

History of Halton

Farming methods in the horse age

Here is another article in a series taken from a history of Halton, written for Halton Women's Institutes by Ben Case of the Silverwood area. There are only three copies of his history in existence; the Free Press had borrowed one to share the story with our readers.

VILLAGES

The mills often formed the nucleus of a village, growing up as the surrounding district became settled. Starting with the mill hands, a store or two would be opened, then the inevitable tavern and eventually schools and churches. This community would require many products produced by hand in the era before the advent of the factory, and hence the village would contain tailors, shoemakers, harnessmakers, blacksmiths, wheelwrights and wagonmakers, tinmiths, bakers and later a livery stable or two. These early communities would generally be found near a source of water-power, although along the waterfront in Halton the presence of water transportation gave the impetus whereby a town sprang up.

FARMING METHODS

We have seen how the early crops had to be sown between the stumps and it would be several years before a field was eventually cleared, so that a plough could be used to advantage. The grain was cut with a cradle and bound by hand, being first raked into bundles with a wooden rake and bound into sheaves. It is not likely that many men are left in the county today who could bind by hand using a few wheat or oat stalks instead of twine. The sheaves were stooked in the field as a protection against rain, and eventually taken to the barn. During the course of the fall or winter the grain was spread out on the barn floor and threshed with a flail - a method which hadn't changed since the days of the Egyptians and Romans.

THE HORSE AGE

After clearing the land of logs and stumps, at which task oxen showed up to great advantage, horses were greatly to be preferred, largely because of the greater speed at which they could pull a plough or wagon. W. H. Smith's book "Canada, Past, Present and Future", shows that by 1850 there were 727 horses in Essex compared with 575 oxen four years old and over, while in Nassagaweya, which was settled somewhat later, oxen still predominated, there being 470 oxen as against 257 horses. Down "at the front" in the township the proportion of horses would be much higher still. In the 1830's, the horse-drawn reaper was made by Cyrus McCormick in the U.S. and by 1850 its use had spread over the continent. With the reaper the grain was cut with a sliding knife similar to that still in use today. A revolving reel bent the grain as it was cut onto a table, and a man standing on a side step raked the grain off in bundles the right size for binding by hand. Eventually in the '80's a self knoter was invented whereby the sheaves were automatically bound with twine. At first the sheaves were dropped individually but later a sheaf-carrier was added to drop eight or ten sheaves at a time to facilitate stooking. All grain was then hauled into the barn and threshing attended to later in the year. The sheaves

were pitched on and off the load by hand and building the load required a considerable skill. Later a track similar to that in the hay-loft was built and the unloading taken care of by horses. The load was built into four bundles each tied with slings and the bundles hauled up one at a time. They were run along the track and dumped into the mow - more or less where wanted. Another and perhaps earlier method was to have the whole load, rack and all, hauled up by windlass to a greater height than the grain already in the mow, so that it could be pitched off down hill into the mow.

Similarly with haying, the horse-drawn hay-mower with a cutting blade similar to the reaper, replaced the scythe. Also the horse-rake replaced the

wooden hand rake. When cured, the hay was put up into coils against the time it could be hauled in, being pitched on and off the load by hand. This was one of the hardest jobs on the farm. A hay-fork installed at the barn, lifting large forkfuls at a time and operated by horses, took the hay into the loft and along a track suspended from the peak of the roof. This eliminated a great deal of hard work. Later a hayloader drawn behind the wagon was a great help in the field.

Along about 1840 a threshing machine about four feet by four feet by five feet high made its appearance with a revolving spiked cylinder which knocked off the heads of the grain, with the operator tossing the straw aside. It was powered by horses working either on a tread mill or at a sort of merry-go-round outside the barn. By the latter method, two, three or four horses would be hitched to long arms running out from a central cog-wheel with a small boy keeping the horses going round in a circle. In time a larger separator, or thresher, made its appearance.

At first it was run by horse power and later power was supplied by an upright steam-engine which was drawn from farm to farm by horses. It was necessary for each individual farmer to have a pile of wood stacked nearby for stoking the engine. The next step was a traction engine whereby the line, built on the lines of a locomotive was geared to propel itself along the road to the wonderment of the whole community and especially of small boys whose great ambition was to steal a ride on this amazing contraption.

The threshing gang of three or four stayed for the night at the farm house where the outfit was located. Dinner and supper were served by the ladies of the household to all, including the neighbors - perhaps twenty all told - who assisted at the threshing. As the culinary reputation of each farmer's wife was at stake the women of the neighborhood vied with each other as to the quantity and quality of the meals served at their respective tables.

In the early days a strawcarrier in the form of a moving canvas was used to convey the straw from the separator to a straw stack in the barnyard. Building this stack was about the worst job at the threshing as the dust from dirt, rust and smut would soon blacken the person at the head of the carriers. Old-timers learned how to avoid this job and it was usually assigned to a green-horn or, failing that, to the hired man. Later on a blower was a great improvement as the straw was automatically cut up and blown into the mow to be kept convenient and dry for feed and bedding during the winter months.

