

The Good Old Days

By Hap Hansen

The most fun I ever had as a kid growing up on a small farm was during wheat harvest. That was the time when all the neighbors gathered, day after day, and went from farm to farm to help their neighbors by acting as a threshing crew. The wheat had already been cut, banded with twine into bundles and hand-stacked into shocks just waiting for the horse-drawn hayrack and farmers with pitchforks. It didn't take long either, for a couple of weather-worn neighborhood farmers on each side of the hayrack to fill it to overflowing. They would then drive the horse team to the thresher which was usually located in an area where the straw would be needed to bed down farm animals the following winter.

The threshing machine was a sight to behold! A farm tractor was usually hauled up to the hay-belching mechanical monster with a pulley attached to a wide belt which turned the equipment needed to separate wheat from chaff and straw. Bundles of wheat would be pitched into the thresher's wide mouth and be digested somehow in its mechanical belly. After a short period of raucous grumbling, the metal beast discharged grains of wheat through an auger and into a waiting truck. The wheat was either stored in a granary or driven to the local wheat merchant to be sold. At the end of the machine, straw and chaff would be discharged and blown into a manageable stack. Unless, of course, the wind was blowing. In that case, chaff and straw went everywhere, but mostly down the necks and into the eyes of the neighbors who were pitching in the bundles. That's when they really go to know each other!

Neighborhood farm women gathered too, in order to provide food for the threshers. And boy, could threshers ever eat! There weren't many who gained weight during harvest because in early to mid-July it was usually about 100 degrees in the shade. And there wasn't any shade! Typical food fare for working threshers consisted of bacon, eggs, potatoes and toast for breakfast, cinnamon rolls and coffee about ten a.m., fried chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy and all the trimmings for dinner at noon, bologna sandwiches and iced tea or lemonade about three p.m. And then the big meal of pork chops, more potatoes, fruit, vegetables and a slab of apple pie with homemade ice cream for supper about seven or eight p.m. Following supper, the men usually went outside to belch, pass gas, smoke pipes or cigarettes, perhaps have a nip from a jug filled with rotgut whiskey and discuss the possibilities of rain. The women cleaned the kitchen, chatted and began preparing food for the next day.

Those times were hard, those times were fun. Neighbors worked together for a common interest. And tomorrow, they would all gather at the next neighbor's farm and do the same thing all over again. And that's what my generation calls "the good-old days."