
# Reminiscences of Graydon Horath, Farm Laborer in Kansas

*edited by H. Roger Grant*

In the past the happenings of common people were seldom recorded or studied. More recently, scholars have sought to examine American history from the "bottom up"—that is by exploring the lives of lesser known and frequently less articulate citizens, whether carpenters, household servants, or mill hands. Farmers also constitute part of this genre, but as a group they are actually relatively easy to study. They frequently kept diaries or at least notebook entries about crops, markets, and weather. Often, too, small-town newspapers reported their various activities, including trips or meetings, in their weekly personal columns. But farm laborers, specifically the itinerant field hand, left fewer contemporary written records and often avoided the attention of local news gathers. Moreover, although their accounts exist, harvest hands of this type less frequently wrote autobiographical sketches later in their lives than did farmers.[1]

Fortunately, Graydon E. Horath, an Illinois teenager who journeyed to Kansas in June 1937, has recalled his adventures during that year's harvest season. His experiences are probably typical of those of thousands of individuals, mostly young males, who sought work on the farms and ranches of the Great Plains toward the end of the Great Depression. Like other agricultural workers, Horath traveled to Kansas "without tickets"; he rode freight trains as an nonpaying passenger of several railroads. Horath had no particular destination in mind, but found job opportunities in the Dickinson County area, moving from place to place as he completed tasks for several farmers. He then left the state for other employment possibilities. Generally, Horath enjoyed his Kansas interlude, but he experienced some unpleasantness. Even the most ardent hobo of the times would agree that life on the road had its negative aspects.[2]

Graydon Horath is typical of males who regularly joined the harvest work force. Most knew agriculture, and Horath was not an exception. He was born on September 14, 1917, in Effingham County, Illinois, to parents who farmed. By the spring of 1937, however, Horath lived with his family in Chester, Illinois, where his father worked for the state prison. Horath also resembled his comrades in that he lacked an extensive formal education. Like countless youngsters of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he learned the "3Rs" in a rural school, graduating "from the 8th grade at Trapp Prairie School."

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1. For examples of common person history, *see* H. Roger Grant and L. Edward Purcell, eds., *Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers, 1931-1936* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1976), and Jules Tygiel, "Tramping Artisans: The Case of the Carpenters in Industrial America," *Labor History* 22 (Summer 1981):348-76. For a sampling of first-hand accounts kept by harvest hands, as well as an informed discussion of harvesting practice and techniques, *see* Thomas D. Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs: Harvesting and Threshing on the North American Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990); also helpful is R. Douglas Hurt, *American Farm Tools, From Hand Power to Steam Power* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 1982).

2. *See* Maury Graham, *Tales of the Iron Road: My Life as King of the Hobos* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), especially chapters 6-8.

*Young Graydon Horath, shortly before his 1937 journey to Kansas.*

Horath was a good worker; he did not complain about difficult and strenuous tasks. After all, job opportunities, even with the New Deal's relief and recovery programs, were not plentiful for a young man with a limited education. Horath, like others, also had a sense of adventure—wanderlust perhaps—and willingly accepted the discomforts involved with travel to the fabled West on a shoestring. Surely he welcomed this change: "I worked [during the previous fifteen months] at the local International Shoe Factory, 3 ½, 4 or 5 days a week, depending on production needs."[3]

While the shoe industry struggled to recover from the hard times of the 1930s and approached the nasty recession of October 1937-May 1938 (the worst economic decline since 1933), Kansas agriculture likewise suffered the sting of the Great Depression. When Graydon Horath arrived in the state, depressed conditions remained, as did the Dirty Thirties, although 1937 was neither as hot nor as dry as had been the previous several years. Crops matured and farmers needed extra help.[4]

In condensing these reminiscences for publication, no major stylistic changes have been made. Most spelling and typing errors, however, were corrected, a few grammatical errors emended, and some punctuation altered to permit smoother reading. The flavor of Horath's writing therefore remains.

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Soon I found myself in K.C., Mo. or Kan., I never did know. All I did know was that it was the biggest vegetable market (shipping point) that I ever saw. Semis being loaded and unloaded, were backed into the docks so close together that I had to turn sideways to slide in between them. Somewhere there sure had to be a lot of Mom and Pop gardens to produce this mountain of food. I rode out to a farm with some other people where we reloaded a huge semi with head lettuce and poured ice all around on top and closed the doors. They informed me it was Chicago bound as they all went into the house, probably to eat. An hour later they came out, I was herded in with the driver and hauled back to town, where he urged me out and handed me a dime. But it was an exceptional coin; it was the one that learned me never to begin a chore—without knowing the means to its end.

On the road again—railroad, that is, and I traveled the length of the moving train until I found a flat-car loaded with Minneapolis-Moline tractors with 5' solid disc rear wheels. By scrooching up my knees on one side of the axle and my body on the other, I could stay out of sight of the R.R. Detectives.[5] Later, as the freight grunted through the yards of Lawrence, Topeka and now in the dead of the night, we were in Junction City stopped.[6] I could hear the ominous crunch of their feet and their loud voices on the still night air, so I squeezed up tight behind the rear wheel and they pass me by. Relaxed

3. Graydon E. Horath, Effingham, Illinois, telephone interview with author, September 28, 1992; Graydon E. Horath, "Tales of the Rails" (Unpublished manuscript, possession of author), 1. For a discussion of farm hands who participated in harvest work in Kansas and other Plains states, *see* Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs*, 130-73.

