FIFTY YEARS ON A
ONE-FAMILY FARM
IN CENTRAL KANSAS

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the following two-installment article, Erich Fruehauf, who says he was probably the last German immigrant to become a farmer in Kansas, tells the story of his 50 years on the same farm in Stafford county. The narrative is printed much as the author wrote it, without documentation and with a minimum of editing, to preserve the flavor of the story. Many of our readers should be able to relate to the experiences Dr. Fruehauf describes. His is a story many Kansans will remember.—THE EDITORS.

FARMING conditions and problems vary from region to region in the United States. My observations are based on the typical wheat-feed grain-cattle economy of central Kansas and in particular of my farm in Hayes Township in Stafford County.

My intention was not to write a history of farming but rather to relate my personal experiences as a German immigrant who had the good fortune to operate a farm during 50 years of what turned out to be a most interesting and exciting period in the history of farming. I was part of and changed with the changing events, seeing them so to say from the inside. I have tried not to tire the reader with more figures and statistics than are absolutely necessary to help him visualize the problems and the life on a family farm during the 50 years ending in 1976.

II. HOW IT WAS—THE HORSEPOWER YEARS

THE CONDUCTOR of the fast Santa Fe train made sure that I got off at the Hutchinson, Kansas depot. That was at 2 a.m., May 20, 1926. It was very dark and cool. For the first time on my whole long trip I felt separated from the rest of the world, all alone. There was nothing else to see or to do but to wait five hours for the 7 a.m. local train. It would stop in Stafford, my final destination.

I carried my luggage to the waiting room. It sported several benches and a lone, fly-specked lightbulb on the ceiling. There was no station master on duty, the ticket window curtained and locked. Not a soul around. I and the dim light above represented an island in the

(166)
darkness of an unknown new world. Was I in a city, or was this one of the small stations I had seen from the train, sitting all alone beside the rails? Out there, in the darkness must be the farm where I hoped to find a future, the farm on which I had staked all I had, for which I had left Germany, probably the last German immigrant to become a farmer in Kansas.

The night air became chillier. I didn't dare to doze off because a black man had come shuffling in on his way to the toilets. Not accustomed to black people, I had no idea whether he was harmless or a possible menace, though a white man under the same circumstances would have had the same effect on me. I worried that I might lose my suitcase to a thief. After all I had no idea what to expect in this strange, new land.

Finally, in the first light of dawn some details of my surroundings emerged. Outside some boys played ball on the street. Only later did I learn that these were newspaper boys who waited for a supply of The Hutchinson Herald, to take out on their paper route before school. In any event, there was now light and life and hope.

Yes, hope is the big force. It makes hardship bearable, it spurs the imagination. No farmer could live without hope. It carries him from year to year, through failures and losses. Always there is the thought: surely, next year everything will come out right, next year's crop will be the big success. On the strength of this faith he gambles, again and again, a small fortune on a harvest a year in the future. How I hoped that I had made the right decision when I burned all bridges behind me, when I traded a meager job for a wholly uncertain future in a strange land, just to be able to actually work with my hands, to produce a valuable, needed thing.

For this end I had prepared myself a long time. That it would become reality in Kansas and that I would spend the next fifty years here, living through the most exciting and revolutionary period in the history of agriculture, I could not foresee.

I was 25 years old, born 1901 in northern Bohemia, then part of the old monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Also called Sudetenland, it was settled predominantly by Germans. Here I went to school. I finished high school just at the end of World War I in Gablonz, a city of 30,000 inhabitants. The battlefields were far away and the bombing of open cities by air was not yet invented. So the most vivid memories of the war years were not of a violent nature, but of hunger. The distribution of food didn't function at all. There were ration cards, but often neither bread nor potatoes in the stores. As a high school student I worked during several summer vacations on farms in central Bohemia. There was always plenty to eat where the farmer had his own wheat and rye, his own cows, hogs and chickens.

I knew that my grandfather had operated a large farming complex in southern Bohemia. But my father, one of five brothers, had left the farm to become a lawyer. He died when I was only twelve years old. The stories he had told me of his boyhood days on the farm fired my imagination. That must be the life, riding on horseback over the fields, overseeing the work of many hired hands. On the strength of this romantic picture and with the memory of the war-time hunger years still fresh in my mind, I decided to study agriculture. My aim was to become manager of a large estate owned by an aristocrat or by the well-endowed Roman Catholic Church in Austria or Hungary. The fact that the Austrian monarchy fell apart at the end of WW I spoiled that dream. By a decision of the Peace Treaty of Versailles I woke up one morning as a citizen of the newly created Republic of Czechoslovakia, a state openly hostile to its German minority. So I enrolled in Germany at the old and prestigious University of Leipzig. Strongly attracted by lectures in philosophy, I nevertheless convinced myself that there would be more bread in farming than in philosophy. I earned my Ph.D. degree in agriculture there in 1924. Subsequently I applied for many jobs in agriculture and soon found out that nobody in Germany needed a young doctor from Czechoslovakia. One of the more practical lessons taught in every school should be that a moron with connections will get the job ahead of the better qualified man without "pull." So I settled for a job in a chemical factory in Emden. It had plans to branch out into the manufacture of veterinary pharmaceuticals, but became a victim of the terrible post-war inflation. My last activity was to type the notices to every employee, including myself, that our services were no longer needed. After this traumatic experience I...
worked as fieldman and organizer for a farm organization, similar to our Farmers Union. Here I could do some good, but again the job led farther away from practical agriculture instead of into it.

Finally I swallowed my pride. If others used their connections, I could use mine, insignificant as they were. I knew that friends of my mother had a cousin in America who owned a farm. His name was Robert Hupe, his address Hudson, Kansas. In a letter I asked this gentleman for information, whether there was a chance for me to find work in agriculture in Kansas.

I had not the faintest idea what farming there would be like, only that Kansas was famous as a wheat state. I was also aware that the USA must be a country of great vitality and power, judging by the way it had waded into the conflict in Europe. To my surprise I received a friendly answer from Mr. Hupe. He stated that he was getting old, worked the farm alone and could use some younger help. He would send me a steamer ticket and would help me find other employment should I not like the work on his farm. How could I refuse? My ship, the Cunard liner _Andania_, would sail in four weeks from Hamburg for New York, a short notice to get all my papers and passport in order. Ironically my Czechoslovakian citizenship became an advantage. The immigration quota for Germans was filled up for a year ahead, while Czechoslovakian citizens were still being admitted.

I quit my job and took a few English lessons at a Berlitz School. Anybody who has tried that system will agree with me that the few phrases learned there in a hurry from a young Englishman who had never seen America, are somewhat less than the minimum needed for a conversation. I took leave from two brothers and from my mother without knowing that I would never see her again.

My first impression of America was not at all what the reader would expect. Did I see the Statue of Liberty with tears in my eyes? No, I didn’t, because at the time we passed the lady I was in the office of the ship’s purser, answering questions by the immigration officials. By this method I was allowed to enter the United States without the customary quarantine on Ellis Island. The customs inspector on the dock was unhappy that, as a doctor, I had no medical instruments to declare, until a German speaking official of the Travelers Aid came to the rescue and mollified the man. Afterwards he took me in a taxi to meet my train for Chicago. Following his advice to get something to eat for the trip to Kansas I bought two oranges and three buns. This supply fell woefully short of my needs as the trip lasted two days and nights. Most new arrivals are not prepared for the vast distances in America.

On the train I came to sit next to a man whose name was Campbell. He produced a Bible and began to bombard me with a long, long speech which I didn’t understand. I probably guessed right that he was trying to convert me to one sect or another, but was unable to reply or to sleep. So I escaped to the men’s lounge. Another surprise awaited me there. About a dozen men, probably mostly travelling salesmen, ordered ice water in paper cups from the black attendant. To my surprise they spiked it with some form of alcohol from small hip flasks. Mr. Hupe had warned me not to bring any whisky along because the country had prohibition, a law which made possession of alcoholic beverages a crime. Evidently the law was not very popular. One of the gents treated me to a drink, then inquired about my destination. When I said: “Kansas” he became excited. “Aren’t you thrilled?” he asked. The word “thrilled” was not in my vocabulary. To play it safe I answered “no.” “Something wrong with you” grunted the stranger and went back to his drink. Of course I was thrilled. Wasn’t I riding a train into the greatest adventure of my life?

