

Hay season brings back memories

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Our photo was taken in the 1920s on a local farm. Here we see a horse-drawn wagon pulling a hay loader. This mechanical hay loading device saved pitching the hay onto a wagon. However, once the hay was being loaded onto the wagon a man needed to be there to pitch it around to level the load out.

Once the hay wagon was loaded with all the loose hay it was driven off to the barn for storage in the hay mow. Depending on the arrangement of the barn, the wagon could be pulled up to the outside end of the barn for unloading or even driven inside for this purpose.

Barns were often equipped with a hay track in the ridge and a trolley for a harpoon hay fork or a grapple fork, which would have to be lowered down onto the hay wagon. These large hay forks were punched into the loose hay. The horses were then hitched to a hay rope attached to the fork and through a series of pulleys, large heaps of loose hay were pulled up into the hay mow.

The trolley was pulled along the track and a trip



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rope was yanked and the hay fork released a pile of hay in the mow. It was then the job of a man or two to pitch it around and level it off. Needless to say it was a hot, sweaty job in the height of summer heat in the top of a barn.

As a kid growing up on a farm in the late 1940s and 50s, I first saw haying in the manner I just described. About 1954 my father got a neighbor with a new hay bailer to bail his hay. What a labor-saving

device.

However, I feel now I was enriched to have seen what was literally late 19th century farming firsthand.

My father bought a new GMC farm truck in 1948 and at the same time a hay loader. When I was around six years old, I can remember driving the truck in the hay field with the hay loader and my father on the truck deck pitching the hay around. He had set the throttle on the truck to move slowly over the raked rows of hay ready for loading. I had to kneel on the seat in order to steer.

My dad had an old gent as a hired man by the name of John Green. He would not drive a tractor but instead used a team of horses and an old mowing

machine to cut down the hay to begin this whole process of hay harvest. When I say I witnessed 19th century farming, I'm not kidding. And yes, I remember how my father hoped it wouldn't rain before he got the hay in the barn.

Until the 1930s, all hay harvest was loose hay not bailed. In early times there were stationary hay compactors that were used to compress hay into bails for shipping on the railroad to big cities for the horses living there before the gasoline engine became paramount.

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