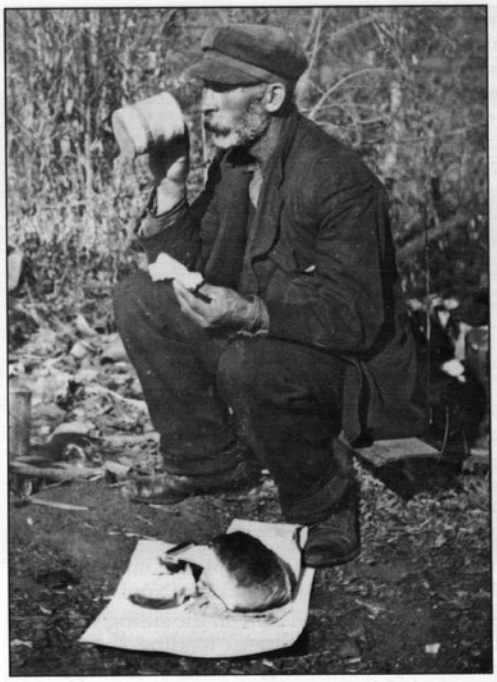
4. Lawrence Svobida in his autobiography *Farming the Dust Bowl: A First-Hand Account from Kansas*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986) provides a valuable account of the weather and farming conditions in the state during the most difficult years of the 1930s.

5. Since the late nineteenth century, railroad companies employed hired security personnel, often called "dicks" or "bulls." Hoboes knew them for their frequently cruel or uncaring behavior.

6. Horath traveled from the Kansas City area to Junction City on the Union Pacific Railroad. Junction City is 140 miles west of Kansas City, Missouri. This main line of the Union Pacific, the former Kansas Pacific, connected Denver and Kansas City.

now, I dozed and let my hand drop to the floor to brace my tired back.

"Boy; come out of there!" And I was now wide awake and rather quick to obey. "Boy! Where you from and what's your name?" With a voice like that in the middle of the night, I answered quite soon enough and he searched me, making me drop my outer pants and searched me good. He accepted the fact that I was a farm boy and my excuse of wanting to see the West (as in that day there were hundreds more like me) but scolded me soundly for traveling without an identification. Now every pair of bib overalls and band pants were made with a rule pocket, low down, on the right leg, to conveniently hold a 6' folding rule or a pair of pliers, making it more prestigious than today's label by Calvin Klein. So, on the inside pair of pants, I reached down inside the rule pocket and with two fingers, withdrew my newly issued just last year (1936) Social Security Card.[7] It was then I realized my mistake. I watched his face turn blue and then purple, the big important, school educated man had failed in his shake-down of a dumb kid. But, down deep, he was a gentle man, with reservations. I was to angle out across the yard, get to hell across those vacant lots and never set foot on his Rail-road property, "EVER" again! I certainly obliged him—real glad to do so until the second lot I was crossing, I encountered a warehouse watchman with a sawed-off shotgun! We had a few words, there in the near dark, as I recall now, definitely all of the words were his and as his shotgun was pointed back towards the [railroad] yards and because I saw my freight moving out at a right pert rate again, I started moving fast and hastily exited Junction City, Kan. on the same train that had brought me in.



*Itinerant farm laborers often lived the hobo life as they searched for work in the Midwest.*

I got off in Salina, Kan. and I suppose I inquired, yet the reason is unclear to me today as to why I back-tracked to Solomon and then took a slow freight north to Manchester. A city that a cowboy might describe, as 5 lopes long and 3 skittish jumps wide.[8]

As the old slow local snorted to a stop near the water tank, the conductor got off to throw the switch in preparation to setting an empty box-car on the siding, the first of many that would be used to haul away huge harvests of golden grain. So here I was in the land of my dreams—the great wheat fields of the fabled West. What I didn't know at the time

7. A foundation stone of the Second New Deal was the Social Security Act of August 1935. The federal government began monthly payments to retired workers in 1942.

8. Horath hopped off a Union Pacific freight at Salina, forty-seven miles west of Junction City. He then retraced his route to Solomon, on the Dickinson County line, but probably via the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway's Abilene-Osborne branch rather than the Union Pacific's main line. Likely Horath continued eastward to Abilene, twenty-three miles from Salina and eight miles from Solomon. In Abilene he gained access to the Santa Fe's north-south Strong City-Superior, Nebraska, branch. Manchester, fourteen miles northwest of Abilene, was a junction point with the forty-three mile Barnard line that extended westward. Located in northwestern Dickinson County, Manchester claimed 241 residents in 1930; its 1940 population dropped to 215.


*The Manchester railroad station in the 1930s signalled to Horath that he had arrived "in the land of my dreams."*

was, that the great rolling plains of endless grain was still perhaps, almost 200 miles to the west. Still, regardless, the area around Manchester, Kan. had far more wheat than I could handle. I walked by the water tank, past the reservoir, by the train-men, who were now busy switching and failed to even give me a second glance.[9] Out on the main track the whistle tooted, the last switch was throwed, the engine snorted, clouds of steam erupted, the drivers screeched, digging in, the couplings clenched fists one by one, clanking down the line as the men swung abroad and the train chugged along, passing me by. I kept walking up toward the 3 or 4 cars on the siding where an old man sat tending a coffee can full of gruel that was suspended over a very conservative fire. "Hello," I said, Howdy wasn't in the corn-belt vocabulary then. He nodded but said nothing; I wasn't offended; tired, I just folded my legs and sat down. It was then he spoke.

"Had anything to eat?"

"Not today."

"Corn meal. We'll eat after while."

Hungry as I was, I had no reason to argue. Out of an old cloth sack, he produced a small wiener can and a sliver of wood whiddled into a spoon. The food was hot and "good." Then night came, we sat a while watching the breeze waft the bright embers of the dying fire up in the air. We picked the open door boxcar and climbed in. He untied a couple of strings and unrolled a bundle which turned out to be 3 paper cement bags. He offered me one. "Here, have one, take off your shoes and put your feet in the bag and tuck the top in between your legs and then your body heat will make it warm." He was right, a trick I did before this trip was over, many a time. I slept real good, sleeping on a board floor was no problem for me then and with the car stationary and not jerking around as of the several nights before made it a treat for me, too. Morning came—and I awoke, surprised. The old codger was gone! Oh, I shouldn't have called him old, it was just that a self-inflicted life of harsh exposure to the elements had helped him to look that way to a young man such as I. No Boss to watch, no card to punch, no bells to ring, I sat content with my legs hanging out the door, trying to figure out my next move and soon I saw him.