Mr. Hupe was at the depot in Stafford when my train stopped there. He had white hair, a well-trimmed white Santa Claus beard and a ready smile. And never, to his last day, have I seen him without the small clay-pipe he smoked. From a small cotton bag he filled it with “Cornake Tobacco,” lit it, then covered it with a cap cut from the bottom of a tin can, so that no sparks could escape. Now I was finally able to speak again and ask questions, a real relief after the train ride among strangers whom I couldn’t understand. We climbed up into his Model T Ford Sedan and drove into the wide open country on a ruler-straight road. It didn’t resemble our present all-weather roads but consisted mostly of ruts
cut by wagon wheels into the prairie grass. We crossed the Rattlesnake Creek, then made a lefthand turn at the Hills Corner Schoolhouse, from where the smokestack of the Hudson Flour mill looked over the treetops. All the farm houses I noticed on our way were half hidden in small groves of trees, planted by the farmers as protection against the wind. The country looked fairly level, covered with green wheat fields or plowed land and pastures with cattle and horses, everything fenced with barbed wire nailed to wooden posts. No mountain, from horizon to horizon, blocked out any part of the vast blue sky.

Eventually we turned into a lane of shade trees that led to the farm house. The sail of a windmill near the barn proclaimed in bold letters: HUPE'S FAIR GROVE FARM. Two dogs scattered a flock of chickens as they greeted the car. At the garden gate I met Mrs. Hupe and her daughter, Hedwig. The latter had been ill and looked pale and thin at that time. Later she told me that I made the same impression on her. Small wonder, since I had no chance yet to acquire a sun tan and calloused hands after years of college and office work.

The house, shining in white paint, stood in a flower and vegetable garden. A fence kept chickens and other livestock out and children in. To the east stretched the open yard flanked by other farm buildings, while the grove protected the place on the north and west side.

Just as inviting as the place was the climate, much warmer at the end of May than I was used to from Germany. But enough wind to make the wheat blades bend like waves on a lake, dried the sweat and gave a cooling effect. I had always longed for warmer summers, and I got them. At the same time I traded for more severe winters. In the beginning I tried to harden myself by not wearing gloves, but changed my mind fast when the first blizzard hit.

On that first day I did no more than get acquainted with the arrangement of buildings and corrals. I watched Hedwig and Mr. Hupe milk five Shorthorn cows, feed seven horses and mules, a few hogs and the flock of laying hens. I was soon reminded that the work on a farm with livestock stops for nothing, absolutely and literally nothing. There is no free Sunday or holiday or vacation because somebody must take care of the animals. Cows must be milked on schedule; they, their calves and all animals down to the lowly cats depend on us for their feed. Unlike a store or shop there is no way to lock up a farm and take the whole day off. You have a whole zoo at your hands and the conscientious farmer lives by the military motto: “first the horse, then the rider.”

In the evening I began to feel that I had missed a lot of sleep the night before. The kerosene lamp in the middle of the round table in the kitchen-living room shed only a small circle of light on the table cloth while the corners of the room remained in darkness. Before going to bed I groped my way through the night to the little two-seater outhouse, modestly tucked away in the grove, some distance away from the dwelling. This arrangement had its advantages, but in rain or a blizzard it posed certain problems. Only with difficulty did I find my way back, as there were no brightly lit windows to indicate the location of the house. Later I learned that there was a kerosene lantern available for such excursions.

Soon I exchanged my European pants for the standard clothing of the farmer, blue overalls with bib and shoulder straps and a variety of pockets for all purposes. Now I could slide easily into the routine of the daily chores. After the horses were fed in the barn and the cows milked, we all gathered in the kitchen for breakfast. A real, solid breakfast it was, not the hastily swallowed cup of coffee over the morning paper as has often become the habit in the city. The women had the cast iron stove going, the coffee pot boiling and eggs, homemade sausage or pancakes in the frying pan. We burned wood and corn cobs in the stove which also heated the room. On a bench beside the stove, handsomely bound in polished brass hoops, stood an oaken bucket with a long-handled dipper. It contained the drinking water for the family. From the hand operated pump in front of the house I carried it inside in buckets, thousands of them. Firewood had to be carried in and ashes carried out, while Hedwig cleaned and refilled the kerosene lamps and lanterns.

There was a bedroom on the ground floor and a parlor, the joy and pride of the housewife. It had a rug on the floor, a fancy table and chairs, mounted antlers and giltframed family pictures on the walls. A small house organ stood
Erich Frueinhauf, who came to Kansas from Germany in 1926, has witnessed a revolution in agriculture during the last 50 years while operating a farm in Stafford county. He had a Ph.D. in agriculture from the University of Leipzig, but he had much to learn about practical farming in central Kansas.

there too. Hedwig played it sometimes on Sundays. The player had to operate the bellows with her feet in the same manner as she worked the treadle of her sewing machine. Mrs. Hupe kept this room securely locked during the week. It was strictly a place to impress visitors but not for family use. In contrast we never locked the house door. "A lock keeps only the honest people out," said Mr. Hupe. The upper story contained bedrooms. They were not heated, but large, fluffy featherbeds kept me warm during the coldest winter nights once I got over the first shock of crawling into the ice-cold bed.

Near the dwelling stood the washhouse, a stuccoed brick building. Its single room housed a bathtub, a small stove to heat water, and the cream separator. This handcranked machine extracted the cream from the whole milk of our cows by centrifugal force. A cellar under the washhouse provided storage space for vegetables and potatoes as well as for our supply of lard, hams and sausages. In a concrete storm cellar we could take shelter in case a tornado came our way. It also served as storage for canned fruits and vegetables and for fresh apples and pears in season.

Within a mile from the farmyard I could see six other neighboring farm homes: Fred Beuttell on a hill to the south, U. H. Ukena and Carl Schwietale to the southwest. Across the road and nearest to us was a place belonging to Louis Spangenberg, but not occupied at the time. To the north lay the farm of Adolf Schade, a cousin of Robert Hupe, and to the east a large grove and orchard where Mrs. Mina Messerly, a widow, lived. She raised baby chicks the year round and experimented with feeding mulberry leaves to silkworms as a hobby.

About the first thing I learned was to drive the Model T Ford car. As it had no starter we had to turn over the motor with a crank, a tricky business, for the motor was apt to kick back when the ignition timing was not far enough retarded. Many a car owner suffered a broken wrist or arm in the process. In cold weather we jacked up one rear wheel to make the cranking a little easier. The car fitted into the wagon rails like a train on the track. Often it was impossible to get out of the deep ruts, but traffic was extremely light. Soon I was entrusted with running errands for Mr. Hupe who, by temperament and habit, preferred very much to drive a team of horses. I learned that our town of Hudson was 3½ miles away and our schoolhouse 2½ miles in the opposite direction. Beyond that stretched the Great Salt Marsh, a terrain of grassland, sand, mud, ponds and barren white salt flats, a paradise for hunting and trapping.

Many are the memories connected with this first car. There is nothing equal to the lift our ego gets from sliding behind the wheel. We become masters of a noisy motor, obedient to our command. It takes us down the road at the respectable speed of 30 miles per hour while it stirs all the neighborhood dogs into barking pursuit. Cars have become better and more powerful, but never more thrilling than that first one. Here in the wide open spaces they were never a luxury, but a necessary mode of transportation.

As a rule we used our car twice a week. On Saturday Mr. Hupe drew two gallons of gasoline from a barrel and poured it through a
funnel into the gas tank. Then we loaded our cream can and egg crate on the backseat and drove to Hudson. A producer took our products. His check paid immediately for groceries or drygoods in one of the three general stores, Dohrmann, Hallman or Witt.

The other trip was to church on Sunday morning. Located 2½ miles northwest from the farm it was called German Evangelical Peace Church. Here a couple dozen Model T Ford cars lined up while several teams and wagons tied up to the hitching posts. The farm horse as a means of transportation on the road was definitely outclassed by the internal combustion engine. Not only could the motor car outrun a horse on the road but it gave the owner social standing over the horse driver, to the same degree as the Cadillac or Mercedes proclaims the fact that the owner is a man of means and status.

Every young man worked extra hours until he could call a shiny, black Ford his own. And it was a very devoted girl indeed that wouldn’t prefer to go on a date by car instead of riding in the old buggy. Of course, the horse was still the more dependable mode of transportation on the primitive dirt roads of that day. It could negotiate mudholes, steep grades or the deep, loose sand of the hills where cars got stuck. Many times I went out on the road with a team of mules to pull a stranded motorist to the solid ground. We never charged for such service, knowing very well that our car was equally susceptible to such mishaps.

