

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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A TREADMILL IN USE



This is one of those wonderful unusual pictures we don't know much about. But because of its sheer rarity, I present it here. It comes to us by Mr. George Caliard of Carlton from family effects. We can assume on fairly good ground that it's local. Judging from the quality of the original snapshot, I would estimate that it was taken in the "teens" or early twenties. You ask "What's taking place here?"

The major apparatus to the left is a large treadmill designed for horse or oxen power. In this case a team of horses appears to be walking on a continuous belt made of planks. We notice a large fly wheel on the back side at far left. To a smaller power wheel is attached a wide belt which is connected to some sort of machine. My guess is that it's a small threshing machine for beans. It looks similar to a big corn sheller but there aren't any cornstalks in the photo. There are three full bags of something to the right near a shovel lying on the ground. It could be grain or corn but I think it is beans. Obviously, a woman with her back to the camera is working at the machine while another person looks out the double doors of the barn from a loft. The large wheel to the far right could be on a seed drill. The barn is unidentifiable because of its utilitarian nature. It is a barn type or style from this area dating back to the 1830's.

We know such devices as treadmills were used to provide power for various purposes. I've seen a large treadmill like this one in Cooperstown at the Farmers

Museum. But I never before have seen one in use through an old photo. The Cobblestone Museum at Childs also has a treadmill for a big dog to walk on, thus providing power to do the butter churning. It was used by the Phillips Family in Hulberton and is of the turntable type. Continuous belt treadmills were more common however. Treadmills like this were used to buzz wood, run corn shellers, threshers and other heavy stationary farm equipment.

Eventually the gasoline engine replaced the animal power of a treadmill. Soon came the farm tractor and eventually electric power took over and made treadmills obsolete. But actually when we stop to think about it, many body building devices for fat loss and muscle building have a kinship to this old agricultural equipment. How clever were our ancestors of yesteryear to contrive mechanical ways of saving themselves backbreaking labor.

My dad remembered when Frank Prussia lived in Gaines and spent half a day jacking up the rear end of a Model T car and attaching a belt to a wheel so they could run a washing machine in the back room of the house. One wonders if it just wouldn't have been easier to do the work oneself in some cases. We take electric power for granted. Why it wasn't until the mid and late 1930's that most side, back or out-of-the-way roads in the county had electricity. Hard to believe now, isn't it?