9. Horath describes the railroad corridor that existed before the end of the steam locomotive era. For a discussion of the railroad landscape, *see* John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983).

"Where you been?"

"Snipe huntin'."

"You got up pretty early."

"Got to get out early, boy, if you expect to get the longest cigarette butts. They're milder if you get 'em while the dew is still on them. That makes them taste fresh. Want one?"

"No—I don't smoke."

"No—well what do you do?"

"Most anything—plan to work in the wheat fields."

"Me, too."

"Know anything?"

"No."

"Guess I'll just go into town and inquire."

"Wait 'till people get settled down," he told me.

"I guess."

"You got money?"

"Maybe a dollar." I wasn't afraid of men then—especially this kind acting old fellow. The railroad had lots of beggars but few killers.

"A dollar?" He scratched his head. "Tell you what; you give me 10 cents a day and I'll keep us in food 'till you find work."

"How'd you do that?"

"Is it a deal?"

"Sure." I thought I knew about everything about Bums but what I didn't know was that I just met a full-fledged, 14 carat Pro![10]

We started up the narrow, dusty main street past a few residences, I'm sure but I don't recall the town all that well. I do remember a tavern and a grocery store. It was possibly 10 A.M., with an old blouse throwed over his arm, he sauntered around the store—picking up a loaf of stale bread and then asking the observant grocer for 5 cents worth of corn meal. To my astonishment, after having accepted the dime for the meal and the stale loaf of bread, the merchant obliged by fulfilling the old man's request, by giving him some salt meat scraps and a thin slice of a baloney butt.

I took the coffee can to the water spout and got back just in time to see him unpin the sleeve of the blouse and watch a fat potato and a brown onion roll out. It remained a mystery how they had gotten there. I built a small fire, hung the coffee can over it, careful that the black didn't rub off. He found a small board and took his leisure time in dicing the meat, onion and potato. After the water was hot, he dumped them in and added a tad of corn meal and I judge the water came to a boil about 1 P.M. A while later he let the fire die down and watched the pot, stirring now and then as it simmered—and simmered, and simmered! By the time 4 o'clock came, the aroma had my guts in a severe turmoil; a suckling pig on a spit was but po'e folk food at the side of the Pro Bum's gruel; an' the stale bread was angel-food cake in my hands. Plenty of sun—western, only once breathed fresh air and one meal a day totally eliminated finicky feelings—or the need of rolaids. Now, a tin can became a Lenox bowl and a sliver of wood a Rogers Sterling Spoon!

Each day, after his early snipe hunting foray, I gave him 15 cents and we went into town. People nodded politely and passed us by, seriously bent on things that earning an honest living demanded. I advertised well to the grocer about my intentions of working. Then back past the Tavern to return to the rail line, in plain sight of the town's people but out of their way. I recall meeting other young men in the evening and "bare" together we swam in the reservoir. What a refreshing pleasure after a long hot day.

The 5th evening a family came into town and gave me directions to their farm. I started out, before sunrise, the first mile East was a song, then I turned north and the house seemed just two steps away—plus two more steps and then many more.[11] The clear air void of trees combined with the level land made the 2 miles go on forever. She was waiting, with breakfast on the table, totally confident that I would be there. I ate bacon and eggs with gusto for the first time since I had left home. The man hitched 3 horses to a binder and we went to the field. He cut and I shocked for 4 days in a hot sun but softened a bit by a steady western breeze. Finished there, they took me to a distant relative—he had a combine.[12] I spent an easy early morning riding around with him

10. Horath may have been mistaken when he referred to his acquaintance as a "bum." More likely the individual considered himself a hobo. Indeed, a major distinction existed between the two: the hobo gladly worked and showed respect to others; the bum generally did not.

11. After learning of the actual relationship of Manchester to the railroad track, Horath subsequently wrote: "I recall the town as being on the opposite side of the tracks. So if my assumption of that is wrong, then sure enough, the farms would be . . . South-west, not North-east" of town. Graydon Horath to author, March 24, 1993.

12. For commentary on the use of binders and combines, *see* Isern, *Bull Threshers and Bindlestiffs*, 24-67. By this time combines, which were "lumbering over the bigger fields," were replacing the older, less sophisticated binders. *Abilene Daily Reflector*, June 26, 1937.

until his daughter appeared with the family car pulling a 2 side-board high, rubber tired wagon. We filled it with grain and he told me to go to the elevator with her. What a lucky break! Boy Howdy, after shocking hay under a hot sun 10 to 12 hours a day and now to have the joy of riding around with this pretty girl; why I had nickels in my pocket that could be spent no better than by buying her a candy bar. Sitting side by side in the front seat of the touring car, each with thoughts of their own, out on the open road, going slightly down hill, when I glanced to the right, suddenly astonished to see the wagon running along beside me! Just then it veered to the right, across the ditch, up the bank and turned over on its side in a showering of grain that flew all the way across the fence. Fate stepped in; in an instant, girls, candy bars and the easy life were all gone. Back again, in the hot sun, I shoveled up into the high wagon, attempting to recover these golden grains again. The beginning of a long life of calling the wrong side of the coin. So all the rest of the day, I struggled to separate the dirt and stubble from the grain and then the next day, after a good breakfast, they took me over to Uncle Joe's. Uncle lived over at the old home place, alone, ever since the old folks had died. Now I knew I had it made when this 50 year old past, told me we were going to finish shocking his crop. One more field, he said, 24 acres; I saw it, the most beautiful field of wheat that I had ever seen.