My first business trip in the car was to Ellinwood in Barton county. There I was to pick up a live turkey from a farmer. At the county line my road came to a deadend at a crossroad. Should I turn left or right? It so happened that there was a house with a gas pump at that corner, where I could ask directions. I knew that I had to formulate my question so that the filling station operator must answer with a simple “yes” or “no,” because my few words of English wouldn’t be sufficient to follow an involved explanation. So I pointed to the east and said: “Is this the road to Ellinwood?” To my consternation he answered “you bet.”

Again I had to ask: “is that yes or no?” whereupon he laughed at the greenhorn and said: “it’s yes, yes.”

I remember very vividly my first working day on the farm. After breakfast Hedwig gave me a corn knife, (today probably better known as a machete) and led me to a field where Mr. Hupe was already busy breaking down the dry cornstalks from the year before with a horse-drawn drag fashioned from 16 ft. planks. He used the gentlest team because the breaking stalks sounded like pistol shots that could have scared a nervous team into a wild stampede. In the previous fall this field had been planted to wheat with a narrow stalk drill which fitted between the rows of standing corn. Now, after the corn was harvested, the remaining stalks had to be removed somehow, or they would interfere with the harvesting machinery when the wheat ripened. My job was to chop down the stalks which the drag had missed. It was fun to walk through the ankle-high wheat and swing the knife. The sun shone bright and hot on this beautiful day in May. The field seemed to get bigger and bigger. There were miles and miles to walk up and down the rows. I was ready for a rest when Mr. Hupe waved me over to the fence where he let the horses cool down awhile. From the weeds under the barbed wire he produced a jug of coffee and some cake, wrapped in a napkin. Our small, white dog watched nearby, ready to defend the lunch against man or beast, well knowing that he always shared the cake with us. There was also drinking water in a crock, covered with wet burlap which kept it reasonably cool for a few hours.

Afterwards I moved up to the business of driving horses, to use the magic words “get up” and “ho” to start or stop them, to harness them correctly and hitch them two, three, four or six abreast, depending on the implement they had to pull.

Our crops consisted of wheat, corn and a few acres of alfalfa and Sudan grass for hay. I expected a strict crop rotation, but there wasn’t any. We sowed wheat after wheat until weeds like sunflowers, muletail and thistles became bothersome. Then we shifted the field to corn for a year or two. Cultivating the row crop during the summer destroyed most weeds and prevented them from producing seeds. Only the cockleburs evaded the cultivator shovels. They flourished in the corn rows and produced their prickly fruits in abundance. Humorously called “porcupine eggs,” they hang onto the horses tails for transportation to new locations, but disappear when the field goes back to
wheat, a good example how a weed problem can be overcome without the use of herbicides.

This “corn stalk wheat,” seeded between the rows of growing corn seldom amounted to much of a harvest because the moisture in the soil was generally depleted by the corn. The wheat was strictly a “catch crop” so that the field would not lie idle the next summer. The term “summer fallow,” meaning the control of weeds during the summer without harvesting a crop, but allowing the soil to accumulate and store moisture, was known but not practiced. It seemed that we could not afford to forego one crop in expectation of a better one in the next year. The superficial logic dictated that two small crops were better than one large one.

I was well aware that I had all sorts of theoretical knowledge from college, but very little practical experience. I simply observed first how the neighbors solved their problems and didn’t try to apply farming methods from Germany to this so very different soil and climate. Many of the local farmers who had settled here came from other trades. Mr. Hupe had been a gardener in the old country. They were not burdened by tradition with rules on how to farm. They tried their best, made many mistakes and learned from them the hard way. Many of the oldtimers consulted the calendar for the proper phase of the moon to do certain things. Planting or castrating had to be done under certain signs of the zodiac to be successful. I am glad that I didn’t make the mistake of hastily adding my own prejudices to their efforts before I first understood the soil, its potential, and the elusive climate.

All mistakes in farming are costly and generally can not be corrected until another crop year comes around. Besides, I was here to work on the farm, not to run it. One can learn from books how to keep books, or from an instruction book, how to weld, but there is no book, and I sincerely believe there cannot be one that can teach practical farming. Too many variables exist from one locale to the other. There is no rule that can be applied everywhere. What works best this year may be all wrong the next. Quite often success or failure depends on the capability of the operator to make quick decisions, to be flexible in his planning and especially to have a keen understanding of priorities, so he can do the most necessary things first. Of course there are a few general rules of thumb, for instance when to plant certain crops—the Agricultural Experiment Stations have done most valuable work in this respect—but the farmer needs no calendar which tells him from day to day what to do. Every day he looks at his fields and crops, at his livestock, fences and buildings. His problem is not so much what to do, but most often what to do first. Some things can wait, others had better be done right away.

The people that came to this part of Kansas were in fact settlers. They had come for land, good land. They had come for the security which it could give to the family, a security to hand on to children and to grandchildren. The mentality of these settlers was quite different from that of the great stream of humanity which drove west, ever west on a chase after the elusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. They were a restless lot, opportunists at heart, all hoping to get rich quick. There was gold in the creeks and rocks of the West, Colorado, California, and the Yukon Territory. Willing to take hardships, they accepted failure as part of the game. They simply moved on to some other place and tried again. The settler stayed where he was, on his land. He didn’t expect to get rich quick, though he hoped to make money. He was persevering, diligent and not easily discouraged. His farm was to him the Biblical talent, entrusted to him, to use and improve, to hand on with interest to the next generation. He regarded it fiercely as his private property, but never as a simple capital asset that he would sell without hesitation for a quick profit. This attitude was never brought home to me more clearly than on the day when I entertained a city dweller. After we had talked about the amount of capital invested on a farm in real estate, livestock and machines, he said: “And you still work so hard? If I had that kind of money I wouldn’t work another day in all my life.” Maybe the farmer is crazy when he realizes a much smaller return on his investment than he could get otherwise, and still stays on. There are other values in farm life which are not easily expressed in money. To be your own boss is one of them.

The Hard Red Winter Wheat is the natural plant for the High Plains. Tough and hardy, it establishes a good root system in the fall of the year underground, and grassy growth of leaves on the surface which acts as protective cover.
Horses provided the power for this threshing rig on the Robert Hupe farm. In this photograph taken about 1897, Hupe is standing in the foreground with his wife and two daughters. His neighbor and cousin, Adolf Schrade, is in the white coat standing on the separator. Hupe had worked for his Uncle Schrade when he first came to Kansas from Germany. In 1892 he bought his own quarter section of land and later, another 80 acres adjoining. This farm has remained in the family to the present day.

for the soil. The sandy loam and loamy sands which form the top soil in the region which lies within the big bend of the Arkansas River between Kinsley and Hutchinson, Kansas, is quite vulnerable to wind erosion. A good stand of wheat is sufficient protection against the winter storms. When they begin to blow and the soil freezes, the wheat plant goes dormant. Its foliage dies down almost to the ground.

The first warm days revive it. New leaves appear and grow until they are long enough to sway and roll in the wind like the waves on a lake. Around the end of March the wheat heads form on top of the stalks on which they will eventually ripen. By this growth habit it is possible for the winter wheat plant to utilize the winter snow or rain before the days become too hot and the soil too dry. For this reason spring-planted varieties have never successfully competed with winter wheat here. Their growing season simply extends too far into the extremely hot, dry and windy summer months. All varieties grown here were developed by colleges and commercial plant breeders on the basis of the Turkey wheat, brought along from Russia by German Mennonites. This wheat proved not only to have extreme hardiness in winter temperatures well below zero Fahrenheit, but the flour milled from it has excellent baking qualities. From my childhood days on I have been used to the solid, chewy rye bread of Germany and still not particularly fond of our soft, fluffy, white bread, unless it is toasted. But who am I to question the selling tactics of our baking industry or the buying habits of our housewives, God bless them.

There is some rye grown here for pasture, but to the wheat farmer the rye is an undesirable weed and a contamination of his harvested crop. From roadside ditches and fence rows some rye grains always find their way into his wheat fields. So he wades through the wefting, waist-high wheat before harvest when the occasional rye plants with their taller stems are easily visible above the wheat heads, and pulls them out. It is a tiresome job, but an admixture of rye in otherwise good wheat means a lower price at the elevator.

The weather from the time the wheat blooms until it ripens is crucial for the yield at harvest time, about six weeks. Too much rain is worse than none at all. Rank, heavy wheat will "lodge," lie flat instead of standing up straight, or become infested with diseases like rust. I have heard it said that there is no plant that can promise more and keep less, or promise less and keep more, than wheat; and I agree.

