

Whoopee! the hay's in!

By Madeline Harrison
LOCUST HILL—It's that time of year when we, here on the farm, can breathe a sigh of relief. The hay's in.

For most farmer's, there are two high points in the crop season: (1). When the hay is in the loft and (2). When the last load of grain is dumped in the bins or trucked off to Wilson's at Whitevale.

Between these times, however, the worry results in a rash of chewed fingernails or bald patches on the dome. For it's the weather—it's either too wet or too dry.

The other day, the 'Oldtimer', that lives down the road, and I got to talking about the haying season, and what it was like then, and now.

He did the talking and I did the listening. "T'wern't too long ago that we did our haying the hard way. Got up five, six o'clock, fed the horses, milked the cows, tended the chickens, then went in to breakfast. Now them was the days when a breakfast was a breakfast—none of this dried cardboard in a box stuff they call cereal. We et bacon, eggs, fresh home made bread, hot oatmeal cereal with lousa cream thick from the top of the can and fresh brewed coffee. During the busy season we sometimes had extras like steak, mashed potatoes, gravy, three kinds of pie and maybe some fresh fruit when it was in season. Took about an hour to eat breakfast proper. After that we'd head off out and hitch up.

In them days t'wern't no fancy dang tractors and balers. Horsepower! Woman! Horsepower!

Soons the dew was off out we'd go. Old Maud and Ned hitched to the two horse mower. Oh yeah! There were some fancy dude farmers in those days too. They'd have these four, six and eight hitch mowers that'd cut a swath as big as half our hay field out there. I kinda enjoyed sittin' up there behind the ol' beggars watchin' the hay come over the blades, smooth as a sheet of water washin' in over the rocks on Lake Ontario. Took longer with two horses but when you enjoy your work you don't mind.

Not so much noise you couldn't hear the larks. Had to watch out for the Killdeers. Darn fool birds nest on the ground. Usta try to go round 'em if we could. Sometimes the hay field 'ud look like there were teeth missin' in the mower, or that guy cuttin' it was half drunk at ten in the mornin'.

Never mind, we didn't call it that in them days, but today they call it ecology. I just didn't like to see poor wounded birds or momma bird missin' and no one to raise a nest full of fuzzy critters hardly outa their shells.

After we'd get a field of hay cut then we'd sit back and pray it wouldn't rain for a week. Then out with the rake. Smoochin' up those rows of fresh cut hay into long rows. My that did smell nice. When both sides of the row'd dry then the men with the pitchforks 'ud come out. One man to a row. Forkin' the hay up into mounds. Called it teddin'.

Get them little stacks up all over the field, looked like one of them bee fella had gone mad 'builidin' them beehives all over the field.

Now we were really prayin' the Good Lord'd hold off the rain for a spell. Once it rained on them stooks then we'd have to start all over. Lettin' the top dry, off then turnin' the whole stack over so's the bottom 'ud dry. Dang near broke a man's heart to see it rain that time of year.

Once it was dry though, in it came. Lined up a coupla the neighbours with their teams and wagons. Four men on top the load trampin' and settin' the hay in the slings. The ol' team ploddin' down the rows, stoppin' at the right time and nary a word need be spoke to 'em. They knew where their winter feed was comin' from.

While one wagon was headin' for the barn, another be loadin', another be comin' back to the field empty and a fourth'd be unloadin' at the barn.

That unloadin' was somethin' to see. You'd have your load divided up into four sections all set with the sling ropes underneath each section and up the sides. Unhitch the horses from the wagon and hitch 'em to the long rope runnin' from the barn. That rope ran from horses up through a pulley at the very top of the barn. The pulley came back down to the load of hay sittin' on the barn floor. Feller'd hitch the sling ropes to the end of the long rope. The horses'd be given the "Hup there". They'd start pullin' on the rope.

The section o' hay'd start risin'. Soons it hit the track at the top o' the barn it would start rumblin on the rail. Feller in the hay mow would have a guide rope to make sure the cart ran in the right direction and, if he were workin' good, he'd bring that ol' pile o' hay right in t' were he wanted her. Give a tug on the guide rope and that pile o' hay 'ud wind up in the mow in just about the right spot. The other fellers up there 'ud start in t' forkin the hay to where the wanted it for sure, stompin' and settin' it. If you had good fellers up there you'd have just about the nicest, straightest mow of hay you ever did see.

Now that filler up there handlin' that guide rope had to know what he was doin'. He pull that guide rope too soon and the whole load'd end up on the barn floor. Pull it too late and three men'd get buried quicker'n a cat can blink. Ever been hit by a quarter ton of hay fallin' from the roof of the barn? You'd think it was the end of the world!

Why I remember one time the guy on the wagon didn't hitch the sling ropes proper to the tug rope. Soons, the hay got up a height and hit the track. It dumped on him, the wagon and all over the barn floor. Boy there were some words said that day even I'd not heard afore. Only way they could find the guy on the wagon was that he was one of these talkin' fellers. Git him would up he'd run all day. Never stopped once he started forkin' the hay up into mounds. Called it teddin'.

of three weeks just to get enough hay in to winter the cattle and horses. Never had none for sale in those days. Them was the days. Get a bunch o' your neighbours together, laughin', swappin' jokes, and tellin' tall tales. Each tried to outdo t'other. That's what kept neighbours neighbours in those days. Workin', laughin', cryin' and prayin' together. Anybody needed help, we'd all pitch in.

Different nowadays. The whole dang bunch of ya is just too independent. You take hayin' season today.

Ya got these dang fool tractors don't understand a word you say. These new fangled swathers, cut the hay, condition it and lay it out in rows. Don't leave ya no time to stand and admire the scenery. Along comes another guy balin' it. He don't even touch it. He don't even need no help. That dang baler just picks up the bales and tosses 'em into the wagon. Nary touched by humin' hands till your ready to put it in the barn. Then its up that fool elevator—con-traption. Get a coupla

kids up there stackin' and complainin' 'bout the heat. Don't know what heat is. They never stood out in a July hay field sweletin' under the sun, pitchin' hunks a hay up there till you felt your arms comin' outa there sockets. Gol' darn it, they got women out pitchin' hay these days. In the old days it twern't a woman's

job! Her job was in the kitchen!

Tell ya what though, sure do wish I was farmin' today. Coupla days and your hays all in the barn. I'd rather head for Florida every winter too, give me half a chance. Too old now to enjoy anythin' but lookin' at pretty girls in bathin' suits. No sense goin' to Florida lest you can do somethin' more than sit in the sun.

Sure do beat all what things are comin' to agree. In a lot of ways I agree. "It sure do beat all!"

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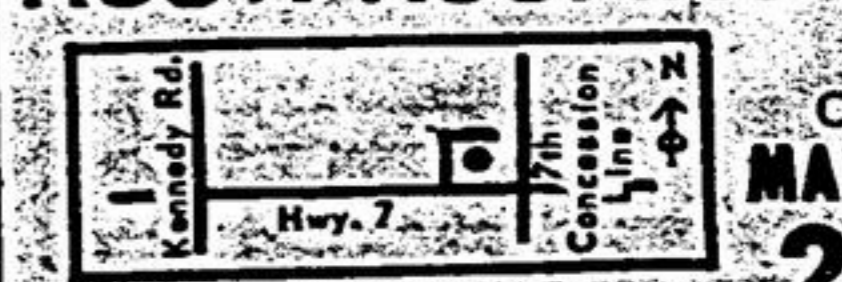
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