

Wheat Harvesting

By Milo Bauder, Richmond, Washington

My family immigrated to America from Hoffnungstal in 1889, arriving at the German settlement north of Burlington, Colorado in November of that year. This was wheat country and still is.

One of the greatest concerns of the wheat farmer was hail, therefore it was of the utmost urgency to start harvest and complete it as rapidly as possible because the next approaching cloud could possibly be devastating. Using a binder for harvest was a slow process and required a lot of field hands and even with the wheat in shocks (stooks) it was still subject to hail damage or with rain it could sprout while still in the head and then be worthless. So with the advent of the header it was then possible to greatly reduce the harvesting time.

The attached picture shows my great Uncle, Friedrich Bauder driving the header machine with a header barge (wagon) alongside. The three field hands in the barge were called pitchers whose job was to even out the load and then when they arrived at the threshing place they would pitch the headed wheat into stacks. The header was an extremely difficult contraption for the driver to steer. Uncle Fred is standing in the middle of the main beam and several feet directly in front of him is a aid to steering that has a small cross arm near the top. Under him is a crazy wheel (turns any direction) with a vertical shaft that runs up as high as Uncle Fred's hip where a horizontal tiller is attached. Hip movements against the tiller would provide the direction to the crazy wheel.

As to the question about the location of the threshing stacks being near the barn or out in the center of the field, the concern was efficiency to reduce harvest time. The best method was to start in the center of the field and go in a counterclockwise circle with the threshing stacks in the center of the field so that yeah the header barges then have the advantage of always making the shortest trip. You will notice in the picture the



large bull wheel on the left side of the header. This wheel provided the ground power to operate the sickle bar and the canvas draper that extends up the elevator to deposit the wheat and straw in the header barge. The bull wheel caused such a drag on the left side of the machine that it was almost impossible to drive in a straight line therefore the machine could operate at an increased speed by simply continually turning into a left hand circle.

Not shown is the old time canvas water bag. It may have had mud on the outside, but cool water never tasted better than from that old bag.