Eventually, around June 20, 1925, in my first summer in Kansas, the wheat had matured enough to be harvested. The implement we
used was a header. It consisted of a sickle on the leading edge of a platform on which an endless conveyor belt rolled. It cut the wheat stalks a few inches below the heads, moved them to one side onto another belt in an elevator, and from there into a wagon with a large box. It was called a header barge. Pulled by two horses and staffed by two men with pitchforks, it traveled alongside the header and received the wheat heads. The header itself rested on two large iron wheels whose rotation powered the sickle, the canvas belts and the reel which pushed the wheat onto the platform. A long iron tongue extended backwards from the platform. On each side of this tongue, and hitched to its far end, walked three horses behind the platform and pushed the machine forwards. Their driver stood at the extreme end of the contraption on a platform over a single small caster wheel. Between his knees he held a plank, shaped like the tiller of a sailboat. With it he could turn the guide wheel slightly to make the machine go straight or turn corners. He needed both hands to control the six horses.

We harvested together with our neighbor Adolf Schade. Each of the partners furnished one header barge with two horses and two men, three horses for the header, and either the driver or the stacker. The latter job was always Mr. Hupe’s. From the loose wheat heads he had to build large, tall, well-balanced stacks in the middle of the fields. Since the wheat still carried a rather high moisture content at harvest time and contained occasional green weeds these stacks became quite hot for several days. The farmers said they were “going through a sweat” and that was considered necessary before the wheat was ready to be threshed and go into storage.

After Mr. Hupe had built the first two stacks he became ill. I, the greenhorn, had to take over as best as I could. The harvest hands in the header barges were either drifters or small farmers from Missouri and Arkansas who followed the harvest northward. I needed their opinion and advice whether my stack was coming up straight, or whether it was leaning to one side. From the top where the stacker works that is hard to see. The men had their fun with me, pitching furiously while they tried to bury me in the loose, fluffy material full of awns that scratched around the neck and arms. I built two stacks that first day. Overnight both stacks fell over. From there on I used my own judgment, became more confident and had better results.

The harvest hands had a special meaning for me apart from harvesting activities. In a sense they were my first English teachers. In the family we spoke German, but in the field I was forced to speak English, any kind of English, to make myself understood. The vocabulary needed was small, just the terms necessary to keep the harvest rolling, including a few four-lettered words. In every language they are so easy to learn, it seems, as a part of the rough vernacular of the field. It is also tempting to use them more often than necessary. One day I worked alongside one of our harvest helpers, cultivating corn while the wheat was too damp for harvesting. One of my mules had the habit of always hanging back a little, letting his mate do most of the pulling. I became angry and called him a lazy s.o.b. Just then the Missourian asked me, tongue in cheek: “And what is the name of your other mule?” Nobody could have made me realize my overindulgence in profanity more elegantly than this man. Alone on the job, you encounter times of frustration when everything goes wrong. You repair something twice and it breaks again. Unless you possess the composure of a saint you have to find an outlet for your feelings or burst.

A whole lot easier than the spoken word was for me the reading and understanding of written material, such as newspapers and magazines. A good knowledge of Latin and French makes it possible to understand most stories. However, the correct pronunciation is something else. It must come from exposure to the spoken word. I tried hard to overcome my German accent and after 50 years of practice, thought I had my problem licked, until one day I heard my own voice on a tape recording. I still stumble over the “r” and the “w.”

Harvest was finished. After a rain we plowed the wheat stubble with a lister plow, an implement shaped like a snow plow which digs out a furrow and throws the excavated soil to both sides. The result is a series of alternating parallel furrows and ridges, a very effective method to incorporate the crop residue into the soil and at the same time minimize wind erosion. Given some precipitation, decomposition
by bacterial action takes place rapidly in the hot, sandy soil.

There was one uncomfortable aspect to this kind of plowing. After harvest we often had thunderstorms with violent gusts of wind. They lifted the roof-shaped tops of our stacks and spread the loose wheat heads over a distance of about 200 ft. on the ground. To salvage the grain we had to dig it out of the furrows with a pitchfork and carry it back to the stack, then throw it up there where it belonged. On level ground we used a dumpprake but in the uneven lister furrows it was useless. Much wheat was lost between harvest and the time it was finally sold, wasted in the field, damaged by rain, ruined by insects and molds in the granary.

Several weeks after harvest a custom thresher came from farm to farm. He brought a large threshing machine, called a separator, which was powered by either a steam engine or a cumbersome Aultman-Taylor tractor, and a crew of about six men. They had the job of pitching the stacks into the ever hungry groaning and clattering separator. A strong blast of air blew the empty straw and chaff into tall, cone-shaped piles while the cleaned grain emptied into the grain-tight boxes of our farm wagons which we backed against the side of the separator. Several farmers in the neighborhood exchanged labor hauling the grain away with their teams and wagons. As soon as a wagon was filled with a 50 bushel load it started on the trip to the owner’s granary while the output of the threshing machine was directed into the next of the waiting wagons. At the granary the driver and generally another helper scooped the wheat as fast as possible through a narrow door into the storage bins while the next load was already on the way. Today nobody can fully realize how much sweat flowed on these hot days in July or August until all granaries were filled.

Not only all able-bodied men worked hard at threshing time. The farmer’s wife had to set the table for the whole crew. In later years the threshing contractor had a cookshack on wheels where he fed his men, but there were always the grain haulers. In one of the early years we had the men on the place for almost a week while frequent rain showers interrupted the threshing. During that time and before the weather cleared they ate up a whole beef which

Mr. Hupe had butchered, not to mention all the bread, butter, potatoes, vegetables and pies that went with it. Every farm woman sets her pride in a reputation that she fed her farm help well.

The last load to come from the machine we always took directly to the mill in Hudson where we contracted for 1000 pounds of flour for the coming year. Every family baked their own bread. So it was good to know that, come what may, we would at least have bread to eat.

Wheat was not our only concern in summer. Before and after wheat harvest we had to plant and cultivate a corn crop. The planting started by the end of April in the bottom of lister furrows where the young plants stood somewhat protected from the wind by the ridges on both sides. To destroy the weeds which soon appeared in the field we used an Ochel sled, an implement so called after the blacksmith in Hudson who had built it. It was really a sort of sled on two wooden runners which fitted nicely in the lister furrow, pulled by two horses who had to walk on the ridges (which they didn’t like very much). Mounted on the sled was an iron seat for the driver and on a crossbar four revolving steel discs at an angle to the furrow. These didn’t only destroy weeds but at the same time they pulled some soil from the ridge back into the furrow. After two such trips through the field it was again as smooth and level as in the start. Thereafter we used shovel cultivators to catch any weeds left in the space between the corn rows.

When the corn ears were well filled in fall we went out and cut part of the field with the corn knife as winter fodder for the cattle. An arm full at a time we carried the heavy, leafy stalks to the side and set them up in shocks to dry until there were enough shocks to last through the winter. The rest of the corn was allowed to mature fully. After the winter wheat was sowed and the frost had killed all vegetation we walked down the rows, broke the ripe corn ears out of their protective cover of husks and tossed them into a farm wagon. This process is called husking or more often “shucking.” The wagon had to be pulled by a gentle, slow team which was trained to stay in the row and listen to voice commands because there was no driver to guide them. It was hard work. We wore cotton gloves against the morning cold and as protection against the sharp edges of the
dry husks. A practiced man in good corn could pick up to 100 bushels of ear corn a day, if he was in the field by sunrise. I was seldom able to gather more than 50 bushels. Of course each full load needed to be unloaded into the corn crib, another good exercise with the scoop shovel at the end of the day.

I can still remember the staccato bang-bang in the quiet morning air from the neighboring fields where the same work went on. Really ambitious farmers were in the field before sunrise, warming their hands over a small fire from corn stalks until it got light enough to see the corn. We treated our gloves with pine tar and sand so they could last a day or two longer. More than once did the driverless horses decide to run away. A sudden noise or a rabbit jumping up in front of them could scare them into a senseless gallop with the wagon in tow. With luck they made a beeline to the barn in the farm yard. With less luck an angry, breathless farmer saw them careen out on the public road. The sharp turn there was often enough to upset the wagon, spill the load, break the wagon and harness and even injure the horses. Nobody complained when this unpopular exercise became obsolete and mechanical devices replaced human hands and muscle.

Toward spring, when the corn crib was piled high with the yellow harvest, the owner of a custom shelling rig brought his machine to the farm. Belted to a tractor his machine devoured the corn ears between spiked rollers which rubbed the kernels from the cobs. While the shelling went on, the farmer selected the best ears for seed. These we shelled later in a small hand sheller. When the last few scoops full of ear-corn entered the sheller, all hands jumped into the corn bin and killed the many mice that had hid out under the corn ears out of reach for our cats. It was a noisy banging with shovels on the tin floor until the last mouse was eliminated. An occasional rat escaped sometimes through the door way, but seldom got past the waiting dogs. The grain was now ready for sale. A part of it stayed on the place as feed for horses, hogs, and chickens. The cobs ended up in the kitchen range as a valuable fuel with a high heat output.

