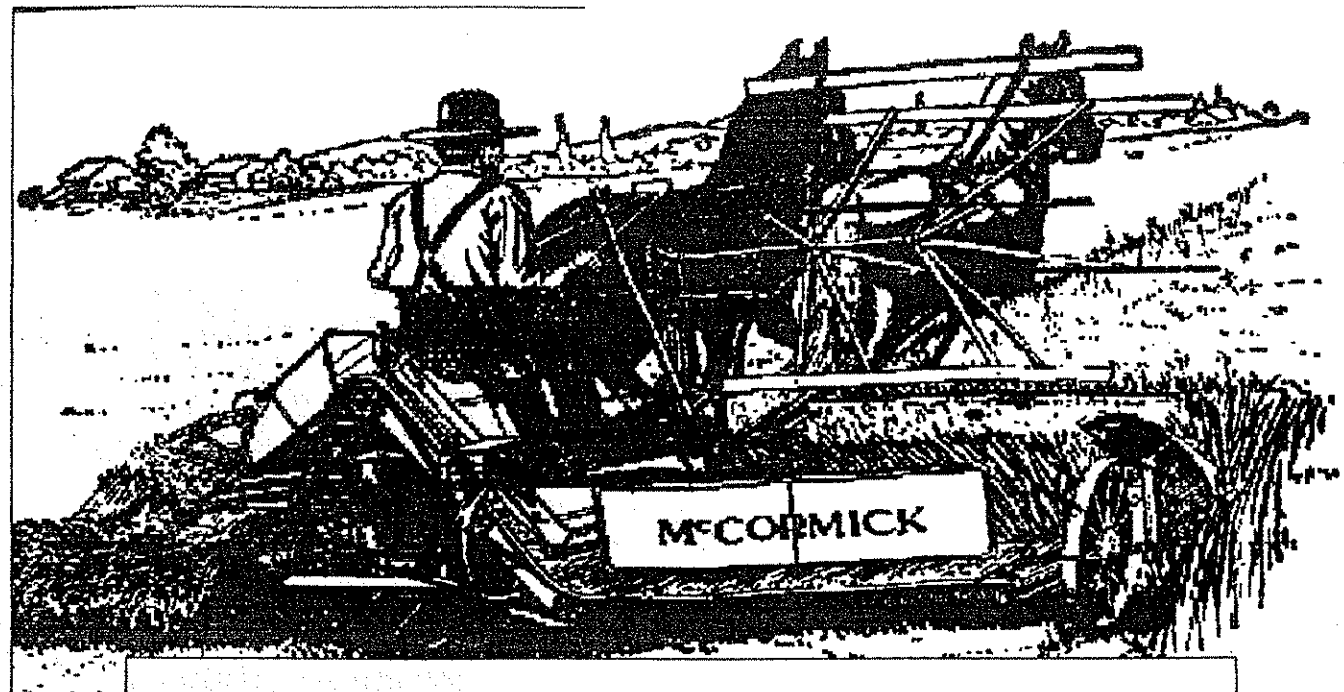


The Binder

The first step toward mechanised farming.



*McCormick Binder with right hand cut, five foot width
Picture reproduced from the Canadian Thresherman and Farmer
of June 1906*

At the mention of the word "harvest" today we have visions of great, rumbling combines creeping around the field in a cloud of dust accompanied by grain trucks rushing to and from the area.

It was not always so simple. Many stories have been told of the gleaners and reapers of early times; of hard working people striding about the field with scythe or cradle, but since we are dealing with the binder in this article, we will start at a later date.

The first form of mechanized harvesting was to be found in the reaper. It was a horse drawn machine with a sickle arrangement known as a cutting bar. It was also equipped with a reel which forced the falling grain onto a table. Various means were

used from time to time as improvements were made to pick up and tie the grain. At one time other workmen or women followed this contraption, scooped off sheaf sized bundles and tied them on the run. Eventually, a rotating canvas was installed which deposited the grain on the ground as does the modern swather today.

As farms got larger, it became necessary to find some way to speed up operations. The binder was the result. To the old reaper an elevator, consisting of two canvasses, was added which carried the straw up and over an idler roller and clumped it on a declining deck. From here a set of packers picked up the grain and a butter arrangement beat the stems evenly at the base. The bulk was

forced downward to a trip, which when adequate pressure was applied, set in motion the discharge mechanism which in turn activated the needle and knotter.

When this sequence was completed, and if the knotter did not miss, the operator had a nicely tied sheaf on the bundle carriers to be dropped at the next wind-row.

It was argued at the time that the new machine was too elaborate, complicated and troublesome to ever be considered a success. It was also said that the binder provoked more men to wrath - and the breaking of the seventh commandment - than any other machine made by man.

Trouble with the binder



Waiting in line to unload

was considered to be just cause for much anti-social behaviour. Tales were told of a neighbor who was unknown to have spoken a civil word to anyone until after the harvest trials; or of the hired man who said it was unwise to address the boss until the last of the grain had been safely tucked away.

But the advent of the binder did succeed in changing forever the style of harvest operations, it made it possible to work larger acreages, and saved a great deal of labour. An old Public School History book of many years ago, told of how the labourers used to go out at night and burn the binders. They were putting them out of work.

Each year when we are cutting the wheat for use at the harvest display, it is common to have passers-by stop to admire or to photograph the operation. To many it is a nostalgic experience. to the young it is the first and possibly the only opportunity to see a binder in operation.

The binder is a common artifact that you may expect to find at any agricultural museum, but few can boast of having an older model in a restored condition than the McCormick on display at the Rocanville and District Museum. The word "McCormick" is a grand old name when related to farm machine companies. It was one of the old manufacturers, possibly the leading one, which came to make up the long standing International Harvester Company, which came

into being in the year 1902.

Our museum model dates well before that time. It has a right hand table; only one of our senior members can recall ever having seen one of this type in operation.

This old relic from the past was found in poplar bush where it had rusted for many years. The first tool required to retrieve it was a chainsaw. Trees had grown up through it's frame and mechanism; it appeared that nature had claimed it and was reluctant to let it go. But from the beginning there were indications that good fortune would be on our side. The missing half of a broken idler pulley was found safely stored in the twine box, the main drive chain was

still in place and the knotter seemed to be intact.

And so began a winter of enjoyable, harmonious work as all hands joined in putting this old machine back in serviceable condition. One of the biggest problems was in locating and adapting rollers to replace the rotted away ones, also, it was difficult to build the wooden parts when no pattern was available.

However, after a massive cleaning job, bearing and shafts were rebuilt where required and a new coat of paint was applied, the finished product stands high in our collection of harvest equipment. It is hoped that it may be used some time to assist in cutting the wheat which we use each year for harvest demonstrations.

