

Threshing

By Rod Beck, St. Albert, Alberta

I'm not sure but maybe it's a spelling thing with the term "shocks" or not? The stories my Dad and family explained to me about threshing was that the gathering of the bundles as Ted Weisenburger explains below was called "Stooking". The group of seven or eight bundles once put together was called a "Stook" not a Shock? Depending on the size of the bundles sometime they would be only four or five bundles. There was also a method of stacking the bundles on the rack and the fear was if you didn't load up properly you would lose your load before you made it into the threshing machine. The heads of the grain were always skyward to allow the wheat to harden. If I understood my family correctly the later model binders had holding devices to help in the grouping or gathering of the bundles for stooking. This saved some walking especially when you were going around a 160 acre quarter. The children would also help in this process. My Uncle Roy Beck, when he was six years old was tied onto the binder seat by his father. This was so he wouldn't fall into either the reels or the canvas convey system of the binder. Everyone was automatically physically fit and contributed to the work force which in turn was your livelihood. One can certainly understand when you looked at the hands of some of these old farmer their fingers were like miniature fence posts along with grips like a vise. Very strong men.

I can't imagine how hard all these pioneers worked to start what we have and enjoy today.

From Janice Huber Stangl

My father, Edward Huber, was born near Hosmer, South Dakota in the early 1900's. He was about 11 years old when he started working on the threshing crews around Hosmer. He remembers working as straw carrier for John Himmrich's steam threshing machine as his first job. When they set up the machine on a new site, Dad would need to pitch straw into a wagon to haul it from the last site, to start up the machine. Before the new strawstack became too large, he would climb under the machine to pitch loose straw unto the carrier that fed the steam engine's firebox.

By the 1920s, August Stoecker had a gasoline McCormick-Deering machine. He would use six teams of horses to haul bundles on an average sized field. Seven teams were used to bring in shocks from further locations on larger fields. Neighboring farmers would supply their own teams. My Grandpa, Jacob Huber, Dad, and his brothers, Albert and Reinhold, usually provided three or four teams. The younger brothers, Eugene and Calvin, would "work the grain wagon." This work was to shovel the grain to keep it distributed evenly in the grain wagon, so they would not have to make so many trips back to the farm yard to unload the wagons into the granaries.

When the machine and crew would move farther away from home, it was too far to travel home for nighttime. The crew members would take out their blanket roll, crawl up into the farmer's hayloft for their night's rest. They would carry two blankets with them. One to sleep on, the other to cover themselves. And yes, they also slept in the same clothes they had worked in. Dad said that if it had been a particularly hot week, their sleeves

were so stiffly salt coated from perspiration they could hardly bend their arms. It was a great relief when a rain shower passed, so they could stand out in it to get washed off by Mother Nature! He had often thought to himself that he would have liked to jump into the farmer's stock tank, but the livestock would probably not have drunk the water afterwards.

Several harvest seasons, Dad and one or more of his brothers would hop on the train in Hosmer, and go to Strasburg, North Dakota. This was circa 1925. The machine there was owned by three farmers. It was a steamer that burned coal. He remembers threshing on the farms of Lawrence Welk, Tony Werrich, ? Fiest and ? Keller. The "motel" at the Welk farm was the hayloft in the barn, as it was on all farms. The method of threshing here was pitching cut grain that had been stacked into large stacks. The farmer would place two stacks close enough so that the machine could be pulled between them. The crew could then pitch the grain directly unto the feeder of the machine. Horses were still used, but only for the grain wagons. If the weather was too bad to thresh, the crew would pass the time by playing cards. Separate tables would be set up, one for those playing for money and one for those who did not. Dad's older brother, Jake, would play for money. One time he came to Dad to get more money, but he would not give him any. Jake left with a long face, but that was the end of that story!

Dad remembers The Bazaar in Strasburg. It was a grocery, dry goods, and even some hardware, store all in a one-stop shopping center. John Baumgartner, ? Keller and ? Fischer owned this store and also a farm about 10 miles southwest of Strasburg. They had a hired man and usually a family to manage the farm, as they lived in town. Dad worked on their farm during spring's work one year [preparing and planting the grain fields].

I asked Dad what provisions were made for their meals. The threshing crew, which consisted of about 15 men, would have three meals a day at the farmer's home where they threshed. The farmer's wife would set up a long board on two ten gallon cream cans, with wash basins, soap and water, for the crew to clean up before meals. The food was not fancy. By mealtime they were so hungry anything would taste good! Potatoes were usually served three times a day. Soup and chicken were other standard fare, plus homemade bread. Dad says that sometimes the soup had flies in it, if you did not eat it fast enough. The flies would drop into the soup as they were eating it. At one farm even the tail of the chicken was served on the meat platter. Needless to say it was never eaten! They were also served a lunch about midafternoon. Dad says that homemade bread and watermelon was a great afternoon treat. Stoecker's family would sometimes serve kuchen, which greatly pleased the crew. A favorite when threshing at the Huber farm would be a glass of Grandpa Huber's homemade chokecherry wine. They also had homemade root beer and beer as a special treat at some farms.

One autumn, before he was married, he had finished working on his regular crews. Gust and Adolph Treichel's crew was still working south of Bowdle, South Dakota. They needed some extra help, so they could finish before the snow would start flying. Dad went down to help. One warm day, the farmer's wife set several bottles of beer on a bench outside as part of their afternoon lunch. She admonished them, "Be careful when you open them!" Sure enough, when one of the men opened the first bottle it exploded into smithereens! All that was left in his hand, was the neck of the bottle. The dog took off in the fastest gait you could ever imagine, because he was sure he had been shot at with a shotgun! Poor fella probably is still running in doggy heaven today.