The third crop after wheat and corn was alfalfa and Sudan grass for hay. I mowed it with an old 4-foot mower, raked it into windrows with a dump rake, then loaded it with the pitchfork on a hayrack and from it either into the hayloft of the horse-barn or on a stack in the field. There was seldom a surplus of hay at winter's end.

My cursory recital of the farmwork so far may have created the false impression that it was all one gruelling succession of backbreaking work. Certainly there were days when I was very tired in the evening and had to limber...
up sore muscles in the morning when I fed horses and milked cows. I was not very strong physically but I had made up my mind not to give up, and to balance with perseverance what I lacked in strength. When I had applied for my immigration visa at the U.S. Consulate in Berlin, the official there had given me a skeptical look and remarked that farming in Kansas would be very hard work and he doubted that I would last long. I am glad to report that in spite of his gloomy forecast I have never encountered any work here that I could not handle.

In the first place, farm work is so varied, never the same job for longer than a few days, followed by a change to something else, quite in contrast to factory work. Then there are rainy days when field work is impossible and one can fix things around the house or tinker in the shop. Every farmer must be prepared to be his own handyman, mechanic, carpenter, plumber or painter for there are few craftsmen available in the country. There was the Saturday ride to town and almost a whole Sunday for recreation.

The "day of rest" included worship service in the local Evangelical Peace Church. Initially the service was conducted in the German language, understood by all adults, but later changed to German and English on alternating Sundays so as to accommodate the growing number of children who learned to read only English in public school. Finally the German service was dropped altogether, as the second generation grew up. The church functioned also as the center of social life, for men and women alike. Here all the neighbors came together, here they talked about crops, weather, horses, machines and politics. Here one agreed to exchange labor or borrow implements. Here the plans started to help collectively when a sick neighbor fell behind with his fieldwork. In Germany, the village inn had been the social meeting place for the male rural population. But since in Kansas the hatchet of Carry Nation and Prohibition had closed the saloons of the frontier days, such a meeting place was missing. Before Prohibition, I was told, a group of neighbors would meet with their families in one of the groves on Sunday afternoons. The men sat around a small keg of beer while the women had their own circle with coffee and women talk. All the children played together in the yard. When only Kansas was dry, one could still ship in alcoholic beverages from Kansas City, Mo. The depot agent used to keep a barrel full of beer bottles in a corner of the freight room. The thirsty customer simply asked whether there was any freight for him and helped himself to the necessary quantum. National Prohibition from 1919 on had since dried up this last source of liquid refreshment.

The church choir was very popular. It offered young married and engaged couples a chance to meet on some evening practice sessions. There we even tackled an Easter Cantata with more enthusiasm than musical schooling.

The automobile made it possible to stray farther from home. There were ball games to attend or the silent movies. One had already become a more passive consumer of entertainment, while before it was either to make his own or do without. I have witnessed the last such social evening in the little schoolhouse of our district. Parents and children gathered there for games and singing. The schoolma'am presided at the piano, talented persons recited poetry. All participated in the popular spelling bee or watched a pair of contestants add long columns of figures on the blackboard. The one with the fastest correct answer earned a round of applause. In winter, when there was a plentiful supply of ice on our stock tanks, we enjoyed delicious homemade ice cream, or listened to the wheezing tones of the parlor organ or the rambunctious sounds of old records which the funnel-shaped speaker of the Edison player emitted.

I would forget a very important form of entertainment for the farmers' wives during the long weekdays, when they were alone at home, if I didn't mention the telephone. Nobody knows any more exactly how it started. But it seems that an itinerant lineman of the Bell system had once offered a few farmers to connect them with a telephone line. Originally eight or nine farmers north of Hudson, Kansas could now talk to each other without having to hitch a horse to the buggy and go in person. That was very handy at times, but it soon became evident that the ladies got the most use out of the new invention. It was a strictly private line between these farms with no connection to the outside world. Only later, when more such lines came into being, did they formally organize the German Valley Tele-
phone Co., install a switchboard in Hudson and gain access to the long distance service of the Bell System. Each of the participants had an impressive, varnished, wooden box mounted on the wall, about 20 inches in length. Visible on the outside were too shiny bells on top, a funnel to speak into in front. On the left side hung a receiver with a long cord in a cradle and a crank stuck out of the right side.

A rapid turning of the crank made all the phones on the line ring. Such a “long” signal was used by the operator for public announcements, such as: “The mill has a load of coal on the track. Cheaper direct from the car. Must be unloaded by tomorrow,” or “Witt’s store has just received a shipment of nice cabbage for sauerkraut. Come and get it.”

Each party on the line had a special coded signal. A short and two long rings meant that somebody was calling the Hupe farm. But that didn’t mean a private conversation when you lifted the receiver, because anybody on the line could listen. And did. There were ladies who didn’t let a ring go by. They simply had to know what was going on in the neighborhood. Others visited for hours on end over the telephone. The instruments were mounted rather high on the wall so that children couldn’t play with the crank or leave the receiver off the hook. I remember a little old lady who had to climb on the kitchen table to reach the phone.

The operator furnished services that are unknown today. She often knew where somebody was visiting and gladly furnished the information. Or she stepped out of her office door to locate a husband on Main street, reminding him to bring an article from the store that was not on his shopping list. To make a date over the phone was about as private as an ad in the paper.

In spite of the fact that I lived only three miles from Hudson, as the crow flies, I couldn’t see any part of the town with the exception of the smokestack of the mill. The houses nestled among shade trees, too low to be visible. But the sounds coming from that direction became very familiar. The steam whistle of the mill signaled the beginning of the workday and the noon hour, time to walk the horses back home from the field. The rumble of the freight trains could be heard distinctly when they stopped at the depot, or the church bells on Sunday morning.

A closer look reveals that Hudson is one of the many small towns that dot the map of Kansas. They look very much alike. If you have seen one, you have seen them all. They consist of orderly laid out blocks and streets, everything aligned north and south, fitting exactly into the checkerboard pattern of roads in the country side. There is none of the confusion of winding streets one can encounter in old settlements which grew haphazardly, and accordingly no romantic, picturesque sights for tourists. These towns are strictly utilitarian, but nice and clean. Here and there stands a brick building between the white painted wooden frame houses. Each one in its garden patch keeps a comfortable distance from the next house, far enough in cases of fire, yet close enough for friendly, neighborly contact. The same elm trees shade the sidewalks, the same presumptuous false store fronts hide the flat roofed business buildings along main streets.

The towns stand on the flat land, bordered on all sides by farms. Behind the last garden fence begins the first wheat field. There are no ugly outskirts with neglected buildings, unsightly junkyards and billboards, the trademarks of larger cities.

Three streets run north and south in Hudson. Main street in the middle, with the school buildings across its north end, is flanked by stores and shops and bisected by the track of the Missouri Pacific Railroad. But here you can hardly be born at the wrong side of the track. One side is as good as the other. Alongside the track stands the complex of the Stafford County Flour Mills Co. with loading docks and the tall, white row of concrete silos. The golden harvest from our wheat fields is stored here until it goes through the steel rollers of the flour mill and becomes Hudson Cream Flour, or moves on to terminal elevators for export.

In the course of human history people have always settled along water, on lake shores, at river fords, where water and land routes cross, or at the confluence of two streams. That held true in the East of the United States. West of the Missouri River however, in the High Plains, where navigable rivers were not the first access routes into new territory, the railroads took over where the rivers ended. They became the lifelines, connecting the
agrarian West with the manufacturing and consuming East. Built in the first place to join the west coast of the continent to the industrial and administrative centers in the East, they ran conveniently in the right direction for the needs of the wheat belt. Only very few railroads were built from North to South. After the main line of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe R.R. had crossed Stafford County and given promise of successful development to the cities of St. John and Stafford, the Missouri Pacific R.R. built in 1888 a diagonal track from Conway Springs to Larned. There were always enterprising promoters at that time with visions of cities springing up along these tracks, and with high hopes of becoming rich from real estate sales.

One of these, in the case of Hudson, was Daniel Updegraff who homesteaded and built a sodhouse just west of the present townsite of Hudson. He formed the Hudson Town Company, chartered under Kansas State law on June 7, 1887. His connection with the Hudson Bay Company of New York may have influenced him when he chose the name for this still unborn city. Additions to it were later made on farmland belonging to Frank and Jake Hitz, who came in the same year from Illinois. The so-called Rattlesnake Post Office was also moved to Hudson in 1887.