When a man pulls into a field of standing wheat with a binder, he ties the bundle carrier back under the binder, and starts cutting by going all around the fence with the sickle to the inside of the field. The bundles are kicked out at will. Now he stops the horses and releases the carrier. Ripe wheat has few leaves, mostly just a plastic-like golden, hollow stem with a long-heavy, bowed, bearded head of yellow grain. And that beard is a shockers' dilemma, with its long fiber finer, yet like the needle of a pine, except, it has barbs much like a porcupine so that once it starts in, it's almost impossible to pull out again. Now the machine; everything on the binder is powered by the cleated, one foot wide, 4 foot high bull-wheel. The 10 foot sickle cuts the grain—the paddled reel lays the cut grain back down on the platform canvas that carries the 30" stems to the right where they're forced between the two canvases that elevate them up a steep incline over and above the bull-wheel. [T]hey are [then] spilled out upon a downward slanting wooden deck where a batter-board pats the butts in a downward and piling up motion until there is enough grain that its weight trips the trigger, releasing the needle, that threaded with twine, arched around a generous arm load, the needle extended forward, the point below the table contacts the knotter, which in turn ties the twine and cuts it and the needle returns to trip the beaters. [T]hat with three 1' long arms rotate one full turn, kicking the perfectly completed bundle out, where it drops into the carrier. A very neat piece of work but of all the pieces of machinery that a poor farmer had to contend with in his life, a binder was the most cantankerous and precise. [O]ne had never been recorded to fail to die as long as there was any shade! When 6 bundles had been ejected, the driver, having his right foot on a pedal, enclosed by an over the instep strap, lifted his foot causing the long iron rod fingers to drop down and slope to the back so that the bundles slid off into a neat pile. [T]hen with the sole of his foot, he pushed the pedal back down in place in order to catch the next bundle, now already on its way out. Going around and around, he keeps working himself to the middle of the field, where, when done there is a space in the middle of the field approx. 2 binders wide. Now he goes to the outside, where the shocker such as I am [is] supposed to have carried out and shocked enough to leave room for him, by going in the opposite direction, to cut the grain from along the fence.

So, today, here we stood, early in the morning, with the field all cut and every pile of bundles exactly in place. The space in the middle of the field and each pile 10' apart, reaching out each way toward the outer fence, in rows east and west. Then 30' farther up north was another like row and 30' more another, etc., clear to the north fence, like mounds in a neat graveyard. We walked in on the south end to the center and set our water jug down and covered it with a bundle for shade. Now I took the right row—he the left. You stepped to the center of the first 2 piles and grabbed the top end of a bundle, one in each hand and set them butts on the ground, slightly out so that the head supported one another by leaning in, one to the north and one to the south. Stoop over, get 2 more and set them against the first 2, only now with the butts

east and west. Two more, set up S.W. and N.E.; 2 more, S.E. and N.W. now 2 more, north and south in the cavity that has been created by surrounding the first 2 bundles that were set. Ten bundles in all and with 6 in a pile and by using 2 piles, you now have 2 left. Now you pick up one bundle and fan it out and lay it on top, north and south; the remaining one is spread fan shape—done by pressing the butt into your belly with one hand while the other reaches out and presses the heads each way on the opposite side of the twine. Now instead of a round bundle, you have one flared and flat. This last bundle you place on the shock in the opposite direction, or east and west. These two bundles are called the cap and are there to shed the water in case of rain. The cap is used mostly in wheat and oats; the smaller hays, where I'd come from, like Timothy and Red Top grasses, were usually set 4 bundles to a shock, with heads sticking up and tied with a few strands of hay so that they will stand and fare very well with heads exposed to the elements.

Now, as I glance up, he's going the row, working his way west, as I go east. At the fence, turn north and walk the 30' and shock my way back to the center again. Walk down and get the jug, take a small swallow, carry it forward and hand it to him, he drinks, sets it in the shade of a shock and we walk north to the third row, to repeat the process, again. I had to keep my shirt tail swingin'; but even so it was no big sweat to keep up with this older man. Noon came, we went in the empty house, ate a quick, cold lunch, relaxed perhaps 15 minutes, got up, filled the jug at the pump at the outside well and I began to become a tad concerned. Ordinarily you were following the binder around the field to some extent, never really knowing just how much you were accomplishing as quite a bit of efficiency is lost as you travel more often between the rows; but here there was very little lost motion and dang, the old man was still holding the same pert steady pace. Any horse is allowed the consideration of slowing down during the waning hours of the sun. Now 20 acres is 1/8 mile wide and a 1/4 mile long, a pretty neat, strung-out piece of land. When you look out at it, all stubble, cut and clean, piles of bundles spaced before you and neat precise shocks rowed up behind and this was 24 acres. My tongue was dry, my brow was set and the elastic in my back was like bloomers that had been washed in water too hot. He capped his last shock—straightened up quick and taunt as a bow string, smiling a warm smile as he watched me cap out the last of mine. "Boy," he said, "as soon as I saw you cap the first shock, this morning, I knew we'd get her done." I nodded; to me, any comment would have seemed lame. It was about 5 P.M. and for the last hour I'd struggled with all I had to keep pace with him, this old Man! "Let's go to the house, I got an old gun; would you like to shoot a Jack rabbit?" "Sure!" "There's always a few down the grassy ditch, there. In the meantime I'll be scating us up a warm lunch." So after a hard day's work—I found that extra spring in my step to flush and kill two of the long-eared critters and with my knife, cut off their ears as a special prize to take home. My many stops and the heat canceled this enterprising effort and I might add, very soon. Anyway, the following morning, when I departed this old fellow's home, I had nothing but the greatest admiration for this Kansas man.

