

EARLY FARMING – HARVESTING – SLED CARS – FIRST WAGON – FIRST HARNESS

Agriculture is a term hardly applicable to pioneer farming. The implements used would, in this age of improvement, attract attention as great curiosities. The “virgin” soil, as has been observed, was ready for the seed when cleared of its timber. The principal instrument of tillage for several years, was the triangular harrow, usually called *drag*. This consisted of pieces of timber, (hewed before there were mills for sawing), about five inches square and six feet long, put together in the form of the letter A. The drag was sometimes made of a crotched tree, and needed no framing. The teeth made of wood were double and even treble the size of those now used, in order to stand the severe trial they were to undergo. The drag bounded along over stubs and roots and stones, up and down the hillsides, drawn generally by oxen often driven by boys.

When the roots had become sufficiently brittle to admit of the use of the plow, an instrument was used. Then the first “*Yankee improved plow*” was brought into the country, one man said: “*the critter is too darned small. It’ll go to pieces for sure.*” Another said: “*Give me a plow with a twelve foot beam and a seven foot handle and I can handle it.*” The old *plough* was something resembling the present *plow* inasmuch as it was used for the same purpose. At first it was made entirely of wood; then an iron point was added; then an iron shoe, coulter, &c., and gradually, it was improved, till the advent of the Yankee cast iron plow superceded it. Late improvements in the plow and the harrow, and the invention of cultivators, cornplanters, drills, and other labor saving implements, have wonderfully changed the aspect of farming, and increased the power of production.

In harvesting, the change is not less striking. Before the decay and removal of stumps permitted the use of the grain cradle, wheat was cut with the sickle, now a rare instrument. It was then a staple article of merchandise. In the old daybooks and journals of the early merchandise, could be found, under the names of scores of customers the charge, “To 1 Sickle,” followed, in many cases by that other charge, “To 1 gallon Whisky,” an article deemed by some, as necessary in the harvesting operation as the instrument itself. The cradle which superseded the sickle is now fast giving way – in many parts of the country has already entirely given place – to the reaper, an instrument then no more likely to be invented than the photographic art, or the means of hourly intercourse with the inhabitants of the opposite side of the globe. Imagine an Indiana farmer to-day, attempting to reap a wheat field of forty acres with a sickle! Then think of those western fields of one hundred to five hundred acres in extent! In this connection, we will speak of wagons and roads on which to use them. A more simple vehicle was used. From small trees, was taken a piece having at one end two prongs, the single end was put into the ring of the ox-yoke, the other resting on the ground. Across the prongs puncheon boards were laid and kept from sliding backwards by long wooden pins set perpendicularly in each prong. Sometimes the oxen or horses were attached to the fore end of a log trough, the bottom of which had been flattened, and the end hewed away from the under side to fit it, like a sled runner, for sliding over the rough ground. Some of the early settlers came into the country on “*sled-cars*,” and used them for transportation purposes for several years. A sled car consisted of two poles, one on either side of the horse, one end of each being fastened to the hames and the other resting on the ground. On the parts resting on the ground, puncheon boards were laid, and were prevented from sliding backwards by long wooden pins fixed perpendicularly in each pole.

The pioneer’s first harness was made of withes with crooked roots and pieces of limbs or trees for hames. It was not long before the tanning of hides was commenced, and then good, substantial home-made leather harness was used.

Grain was generally threshed with a flail, a days work amounting to ten or twenty bushels a day. There were no fanning mills in the early times. (Ninian Irwin and a neighbor built the first fanning mill in 1824). Sometimes the grain was spread in shallow depths on the floor where it was threshed, or placed in a box perforated with holes, or in a riddle (a very coarse sieve), about thirty inches in diameter and five or six inches deep. To “raise the wind” a linen sheet, possibly taken from the bed, was held at the corners by two men, who gave it a semi-rotary motion or sudden swing. A man would shovel or stir up the wheat on the floor, or hold up and shake the box or riddle with its contents, and the wind caused by the motion of the sheet would blow away the chaff. In this way about ten bushels could be cleaned in half a day. The introduction of the fanning mills was of great service, and soon came in general use.

The grass was first cut with sickle, but only for a brief period, as scythes were soon brought in by the immigrants, and the hay harvest became a matter of considerable importance. A lad of sufficient age to

drive a team can now cut with a mower from fifty to one hundred acres in an ordinary haying season, and the hay may all be made during the same time by one person.

The husking of corn was generally done in the field, as at present. In some parts of the country the ears, when fully ripe were broken from the stalk, thrown into heaps, and then hauled into the barn, and thrown into a long heap across the barn floor, ready for a corn-husking, in which the neighbors, old and young, were invited to participate on some evening. The anticipation of a "good time" secured a general attendance. A good supper, which several of the neighboring women had assisted in preparing, was served at eight or nine o'clock. The "old folks" would then leave, and in due time the boys would gallant the girls to their homes. The recreation afforded to the young people on the yearly recurrence of these festive occasions was as highly enjoyed, and quite as innocent as most of the amusements of the present boasted age of refinement.