Soon new settlers located in Hudson, others gave up farming and established various businesses in town. Around the turn of the century, three general stores operated here. There was a lumber yard, a hardware store, a hotel, a newspaper and a bank. The blacksmith shop served the farmers for miles around. A physician and a drugstore tended to the sick, a barber to those in need of a shave and a haircut. There was a butcher shop, and even a furniture store flourished until the demand dwindled. A Ford agency and garage took its place.

The flour mill was built in 1904 by Gustav Krug and Otto Sonderegger. When the first modest building burned down in 1913 they replaced it with a larger plant and modern equipment. With its payroll it is the economical backbone of the town, just as its storage elevators tower over all other buildings. The school teachers and a few retired farmers complete the enumeration of its inhabitants.

In the following year, 1913, Trinity Evangelical Congregation organized itself and built a modern brick church. Most of its members had belonged to the rural Peace Church, located four miles north of Hudson. The north church remained there as a preponderantly farm-oriented congregation, even though its ranks had been diminished by the exodus. Heavier burdens of property upkeep, and the minister’s salary rested now on the shoulders of its fewer members.

Many such young towns didn’t become the large cities envisioned in their founders’ dreams, when they gave them fancy names, such as Arcadia, Delphos, Eureka, Kanopolis or even Buttermilk. Hudson might well have suffered the same fate, remaining no more than a lone grain elevator along the railroad track, had it not been for the flour mill. Competition from larger towns became severe. The population was too small to support the services initially offered. The fast, lusty growth of the first years soon reversed. Businesses closed, the doctor moved to Stafford. The coming of the automobile made shopping in the larger cities on the Santa Fe mainline feasible, where a wider selection of goods and services could be found. Even when the oilfield activities began to develop in the county, Hudson didn’t share directly in the boom. Since the town had no city gas or water system and no entertainment center such as a movie theater, the drilling firms and supporting businesses located elsewhere. Few new residences have been built. The population shrank in numbers, then remained practically constant at about 200 persons.

TO CHARACTERIZE the early years, the pioneer days, it has been said that farming is not an occupation but a way of life. People were satisfied with little. The difference between the richest and the poorest was not great. There was still some of the frontier spirit left which looked first at the man and less at his money. The settlers had few luxuries. These were not too important as long as all energies were needed merely to survive. The situation was similar to the one the newly emerging African nations face. One hoped and intended to change country and life style in a hurry, from the primitive to the civilization enjoyed by the eastern states. One had not the slightest intention of embracing the life style of the Indians or of imitating their adaptation to the
land. The goal was rather to change the Kansas prairie into another Pennsylvania or Illinois in the shortest possible time.

I had spent the first 25 years of my life in the city, surrounded by the comforts of civilization. I had always enjoyed electric lights, gas, city water service, bathrooms, and was always close to good schools, the theater, concerts and the opera. Yet here I didn’t miss these things much. Too many new experiences and lots of work occupied my time fully. Besides, here we were all in the same boat, nobody had much more than his neighbor. So there was no reason for envy, no pressure to keep up with the Jones’s. Hardly ever discussed, but as a foregone conclusion there lived under the surface of all activity the unshakeable conviction that in time the good life would come to our prairie homes too. It simply had to, that we worked for. There was no hurry, though. First things first.

The women had probably more secret longing for the niceties of life than the men, but they too were satisfied with a new dress once in a while and kept spotless what they had. They introduced color and beauty to the house, made it a home. They knitted and crocheted. Artistic patchwork quilts, the result of much planning and many hours of work over a quilting frame, still bear silent witness to their creativity. Sewing was less glamorous but more important than other needlework as the family budget would not permit all clothing to come from the store or from the pages of the mail order catalogue which appropriately went by the name “wishbook.” Nothing that was usable was thrown away, but ingeniously applied by the inventive housewives. A popular material was found in the large, white cotton sacks in which the Hudson Cream Flour was packed. The printing on the sacks came out after several launderings. Then they could be used for everything from dishtowels to baby diapers. Robert Hupe used to tell the story about the woman who had fashioned one of the flour sacks into a petticoat. Before sitting down in church she gathered up her skirt so as not to wrinkle it. There was on her petticoat, still visible, the imprint; “satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.”

While I worked on the farm, I quite naturally became interested in how it had become established. I heard occasional remarks from Robert Hupe how he had acquired the homeplace. Now I have the abstract of title before me with dates and figures in black and white. Such a document is a chapter of history in itself. It ties the fate of a square of prairie land in Kansas into the larger picture of United States history.

At first the land belonged to the Plains Indians. “Belonged” is not the right word. It didn’t
belong to any Indian as private property, in the sense we use the word now. But it was his land, collectively, on which he depended for his livelihood, on which he lived and died, without claiming a few of its grassy acres his very own, to sell or to keep. He needed the whole wide expanse of the high plains for his way of life. Here he roamed, settled alongside a creek for a time, moved on again to where fish and mussels, fowl and bison abounded, though it now appears that he was as much farmer with a permanent address as a nomadic buffalo hunter. Then white traders crossed the Missouri and moved through the plains, while they sought profitable contact with the Spanish-Mexican empire. Their wagon trains established the famous Santa Fe trail. After the war between the States a wave of settlers from the eastern States, reinforced by European immigrants of Irish, German and Scandinavian background, came behind them. They were not interested in the buffalo. They carried the plow with them on the covered wagon. The free hunting Indian and the settler with his patches of plowed ground, his fences and tame cattle were not compatible.

To the Indian the soil was as much a part of nature as the sky, the sunshine and the rain. To him it was unthinkable to call a piece of land "mine," to the exclusion of all others, just as unthinkable as claiming a piece of the sky as personal property. Some eastern tribes didn't call the white man "paleface," but "the worker." His feverish activity, his pre-occupation with constantly doing something, day in and day out, they could not understand. The European tenet, that only he has a right to eat who works, was inconceivable. If ever two people were less prepared to deal with each other, it was the Indian of the plains and the white settler. To be sure, the several tribes entered into solemn treaties with the U. S. Government but the terms used in the documents had other meanings to the Indian than to the white man, just as today "freedom" means different things on either side of the Iron Curtain. When the Indian "sold" land to the Government (for money he never received), he agreed to let the settlers use a portion of his domain to live there as he did. Little did he dream that he would be fenced out from the lands so designated, and considered and treated as trespasser when he rode through.

The U. S. Government, in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, had bought this whole territory, including Kansas, from France. The surveyors had carved up the territory into neat square miles of 640 acres, more or less, and buried their stones and cedarwood chips at the section corners. Every newcomer who lived up to the conditions of the Homestead Act of 1862, could "prove up" a claim and become, without any cash investment, the owner of a quarter section of prairie land, 160 acres being considered the right size of farm to support a family. The year 1862 was important for agri-

After the wheat was cut, it had to be stacked in the fields. The stacker built tall, well-balanced stacks from the loose wheat heads, a difficult job that was learned from practice.
culture for two more reasons: the establishment of Land Grant Colleges and of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The railroads were pushing west at that time in a mad rush to connect both coasts of the continent. Aside from their strategic importance, only the railroads could be expected to open up the new lands, make them accessible and carry the exchange of goods to and from the frontier.

The Government actively supported this undertaking and was not insensitive to the need of investment capital by the builders. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe R.R. received by an Act of Congress, dated March 3, 1863 as outright land grant the odd-numbered sections on both sides of the track. The sale of such land was to help finance construction.

In that same year, on June 21, 1863, Robert Hupe was born in Stolberg, in the Harz mountains of Germany, as the son on an innkeeper and greenhouse operator. The small town experienced the same problems as many others. Nestled in a narrow mountain valley, surrounded by the forests of a feudal estate there was no room for expansion, no place to go for the young men. After Robert had finished his basic school years he learned gardening in a commercial gardening firm near Quedlinburg, Germany. At the age of 19 he decided to go to America. Two local families, Spangenberg, and his Uncle Schade, were already in Kansas. On August 2, 1882 he renounced his Prussian citizenship and in doing so was released from all rights and duties, especially the duty to serve three years in the Prussian Army. He sailed immediately to New York and proceeded by train to St. Louis, Mo. While he waited here for a train to Kansas City, he spent his last 15 cents on beer in a saloon. A group of customers, representative of the large German speaking segment of the population of St. Louis, took a liking to the boy. He left well fed on the last leg of his trip which ended at Ellinwood, Kansas. It was the nearest railroad stop to the farm of his Uncle Schade, located at San Dago, a short-lived post office address on the prairie. The farm was a homestead in the very first stage of development, just a mile south of the corner, where the post office in the small store of a Mr. Stimpert, and the meeting house of a Methodist congregation stood.