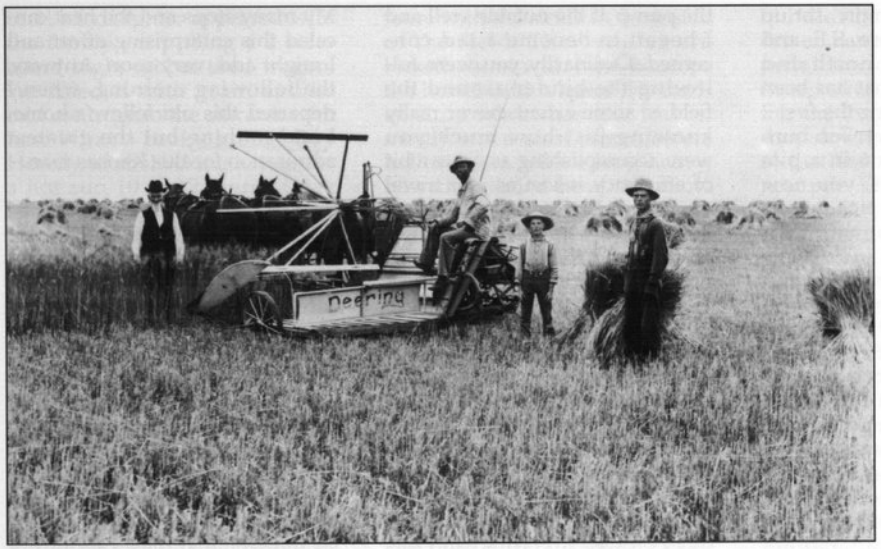
They took me back to the original farm where I had started working and the lady of the house informed me that this evening there was to be a meeting in town. She would introduce me to their friend who could possibly need a hand. Having the day free, I walked into town, went swimming with some of the boys and just generally loafed until evening when the crowd of farmers came in. The Dude she pointed out to me at once caught my eye as being more of a politician than a farmer. He deliberately sized me up and down before declaring his intentions. "Yes sir," he said. "I possibly could use an experienced field hand." Emphasizing the "experienced" part as if "sheep-skin" credentials were required just to get to yo-yo your back all day! To his surprise, the next words were mine. "How much do you pay?" His quick response came as if it were almost none of my business.

"$2.00 a day. Sun up to Sun down."

"Your friend paid me $2.50."

"$2.00 a day is enough, that's if you want to work."

"Oh, I will work; that's what I came west for." I replied, standing there on the sidewalk among this milling group of farmers. I was tall, 6' then and had no trouble looking him straight in the eye. Bold German descent and hadn't been bashful since I was old enough to realize I was potty trained; I persisted. "But you see,




*Plentiful wheat harvests assured farm laborers, like Horath, of many hours of hard work in the hot Kansas sun.*

if I work for you for $2—I would only serve to belittle your friend."

"Well—I'll have you know," he informed me. "Down south here, at the Farmer's Hall there are plenty of men who will work for less than that!"

I nodded. "Then I'm sure that is where your interest lies." And I turned and walked away. Now by this time the majority of the farmers had gone home, so I trudged the 3 miles out to the farm to get my extra clothes. After spending the night in the barn, I sheepishly approached the kitchen door to tell her of my discourtesy to her friend. On hearing she gave out with a loud shout of laughter saying he always was a skin-flint, then insisted I eat breakfast and then pointed me down the road to the neighbor to the west. "Go ask Mr. Cherry," she advised.

Now Mr. Cherry was different—a man about 45, with a nice appearing wife; still I don't recall any children. He lived about a mile from the first place I worked and was just coming out from breakfast as I walked into the lot. There on the spot, we agreed. Now he was different in this way. If a farmer wanted you to shock his grain—that's all that he wanted you to do "was shock," for that was by far the most difficult chore. But not Mr. Cherry—what Mr. Cherry wanted was a helper. Help me feed the stock; help pasture the colt; help milk the cows; harness the horses; slop the pigs, feed the chickens and help hitch the team to the binder, bring fresh twine and grease the wheels. After all this, I was free to start shocking and the sun was well up above the neighboring trees. By now I had started using gloves, as after two or three days of jabbing your fingers into the stiff stalks and often encountering the bearded heads, my finger tips had soon become slightly worn, extra slick, then cracked and bleeding. The gloves were overly appreciated. I worked good, drank often and when noon came, he waved me in again to help with the horses. Why a man would do this I never seemed to understand. Instead of letting me continue at this back breaking job, he insisted I goof off 15 or 20 minutes 4 times a day helping him with a simple chore—one that I could do with one hand tied behind my back when I was only 14 years old and furthermore, those would be 4 horse teams. So when he beckoned, I was glad to hurry in to unhitch, water, stall and feed the 3 horses, to then go to the house where Mrs. Cherry always had prepared for us, a warm and delicious meal. In the evening we rounded out the chores by me milking one of his 2 milking cows. After supper, I was given a well used blanket and told I could sleep in the barn loft in the hay. O.K. by me but all my

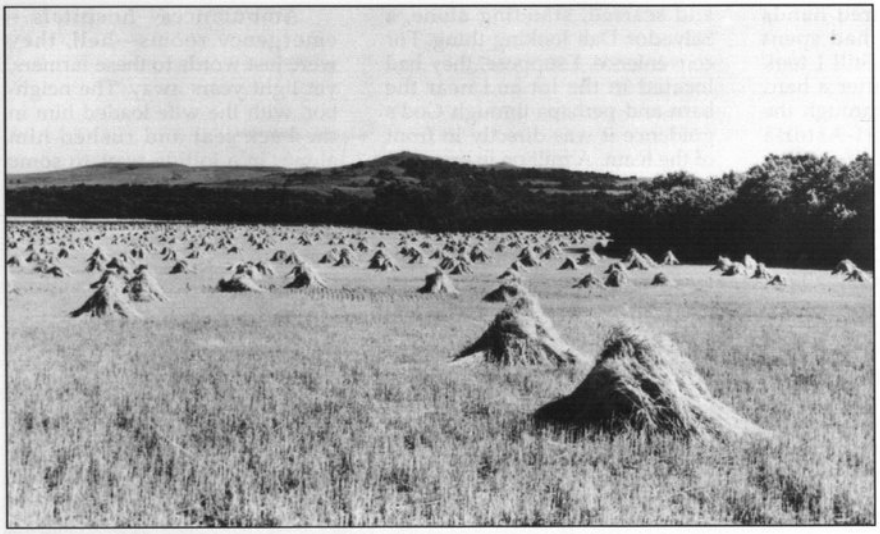
life my folks had hired hands and many a night I had spent sleeping with them. Still I took no offence . . . and after a hard day's work wading through the stubble, the Waldorf-Astoria would have been but a forgotten treat, once I closed my eyes.

