

Binding, Shocking, Heading and Threshing of Wheat in Kansas

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I read with considerable interest the articles on the binding, shocking, heading and threshing of wheat. As a boy of the ages five to nine, from 1922 to 1927, my family lived in Kansas from where in 1927 on account of my mother's health, we were obliged to return to Colorado where we worked sugar beets until 1929 when my father died of an embolism following a gall stone operation. Then my farming days ceased.

I vividly recall, helping my mother, sister, Hulda, and brother, Emanuel, drag the heavy bundles of bound wheat that were being dropped in rows as the grain was mowed by my father sitting on a McCormick Deering binder drawn by four horses. We would carefully position the bundles into stable shock with a perpendicular one in the center and four or five leaning against it to withstand the elements and to await the arrival of the threshing crew.

Similarly, in the years when the wheat did not grow to its full height we harvested with a header drawn by six or eight horses driven by my brother, Emanuel. At such times, I drove the header-barge drawn by a team of old geldings, Pete and Tom, and heaven help me from the tongue-lashing I might receive from my brother if the barge were not consistently maintained at the proper position for the conveyor, which carried the wheat from the header to the header-barge to properly discharge the grain along tits about 30" in height lowerside. The opposite or upper side of the wagon (barge) was about six feet in height against which the hired hand would stack the cut grain as it piled into the barge.

While the shocks of wheat were normally left in the field, the wheat when headed was stacked in a manner similar to hay stacks. To avoid its being blown or otherwise damaged by the elements, the stacks were usually covered with huge tarps that were securely fastened to the ground.

The day the threshing crew arrived with the immense steam engine dragging the huge grain separator was a time of excitement as everyone gathered to watch them position these huge pieces of equipment and attach the heavy belt to the fly wheels connecting the engine to the separator. Standing near the steam engine was the "water monkey," a small wagon, carrying a fifty-gallon tank of water. Everyone enjoyed the whistles produced by the engine to announce its need of additional water or other notices, including lunch breaks and quitting time. Each whistle, for example, one long and two shorts, had a special meaning that all the workers understood.

Having been positioned adjacent to the wheat stack, two men would pitchfork the grain into the operating separator that would extract the grain from the stalks which with the chaff were blown out of one large tube while the clean wheat kernels came out of another and were simultaneously loaded into a grain wagon that was headed for the farmyard granary or a nearby grain elevator from where it would be shipped to different parts of the country.

One year lightning struck a shock in our field with only a brown spot left to reveal where the shock had been. Another year, the steam engine exploded during the night causing considerable excitement but doing very

limited damage to the wheat in the threshing process. These are my memories of harvesting wheat in Kansas from the years 1923 through 1927.