Soon after Robert’s arrival his uncle died. The 19 year old Robert was suddenly the only man and breadwinner in a family which consisted of his aunt, her 12 year old son Adolf and her very old mother-in-law. They lived together in a dug-out on the NE ¼ of section 16-22-12 in Stafford County. A dug-out was the simplest, cheapest and most practical building on the open prairie, where the settlers found neither stones nor trees as building materials. They excavated a suitable square hole in the loamy soil and laid the strips of sod like bricks in the shape of a low wall around the edge of the excavation. The only material they had to buy was a door and some lumber to support a roof. Such a building is cool in summer and easy to heat in winter. In it the family survived the famous blizzard of the winter 1886 and 1887, burning their supply of dried cowchips, and when they were gone, stalks of corn fodder which Grandma Schade cut into small pieces with which she kept a fire in the kitchen stove going. When that supply of fuel disappeared in a giant snow drift, they burned ear corn. Robert hired out to a rancher as cowboy. On horseback he herded cattle and sheep all through the sandhills toward the salt marsh. His boss gave him a team of oxen as salary for a season’s work. These were sorely needed to work the Schade farm. The next year he and his young cousin, Adolf, spent the whole summer breaking sod on section 17 with the oxen and a sod plow. Their wages consisted in the right to plant and harvest a corn crop on the rough sod. Nobody, it seems, had any cash to spend for work done. I have the deepest respect for the terribly hard work which the pioneers invested in these first years. They planted that first corn crop by hand, opening a slit in the turned sod with a spade, dropping a kernel of corn into it, then covered the seed with their shoe while they planted the next seed. They were lucky to have timely rains that year. The corn yielded well, they had a start.

Of course, there was no town of Hudson yet and no railroad close by. To sell this corn, the farmer had to haul his wagon load to the Santa Fe R.R. tracks at Great Bend, Kansas, scoop it into a boxcar and return home with his slow ox team, a two-day round trip of 50 miles for every 50 bushel load. When I think of all the time spent on the road I wonder how they ever found time to work at home.
Returning from one of these trips, Robert had followed the wagon track that served as a road through the featureless country for the better part of the day, when toward evening he ran into a dense fog. Soon the oxen refused to go any farther. There was nothing else to do but to tie the oxen to the wagon, bed down under it and await the morning light. At dawn he heard a rooster crow nearby. In the fog he hadn’t noticed that he slept right behind the barn. The oxen with a better instinct had known they were home.

When Robert Hupe came to his uncle’s farm there remained only one quarter section of homestead land unclaimed in the neighborhood. He badly wanted some farm land of his own, but everybody discouraged him to “prove up” this homestead because he was not yet of age. His aunt finally wanted to give him the south half of her farm in return for all the work he had done for the fatherless family. He accepted the offer but no formal transfer of property ever took place. As a first step for a home of his own, he planted a grove of trees, small saplings of elm, cottonwood, black locust, soft maple, ash, mulberry and sycamores. Soon afterwards, on February 9, 1892 he became a naturalized citizen of this his chosen country, renouncing all allegiance to the “Emperor of Germany” as his naturalization papers state.

Only four months later came his chance to become the owner of his own full-sized farm. Diagonally from his young grove of trees lay the SW ¼ of section 15-22-12. Having an odd number (15), it was so-called railroad land. The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe R.R. Co. had sold this quarter section to Edwin C. Downer and his wife, Etta as of May 11, 1887 for $256.00. The couple built a one-room wooden shack on their property, broke some of the prairie sod and farmed for a few years without much success. Thoroughly discouraged they finally gave up and moved to Pueblo, Colorado, and a non-farm job. When they left they owed a mortgage loan of $1,100.00 to the First National Bank at the county seat of St. John. The banker, Mr. C. D. Vedder, offered the property to the young neighbor, Robert Hupe for $1,500.00 or $10.00 per acre. On his promise not to leave the country but make a go of it, the bank financed the whole amount without any downpayment. In fact the tight money situation couldn’t be better illustrated than by the following exchange!

Mr. Vedder: Robert, make the deal binding by paying Mr. Downer one dollar in hand.
Robert: I don’t have a dollar.
Mr. Vedder: Well, here is a dollar. Now you have one.
(Robert hands the dollar to Mr. Downer.)
Mr. Vedder: Now, Mr. Downer, give me my dollar back, the letter of the law has been satisfied.

So it came that on June 15, 1892, Robert Hupe, a single man, had acquired a farm and a $1600 mortgage. Needless to say that he kept his end of the bargain and stayed, even though much hardship and heartache lay in store for him.

He couldn’t be happier and more excited. The first act of possession was in true character of a man who was not afraid of work. He dug up his young grove of trees and replanted every sapling on his own ground. After 85 years this grove still stands, protecting the buildings and corrals from the cold wind. It has furnished a great number of fence posts. Dead trees became firewood for the house, but new ones grew from seeds in their place. Ice storms broke the crowns out of many tall trees, but a few of the original specimen, cottonwood and sycamore, still survive as a living memorial to the planter. Fruit trees followed, even though this is not the best fruit country, with its frequent late freezes in Spring. Fifty Kieffer pear trees proved best suited. At their peak production they yielded as high as 500 bushels of canning pears. Many of them went to families in northern Barton County where the rocky soil is not suitable for fruit trees. The pears, made into pear butter and pear honey found their way into the lunch boxes of many school children.

When Robert Hupe had moved the shack of the Downer couple into his new grove, the real work began. He dug an open well, built a barn and corral, a granary and a chicken house. A trained gardener, he planted flowers and vegetables near the house. For several years he operated a horsepowered threshing rig in partnership with several others. It was hot, dusty work feeding the wheat bundles into the machine by hand, but the money earned was important. He also served a term as township trustee, a job which included such duties as overseeing elections, assessing the township population’s possessions, the basis for levying the ad valorem tax which at that time was the
only revenue for all administration, from the State and County down to the last, lowly rural school district. In addition the trustee was also "road boss," charged with the responsibility of keeping the township roads passable. Before motorized patrol graders became the standard tools for road maintenance, the necessary work had to be done by the farmers themselves. It consisted mainly in a joint effort, with teams and shovels, to scrape some dirt from the side of the right-of-way and dump it into bothersome potholes. A poll tax of $3.00 per taxpayer could be "worked off" on the road in lieu of cash payment. In winter, when snowdrifts blocked the roads, we attacked them with scoop shovels until the roads into town were opened. Then it was customary to gather around the coalstove in the nearest store and warm up.

When Robert Hupe had saved up enough, he did what thousand other emigrants have done. He bought passage for his boyhood sweetheart in Stolberg, Anna Hupe, his cousin. Upon her arrival they got married. Shortly after the birth of her second daughter, Hedwig, the mother died. A second wife, also named Anna and also from Stolberg, raised the children with great devotion and became herself the mother of a boy. He and the oldest daughter died later on the same day from scarlet fever, a disease which today yields easily to antibiotics. In those days it killed many children while the family doctor stood helpless by. Only Hedwig survived. Another disease, typhoid fever exacted many victims in the early days. It only disappeared with better sanitary conditions, especially when the shallow, hand-dug open wells, unprotected from contamination were replaced by drilled wells. Good, clean water is found abundantly here at a depth of about 83 feet, unpolluted by surface drainage.

On March 8, 1904 Robert bought an adjoining 80 acres from Edward Cook. He paid $10.00 per acre for the somewhat hilly land. About half of it is heavy clay liable to be flooded after prolonged rains, unsuitable for cultivation but making fair pasture. The other half was badly neglected plowland, full of weeds. Cousin Schade remarked that he would consider it an insult if somebody offered him such a property. But Robert only took his clay-pipe tighter between the teeth while he attacked the jungle. A few years later he harvested 20 bushels of wheat per acre on this former weed patch, at that time a respectable yield. The pasture let him keep a few more cows and calves. The farm now comprised 240 acres and remained at that size. No more desirable land at a reasonable price was available nearby. After all, it was about all one man alone could handle with horses and the help of one girl. The loss of his son must have broken his spirit to venture any farther. Always burdened with the necessity to meet the interest payments on a mortgage loan or face foreclosure, he had no heart to take on more debts and more work. The aim of his remaining years centered in the hope to leave the farm intact to his only child.