The next day—after dinner, Mr. Cherry finished binding the field here close to the barn that we were working in and told me there was a 2 acre patch west of the house that used to be a garden, he would move over there and cut that. I nodded, he left and about a half hour later, while I was busily engaged in my work, I heard him scream. One of the horses was a young 4 yr. old but it seemed gentle enough to me, so to this day I can't explain what might have spooked the horses, yet, when I straightened and looked around, they were just crashing through the knit wire garden fence and continued stampeding out across the barn lot where at the south end of the barn they jumped a 2' deep by 3' wide ditch and as the binder bull-wheel bounced over it. Mr. Cherry was thrown out of the seat, easily done as precarious as it was, but his foot, encased in the bundle carrier pedal strap was imprisoned high up on the binder frame and his body strung out dragging on the ground. I dropped my bundles and ran but the distance was far at such a critical time. Now I assume that once upon a time there had been a pair of forked posts set in the ground, probably some 8' apart for home butchering, I expect. Regardless of that, today only one remained standing, a sturdy foot thick, slick, weather-whitened hedge, forked and scarred, standing alone, a Salvador Dali looking thing. For convenience, I suppose, they had located in the lot and near the barn and perhaps through God's guidance it was directly in front of the team. A million in one, you could call it, standing in a large lot all by itself and after bumping across the ditch, the team confronted it with 2 horses on the right and the remaining horse on the other side. They slammed into it with a great deal of force but the harness, good leather that it was, held and actually threw them back a few feet so that the binder rolled back now putting a terrible twist in his leg and rolling his upper body under the grain platform. Now the other miracle came. Having had their little foray and halted, they immediately settled down to becoming the docile, domesticated, loving horses that they had always been. Soon, I was there, jerking out my knife and cutting his foot free and slowly eased him from beneath the binder, his only protest being a low, semi-conscious moan. I straightened his body into what I hoped was a relaxed position and straightened up just in time to be confronted by a pale, frightened wife. She threw herself at his side and even then we could hear the car racing down the dusty road, hardly slowing as it passed the house, careened in through the gate and roared across the lot. By this time I was at the head of the horses so that they would remain calm, knowing now that at the warning of his scream, she must have called for help by phone. Blood on his face and hands, overalls dust covered with green grass ground in, his body looked crumpled, more like a dog wallowed rag.

Ambulances—hospitals—emergency rooms—hell, they were just words to these farmers, yet light years away. The neighbor, with the wife loaded him in the back seat and rushed him along, in a jolting way, to some private practicing M.D. and by late evening he was resting as best he could in a twice fluffed bed in his own loving home.[13]

In the mean time, I had unhitched and unharnessed, stabled, throwed hay in the manger for the erroneous team and gone out to shock more of the wheat. Just naturally assuming the responsibility, I quit a bit early and came in to do the chores. Turn on the wind mill so to have water for the stock; shoo in the colt so he could suck, feed the stock grain, along with the chickens and gathered the eggs. Then went to the house to get the buckets, milked and went up to the milk shed to strain the milk, through a fresh washed rag, into the large stainless steel bowl on the milk separator and then started twisting the crank. I never understood the process of separating the milk from the cream, I suppose kids that went to high-school and studied physics did; all I knew was that you started by turning a crank, that swung in about a 3' circle, and due to its

13. Mr. Cherry is the only one of Horath's Dickinson County employers that has been identified. He appears to be Harvey Cherry, a forty-three-year-old farmer who lived on and worked his father-in-law's (J. E. Jones) land two and a half miles southwest of Manchester. He and Lillian, his wife of just three years, had no children. *Abilene Daily Chronicle*, June 27, 1937, and *Abilene Daily Reflector*, June 29, 1937; *Dickinson County Kansas Yearbook-Directory, 1936-37* (Seibert, Colo.: National Directory Co., 1937), 59; Kansas State Board of Agriculture, Statistical Rolls, 1936, Dickinson County, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.



*Horath satisfied his quest for "the great rolling plains of endless grain" in the wheat fields of Kansas. From there he pushed on to new adventure in the Pacific Northwest.*

low geared ratio, it didn't start off easy but as momentum picked up and you increased the speed it became easier to turn and when you reached a certain speed, that you had been taught to be right, you reached up and opened the valve to the big bowl of clean, fresh, warm milk, that perched above the machine. Now the milk poured out and rushed down at the exact amount, went through the disc bowl and came pouring out at the two spouts, one skimmed milk and the other, golden, delicious, sweet cream! I went to the house then with the buckets of milk and the crock of fresh cream. We, the woman and I ate supper, as she explained to me that, though terribly twisted, his leg wasn't broken, though he wasn't so convinced about some of his ribs. Yet if he had no severe internal injuries, the Dr. consoled her by believing him the hardy farmer that he was, that soon, all would be well.[14]

I went to the barn, turned the stock out for the night and climbed into the loft. At sunrise, from within the barn, her voice came loud and clear and on my answering, I heard the barn door close on her way out. I stretched, to pull out the "daybefore" kinks out of my back, then got up. There was no lost time in dressing, my pajamas and work clothes were one and all the same thing. Descending the ladder, I opened the barn doors and threw in the feed and sure enough, except from some guff from the mischievous colt, the horses and cows came rushing in, each to his appointed place. I gathered up the 2 pails that she had washed the previous evening and now had conveniently left me. Taking the milk, I left it in the milk shed and went to the house for breakfast. Later I separated, turned out the stock and returned to the field. I hadn't recalled her telling me to do anything—it must have just been a silent mutual agreement between us. But for me, this day was far from being done. Tall and thin, heat was normally no problem for me—but 95 degrees? And my nose started to bleed—now this didn't put me into any panic for "that" I'd evidently inherited from my father. I had the hereditary problem of unprovoked nose bleed and what I looked like by noon, I wasn't sure and it wasn't discussed. The bleeding was