The changing structure of the barns over the years is worth noting. Following the log barn a framed barn with possibly adjoining stables, pig-pens, sheep-pen etc. was built on ground level. The framing consisted of hand-hewn beams 12 to 14 inches square and the farmer had to be a master of his trade with a mastery over such things as plates, purins, mortises, braces, bents etc. The sheathing was either clapboard or upright boards sawn from logs cut on the farm and hauled to the nearby sawmill. As the cutting and hauling would be largely taken care of by the farmer and wages

80 Holstein breeders attend annual meeting

By H. J. Stanley

Some 80 Holstein breeders and friends met in the North Oakville Community Centre on Thursday morning, Jan. 14 for their annual meeting. Guest speaker, Les Smith of Brooklyn, discussed how it is possible to make a living with a small dairy herd. With just 24 cows milking he is able to finance his four sons in college and one son in high school. He stated that if you can't make a go on a small farm not to try going to a larger one. He rated the following as the most important on a dairy farm - the wife, who can make dairying enjoyable for all the family, you, the manager; and finally the Holstein cow.

Mr. Smith stated you should set goals that you can reach in the dairy business. If you get close to the goal then raise it. "You must go further than just having good cattle - you must grow good feed." He also cautioned farmers

against investing too much in machinery. He suggested that the farmer should do the best he can with what he has and not always be looking to something different.

Record year

Howard Laidlaw, a director of the Holstein-Friesian Association of Canada, brought greetings to the meeting, as did Abner B. Martin, the first vice-president. Last year was a record year for the Holstein breed with new highs in numbers of registrations, transfers, exports, new memberships, R.O.P. certificates, and number of cattle classified.

A noon lunch was provided by the wives of the county Holstein directors.

Winners of the various trophies and certificates throughout the year were honored.

New officers

The new officers of the Halton Holstein Club for 1971 are: Past president Fred Nurse; president

C. Inglis is president

By H. Stanley

Claude Inglis, R.R. 2, Campbellville, was chosen as president of the Halton Soil and Crop Improvement Association at their annual meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 13 at the Master Feeds Research Farm in Georgetown. Other executive members and directors are as follows: vice president Collin Marshall, R.R. 4, Milton; secretary-treasurer Henry Stanley, Ont. Dept. of Agriculture and Food, Milton; directors Harold Biggar, Arnold Fish, Clarence Ford Jr., Ernest Alexander, Harvey Nurse, Howson Ruddle, Earl Wilson, Fred Bell, Murray Harris, Harold Middlebrook, Russell Hurren, John Kitching, Bruce Coles. Representative to the Halton Federation of Agriculture is Dan Heatherington, R.R. 3, Campbellville. Representative to the Halton Farm Safety Council is Earl Wilson, R.R. 1, Norval.

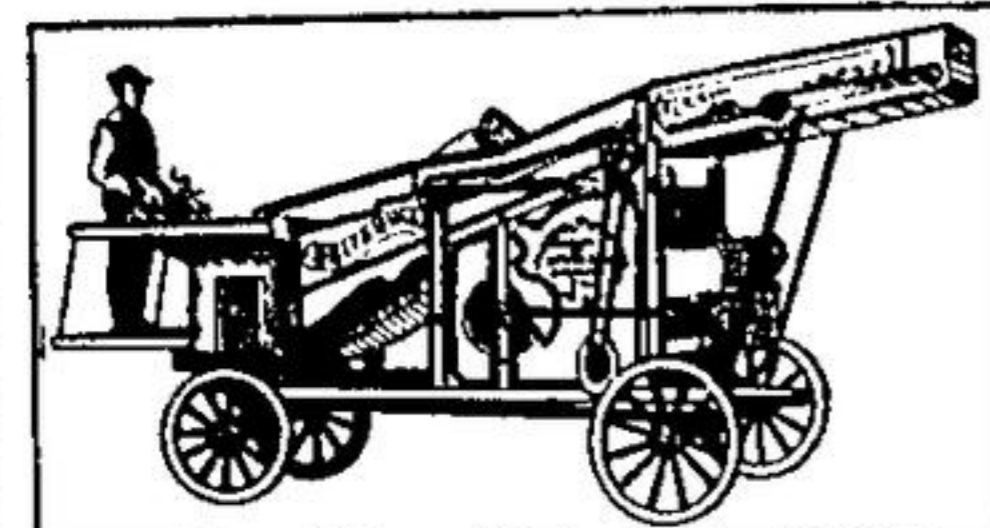
LOCK IT UP

One sixth of all cars stolen in North America become involved in accidents in a matter of hours or days after their theft. The Ontario Safety League reminds you to leave your car locked at all times, even on your own driveway. And don't leave it parked down back alleys. It is safer on a well-lighted, well-frequented street.

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