

Curator's Corner . . . *By* CLAUDE R. COOK

There was a time in Iowa when every town had hitching posts to which horses were tied when they were driven or ridden into town. Many farms also had them. During this period the type ranged from plain posts set into the ground to very fancy steel posts with horses heads on top and fitted with rings through which hitching reins were passed and tied.

There was some pretty fancy knot-tying developed in those days, also some horses who became somewhat proficient at untying most any kind of knot. It was with great pride when I graduated from the hitching rope on the halter of a horse I admired and took great pains in keeping attractive. I had the harness maker make a wide halter strap and became something of an aristocrat in the "hitching" field. But it was an extravagance, for a "nickel" would purchase enough rope, while the inch and a quarter strap cost twenty-five cents or somewhere near that amount.

Hitching posts were everywhere. No respectable town would be caught without them. There was evolution in construction. From rough, unfinished, single posts, came the day when poles fresh from the woods, timber we called it, were fastened to the posts. Then they began to paint them. Later iron pipe was used for pipe and poles, for horses could not chew these.

But one day came the automobile. This did not at once indicate what the future held in store, for some autoists would fasten their cars to the hitching posts with chains. The cars would not go very far, but habit is hard to change, and, of course, the first autos had whip sockets on them. And there were times when an irate motorist would have preferred a balky horse to a stalled machine which would respond to nothing.

At times it was seen that the auto and tractor would not only replace the horse, but the time-honored hitching post. The horse was gradually evolved into disuse,

but not so the old hitching post. And many a town came to the point where their elimination became as much of a problem in municipal politics as their installation had been in the beginning. With increased use of automobiles, the posts gave way, and finally were eliminated altogether.

For a long time no respectable town would be caught with "its hitching posts up." It was just old-fashioned and passe. They had been removed and not even a dog could find one. It marked the passing of an era, mourned by many a historian. The posts were almost as famous as "The Old Oaken Bucket." Just writing this produces a nostalgic feeling. They were gone forever, we thought.

But they are back! I repeat, the hitching post is back. Of course they are made of iron and have a head on them with "doo dads", like clocks and adding machines in them, and you drop pennies or nickles in them depending upon the time you wish to stay. But they are the old hitching posts in disguise and like most disguises, they cost.

Shades of the past! Think of it! My Grandfather, one of the earlier settlers in south central Iowa, would disturb all of the turf in that historic cemetery southwest of Creston if it could be conveyed to him that we were putting money into "hitching posts" for the privilege of stopping our means of transportation, which would also astound him. And my father, much more vocal than grandfather, could think of things to call these modern "hitching posts," now known as parking meters, that moderns would definitely know belong to the past.

Parking meters modern? Invented by a brother of a Methodist Bishop and a college president, they are just the old hitching post with a false face—and incidentally, sometimes false timing.

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