14. The news report about Harvey Cherry's accident differs somewhat from Horath's account; but newspapers, like memories, may not be wholly correct. According to the *Abilene Daily Chronicle* of June 27, 1937, "When the horses became frightened and ran away with the binder with which he was working in the field about noon Saturday [June 26], Harvey Cherry, 43, Manchester farmer, was critically injured. He was given treatment at his home by Dr. S. N. Chaffee of Talmage and later yesterday afternoon removed to the Memorial hospital here [Abilene]." As Horath's account suggests, the injuries were not life-threatening. Cherry lived until he was eighty-one. *See Abilene Reflector-Chronicle*, August 18, 1975.

everything in the books—intermittent. It might run profusely and I'd lay down, wet my neck with a rag, it would seem to stop, then get up to work again fighting a tapped maple tree like, drip—drip—drip; then plug up until it was difficult to breathe, then quit for an hour to commence all over again and with the breeze, all the time the drips splattering my clothes. I had been born with it, back home, with the immediate family it wasn't news. I trudged on, did the chores and at supper tried to explain away her concern, what with all her other trials. After all the chores were done, holding a cloth to my nose, I walked the 3 miles into town and plunged myself into the soothing waters of the reservoir. I swam and wallowed in the water, all alone, and gratefully realized that my nose had quit bleeding. I crawled out of the water and lay on my back recuperating for a long while. The days work and the huge loss of blood had no doubt sapped my strength a great deal. At last, grateful that it had stopped, with no assurance as to when it would start again, I got up and by the gracious, most welcomed light of a late night moon, I trudged back to the loft that was my home.

I rallied without protest at her first call and that day a neighbor came over and cut (bound) his one remaining field. It was a large field and I worked hard but perhaps with even less efficiency, for the heat persisted, actually increased and I well recall the "Utopia" when the mercury climbed to a sweltery 110! No one else was there—no one but me ever knew—however, there in the fence row was a huge old hedge that cast its shade over a very belabored boy sitting, with his legs, ape-fashion, cradled around a comforting, water jug a great many minutes more than was normally allowed. That day is behind me in my life—and I hope that I shall never encounter one like it again. In this same field, not necessarily the same day, I ran across the bones of a long dead ox. Now for 2 years I'd had a seed wart on the middle knuckle of my ring finger and now it was becoming highly irritated by the abrasive grain. My mother had often told me that if you find an old bone and take it up and use the underside (or soil side) to rub the wart, and do it vigorously until it bleeds, then lay the bone back down in the exact same position that you found it—then be sure to turn and walk away without ever looking back—the wart would disappear! Now the only true way I felt I could do this was to wait until quitting time. So I did, and went through the exact ritual, as I had been told, put the bone back down and without looking back, went to the barn. Lo and behold, several days later I looked down to see that the wart "was" really gone—and as I recall, I have never had one again.

Each day much the same and at last the last shock was in place and in the morning, after the chores, I went to the house and was ushered in to see Mr. Cherry. By now he was able to sit up in a chair but much movement gave him a devilish lot of pain, he said. I had pulled him from beneath the binder in a tangled heap; faithfully took care of his livestock and done his chores; fed his chickens, gathered his eggs and shocked his wheat, in a none too congenial a sun and his last words, as he wrote me the $17.50 check were like words that were to be etched on my Tombstone! I hear him yet, as he turned to his wife and said, "Maggie, dear, I believe, in order to get our crop harvested, this is the most I have ever paid." He improved to perfect health, I sincerely hope, though I never saw Mr. Cherry again.

I walked into Manchester, gave the grocer my check to cash and bought a large loaf of bread, some cheese and 3 cans of pork and beans, the next day was the 4th of July. In the afternoon, to mix with a few of the revelers, I went into the Tavern. It was quiet and a quite friendly place and the bartender served me beer. I suppose the feeling of loneliness had set in for I took a fancy to 2 young boys (ages about 10) that were hanging around, and I bought them all the soda and candy that they desired. At about 7 P.M., I suppose, I got up and feeling a bit woozy, I tipped my slightly frayed straw hat in a farewell to the bartender and guests and with some effort, made my way to the door. On unsteady legs, I made my way to the quiet of the City Park and lay down in the shade to close out my first celebration in Kansas. I awoke up at daylight, on the 5th and feeling no pain from the evening before, I went to the Post Office and sent $25 home.

A train whistled and I hurried to go retrieve my bundle of an extra shirt, pair of pants, 2 pair of socks, a jacket, some left over bread and 2 cans of pork and beans. With all this under my arm, I hopped the freight to perhaps, never again, see Manchester, Kansas; the friendly little town, where, in the year of 1937,

the Mayor was no more respected than a lowly Bum!

The engine was huffing black smoke as it began laboring its way into the north wind. High up on the walk-way of the boxcar the hot cinders pecked at my tough browned skin. Now and then one on my cheek made me wince; yet I loved it up here in the clean, healthy land. I loved to see it pass by for I was eager to be on the move again. When I first left Solomon there were very few men on the trains; now I began to realize this had changed as I seemed to see more men getting on my train all the time. Once I recall, the train having stopped at a siding, a ragged farmer speaking to the older of his 2 sons and his voice was strong. "No; I'm not going to sign any danged papers so you can go to the CCC's!" "Why not Pa?" the boy whined. And the startling answer came. "Because it's just that Roosevelt feller's way of establishing him an Army—an' I ain't sendin' no boy of mine to War!"[15]

Little did I know his wise prophesy would come true. A buddy of mine was in the CCC camp and he spent 5 years in Roosevelt's conscription. I was smart enough to not get in the CCC's, so I only spent 4!

