When threshing machines were scarce, the farmers made four large stacks in the field, drove the rig between them, and began threshing. Around 1910, it became popular to windrow and shock



Courtesy of Johannes Sollien

A threshing rig sometime around 1910.

eight bundles to a shock. When it came time to thresh, men with three-tined forks would toss the bundles into eight-foot-wide "basket" racks and haul them by horse to the threshing site.

Later threshers were powered by huge steam engines, but early models used horses and an apparatus called a "horsepower." The horsepower was staked into the ground and had up to four cranks, called sweeps, to which four teams of horses were hitched. As the horses walked in a circle, they turned a series of gears which increased the rotation speed. By means of universal joints and shafts, the thresher received power.

As the bundles of grain were pitched into the thresher, they passed teeth-lined cylinders and sieves which separated the grain, straw, and chaff. The straw was elevated by a stacker and deposited on the ground. Care was taken to trample it down and to round the top of the pile to make it waterproof. Blowers or fans separated the chaff from the grain.

After the grain was processed from the chaff and straw, it was elevated to a measuring hopper which dumped it into a waiting grain sack when a pre-set weight had been reached. Three "dumps" made a full sack. As grain augers were not widely used until about 1930, sacks were the most efficient way of handling

the finished product. A grain sack was 3½-4 feet high, weighed 100-115 pounds, and held about 3½ bushels. When the moisture content of the grain was high, the sacks were only filled two-thirds full to facilitate handling. The tops were twisted slightly to close them off.

As the sacks were filled, they were lifted into the standard three-foot by ten-and-one-half-foot steel-wheeled wagon. Wagons with low wheels were preferred because the sacks didn't have to be lifted so high. From the threshing site, the grain was taken to the granary where the sacks were stored. Lacking modern-day drying facilities, the farmer had to pay more attention to moisture conditions, heating and the resulting molding.

The farmer seldom sold his grain, but fed it out to his livestock. Combines eliminated much of the hard work when they came into general use around 1925-1930, and the community effort and spirit generated by the threshing days diminished.

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Don't Spare The Horses

by Richard McKlveen

THE "HORSE AND BUGGY DAYS" have never left for one man in the Decorah area. He is Mr. Francis Sexton, who at one time owned and worked three teams of horses. Mr. Sexton now keeps only one team mainly for his own pleasure, but these two horses can still do their share of work, as was demonstrated for the Foxfire Interim group when Mr. Sexton, after feeding his cattle from the horse-drawn sleigh, took all twenty-five of us for a sleighride.



Photograph by Steve Buck

Francis Sexton

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