

# Harvest in Renfrew in days gone by

by Harry Hinchley

Photo: Handford Studio in Public Archives

Grain growing has been for many years an important branch of agriculture on much of the land surrounding Renfrew. Even back in the days of early settlement when the pioneers had to harvest with scythe or cradle wheat was one of the first crops.

In 1857 the McDougall Mill and the McCrea Mill were opened in Renfrew and from that time on there was always a ready market for the farmers' wheat. Flour milling developed into an important industry and the flour made from locally grown wheat was of particularly high quality.

About the same time as these mills were built reapers began coming into use for grain cutting but because of transportation difficulties it is doubtful if many reapers were brought into the Upper Ottawa Valley. But soon after the first railway reached Renfrew the binder was invented and could be shipped in by freight.

The binder was a great improvement over the reaper which at best was never very satisfactory. It could only cut the grain but the binder was also able to gather it into sheaves and by means of a complicated mechanism called a knotter bind them with twine.

The pioneer maker of harvesting machinery was an American, Cyrus McCormick, but Canadian manufacturers were not far behind. In Toronto two small makers joined to form the great Massey-Harris Co and in Smiths Falls binders and other farm implements were made by Frost and Wood. Both of these makes were used on Renfrew County farms.

When tractors became more common on farms, combines took the place of binders. Today there are still a few binders in use on some farms but now most of the grain is harvested by combines.