[W]e chugged on through Miltonvale, Concordia, ever increasing the number of men on the train, as the rail-road men worked around them now without a seeming care.[16] One day I was in a boxcar and by afternoon there must have been a hundred men in the same car, maybe due to it being the only boxcar with an opened door, I don't know. Regardless of what I did or didn't know was of small importance. They were a rowdy, carefree lot with a poker game going on in one end of the car and a dice game of nickels and dimes in full swing in the other. The train was slowing down and suddenly halted and so did the games. I'd been in one end of the Boxcar watching the poker game; suddenly I realized everyone was getting out at this little town. But this little town proved to be different—the crowd dismounting were now quiet, although by the time I got to the open door the men were all standing, elbow to elbow, in a line. The Engineer had conveniently stopped the train with the door of our car exactly in the center of the Hi-way. When I looked out, the first thing I saw was a well-armed sheriff with an extra large, shiny star; and he wasn't alone! Four armed Deputies stood near by. When the train man assured him we were all off the train he began. "Gentlemen! I am sheriff of this county and we profess to have a quiet, clean little county seat town. But recently we have had rumors of some towns having a few nuisance happenings and we just don't cater to problems of this kind. Now I didn't say you were unwelcome on our streets and in our stores—but believe me, I'll not allow pandering or pilfering; understand. However, if you're just passing through and should need directions—me or any of my boys will help you! We know all the hi-ways and where they go; even rail-road schedules are no trouble for us. In fact—the train you came in on will be leaving town right after dusk." After staring at us for a long moment, they all got in one car and drove back up town, possibly satisfied that their message had been clearly received. After that, I always wondered why the directions for all the appliances we buy couldn't have been as explicit as this. It was a grand town, I'm sure. Though I never learned the name or for that matter, never traversed its main street. Furthermore, I never quite knew what inspired me to do the things that I'd do—but this particular evening, there on a rail-road siding, I discovered a large poultry distribution plant. I went in, introduced myself as a harvest worker and was rewarded with a dozen cracked eggs. Rejoicing I went out, found a can and water, built a small fire on the cinders by the tracks and by the time the water was beginning to roll, I had acquired 3 friends. Each contributed a bit, I'm sure; anyway we all had full bellies as we rode out of town in the late evening, on the very same train that had brought us in. The line wandered through, maybe Scandia or Belleville and on across the State Line into Nebr. still living the life of a bum.[17] I recall getting off in a

15. The Civilian Conservation Corps, launched by the New Deal in 1933, was one of the most effective of the Roosevelt administration's relief agencies. Before it disbanded in 1942, the CCC provided outdoor work relief for nearly 2.5 million young men with as many as 519,000 enrolled at a given time. *See* John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1967).

16. Miltonvale is in Cloud County twenty miles northwest of Manchester. It was an interchange point with the seventy-two mile Junction City-Concordia branch of the Union Pacific. Concordia is twenty-six miles northwest of Miltonvale on the Santa Fe's line. Likely additional hoboes boarded the Santa Fe freight at the Miltonvale stop.

17. If Horath remained on the Santa Fe's Superior branch, which is probable, he traveled through the Kansas villages of Kackley and Courtland in Republic County, and Lovewell and Webber in Jewell County, before he reached the terminus of Superior, Nebraska. Belleville and Scandia are actually on the Rock Island line.

small town and picking out a likely house, knocked at the back door. When I asked for food, the older houselady insisted that I come in and wait until she prepared noonmeal for me and her brood, some of her sons nearly as old as I. She gave me a welcome that was every bit as hearty as the meal and told me that her husband had been out of work and he, too was riding the trains in search of harvest, so that soon he might come back and put food on the table for them. God Bless them, their kind will always survive.

Still the human body is fixed so that a meal, even a good meal, only lasts for a day and now I recall another time back in Kansas, before I got my first job and I had a very few coins in my pocket, so in the residential part of a small town, a very prim little town, I walked up and knocked on a well painted backdoor. My knock was answered by a very neat young woman, whom, when I asked her for food, seemed a bit uncertain what to do. At least, she brought herself to say "Wait," and closed the screen door. So being overjoyed at not having been refused, I waited; and waited some more. Now this was about 10 in the morning on the east side of the house and there was no porch or awning over the door. So I waited and the sweat began to run down, everywhere. At last I sat down on the stoop where the radiation of the concrete added to the sun that continued to bear down. Finally, after a good 30 minutes, this dear young lady came to the door and handed me two thin slices of bread covering one equally thin piece of ham but wrapped—expertly wrapped in waxed paper with a precise finesse that Elsie Maxwell would commend. All this for a dirty bum, I could have smiled but never, instead, I held it tenderly in my soiled hand and made her think that this day, she had aided one of the Crusaders in his search for the Holy Grail. And I hope, that evening, when she related her experience to her husband, that he praised her, too. It wasn't much, but it was food and food was what I had asked for and indeed I was hungry or I should never have asked—so I was grateful and my stomach was, also.

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Graydon Horath did not return to Illinois immediately after his sojourn to Kansas. He worked his way to the Pacific Northwest rather than following the wheat harvest northward into the Dakotas and the prairie provinces of Canada. Months later Horath arrived back home "thoroughly beat."

The trip west in 1937 was the harbinger of a nomadic life. Although Horath presently lives in his native Illinois, where he has spent most of his adult life, he has traveled extensively, living and working in many diverse locations from the Aleutian Islands and Okinawa during World War II to Kentucky, Michigan, and Argentina during the post-war years. After returning to Effingham County, Illinois, in the late 1960s, Horath spent some time "riding the Mississippi and Illinois rivers on tug boats from Cario, Ill. to Morris, Ill." Then in 1970, as he explained years later, "Mary my wife since April of '48 has bought us a home in Effingham, so for 18 months I'm a salesman; 3 more as a diesel filler upper and windshield washer at a truckstop here in town." Still unwilling or unable to settle down for long, Horath spent the remainder of the 1970s and 1980 in Ocala, Florida; Elkhorn, Wisconsin; and Oklawaha and Silver Shores, Florida. Retiring in 1981, the Horaths moved back to their "home in Effingham"; ". . . as I write in March of 1992, . . . it makes this the longest I have lived in one place since my glorious railroad trip [of 1937]."[18] KH

18. Horath, "Tales of the Rails," 56.