After I entered the picture in 1926, the farm work became less of a burden for Robert Hupe. In keeping with the style of his boyhood experience in Germany he regarded milking cows and any kind of house work strictly as women's...
duty, below the dignity of a man. Now he had more time to devote to his garden.

On January 20, 1927 I married Hedwig Hupe. It was not, as it might appear, a practical arrangement, a business deal, in which she acquired a husband and I a farm. I would have married her without the farm, because we were in love, but we both loved the farm too. So it was the most natural thing in the world.

The ceremony took place in the church after the Sunday service, in front of the whole congregation. In the afternoon we had a reception and open house at the farm. All the rooms were crowded with well-wishers, for Hedwig was well liked in the community. The bride was continually surrounded by friends and neighbors with whom she had grown up, while I was still a stranger to most of them. Soon I felt like the most useless and superfluous person in the party. Nobody even noticed that I changed clothes and went to the barn to milk the cows and do the usual evening chores.

After supper a new fleet of cars appeared in the yard, this time mostly young people, for a charivari party (pronounced “Shevaree”). The custom of making as much noise as possible with car horns, tin cans, shouting, banging against the siding of the house and a few shotgun blasts was probably an ancient rite to drive away evil spirits. It had already then become meaningless, a mere habit, and was to my knowledge the last such effort in the neighborhood. The earsplitting racket didn’t end until Mr. Hupe stepped outside and promised the crowd a public dance in Hudson come Saturday.

During the next ten years three daughters and a son were born to us. The oldest girl arrived still at home because only then was it becoming customary to give birth at a hospital. Our family doctor came out in his car on a freezing cold November night, the radiator covered with blankets because we didn’t know antifreeze in those days. Several times during the nighttime vigil he went outside and started the car to warm it up and keep the motor and radiator from freezing.

The new baby was our pride and the joy of her grandparents. She got into more mischief and gave us more anxious moments than all the rest together. The first one did anything that came into her head, while she later used her authority to keep the little sister or brother from doing the same dangerous thing for which she had been scolded, such as poking a stick into the entrance of a beehive. The younger children learn more from the older ones than from their parents.

When she was just able to walk she disappeared one morning, Hedwig and I looked in vain for her in the house and the garden. In fear that she got lost in the cornfield I ran out there. My heart skipped a beat when I saw her in the corral where she tried to chase the Shorthorn herdbull out into the pasture. Quite unconcerned and oblivious of the danger she beat the big brute with a piece of dry cornstalk. My wife maintained that the girl surely must have worn out more than one guardian angel. Another time Grandpa Hupe was setting out cabbage plants in the garden. When he slowly straightened up at the end of the row and looked back at his handwork, he noticed that his beloved granddaughter had pulled up every plant behind his back as fast as he had stuck it in the ground. But she made up later for any inconvenience as teacher of the younger ones and as Mother’s little helper.

The children depended very little on toys to keep them busy and happy. The girls had their rag dolls and could play for days on end in their playhouses in the grove, where the furnished an imaginary room under a tree with a weird assortment of jars, bottles and odds and ends from the junkpile, fashioned a telephone from strings and tincans and baked their mudpies. There were dogs and cats to play with and trees to climb. Soon they had regular jobs; gathering eggs from the chicken’s nests, feeding skim milk to the calves or raising orphan lambs on a baby bottle.

One after another they became old enough for school. In a succession of old cars I took them in the morning to the small one-room schoolhouse of School District No. 95, known as Sunflower School. Young girls with a year’s training in a Teacher’s College at Fort Hays or Emporia labored here for a small salary, teaching eight grades side by side, from shy beginners to rowdy 14 or 16 year old boys. She had to be educator and disciplinarian, music teacher and coach. In addition to these duties she was expected to tend the fire in a large, round cast iron stove, sweep the classroom and
supervise the playground at recess. Most of
them handled their various duties extremely
well. However, we had a tremendous turnover
in the faculty, as the young farmers of the
neighborhood married them off the school-
ground as fast as we could hire them.

I was soon elected director of the school
board, an honorary job, that consisted of such
duties as hiring the teacher, preparing the
school budget, buying books for the miniature
library, but also the responsibility to get the
playground equipment painted, mow the grass,
haul coal, shingle the roof and destroy wasp
nests in the primitive outdoor toilets. I enjoyed
these chores a lot better than to mediate occa-
sional differences of opinion between mothers
and teachers.

FIVE YEARS after coming to Hudson I
applied for naturalization. To become a full-
fledged citizen of the United States one must
first pass an examination by a judge of the
District Court in open session and prove to his
satisfaction an understanding of our form of
government and a certain fluency in the En-
lish language. Another young man from Ger-
many had just flunked such an examination
and was ordered to appear again at a later
term. Understandably angry he told me that he
could not answer certain questions on Ameri-
can history. Alerted by this information I did
not only study the Constitution but found a
schoolbook on U. S. History. With it I could
brush up my half-forgotten high school
knowledge of the subject, especially find the
answers to the questions which my informant
had missed.

When I was called to the witness-chair at the
end of a regular court session, I noticed to my
great relief that His Honor, Judge Beals, asked
the very same questions I had prepared myself
for. He seemed very pleased to get right an-
wers, but shook his head sadly when I placed
the number of Supreme Court justices at seven
instead of nine. After the judge’s history ques-
tions were exhausted he came up with some
trick questions, probably from his law school
days, such as: What is the only crime men-
tioned in the Constitution? I noticed out of the
corner of my eye how the lawyers at my left put
their heads together and whispered. Not at all
sure that I had the correct answer, but on a
sudden inspiration that a crime mentioned in
the Constitution had to be something quite
general, I said: “treason.” When the judge got
up, shook hands and congratulated me as a
U. S. citizen, I knew I had guessed right.

As direct consequence of my lucky perfor-
ance came invitations to speak at meetings of
the Lions Club at St. John, the Rotary Club at
Stafford, the Kiwanis Club at Larned and to the
high school students at St. John. The topics
were at hand and in the news: Hitler’s rise to
power and the catastrophic low prices for farm
products here at home. These affected city
merchants to the same degree as they strangled
the farmers. The question thrown at me most
often was: “Is it true that there is no freedom of
the press and no free speech under Hitler?”
Good proof that U. S. citizens are well aware of
and ready to defend, their constitutional rights.

I had now worked five years on the farm as
member of the family without any other salary
than food and clothing. At the start I had felt a
great obligation to repay Mr. Hupe for the
expense of my trip to Kansas which was, I
realized now, quite a sacrifice, considering his
financial position. It must have been rather
shaky as evidenced by his indebtedness. We
charged grocery bills at the stores in town.
Before every harvest we had to borrow money
at the bank in order to pay our hired help.
There simply was no operating capital to
cushion normal demands. The cash flow was
simple. What money came in weekly for eggs
and cream we spent immediately at the stores
for items that were not produced on the farm,
and for clothing and the needs of the growing
children, though we never quite caught up
with the merchant’s ledger balance. The re-
cceipts from the sale of grain and livestock were
carefully held back and budgeted to pay the
mortgage interest on time, the local real estate
taxes and the premium for fire and storm insur-
ance, all items of first priority in the effort to
preserve the equity in the farm as the basis of
our existence. Any surplus could be applied
against doctor bills, church contributions, etc.

The ad valorem tax on all property was a
simple but not a just method of taxation. Real
estate value alone is no measure of the ability
to pay. In a year of crop failure it imposed a
real hardship on the taxpayer because taxes and
all other payments come from net income and
not from the tools of production. There were
neither federal nor state income taxes to pay,
nor were we saddled with a sales tax on every transaction. Therefore it was not really necessary to keep books on farm income and expenses. Most farmers carried their few transactions in their heads. A look at the checkbook balance showed the liquid assets available at the moment. I knew a neighbor who simply hid the checkbook in the depression years, reminiscent of the ostrich hiding his head in the sand, and just about as effective.

After I was married I took a closer interest in the financial side of the farm operation. Exactly where did our money come from? Was the growing of wheat or corn more profitable? Should we keep more cows? Would increased income from livestock more than offset the loss of income from grain, if part of the grain acreage were shifted to the production of feed for more cattle? I started to keep a set of books for my information. Though Mr. Hupe may have felt it a bit as intrusion into his affairs, he did not interfere. My books soon showed that we worked more for our horses than they worked for us and how much it cost to feed them the year round. They showed that corn would produce more income per acre than wheat, provided we had enough rain in summer and provided the price structure would not change. Too many unknown quantities in the equation to arrive at a clearcut decision. It certainly would be wise to go slowly with radical innovations.

III. HOW IT CHANGED—THE TRACTOR ERA

THINGS do not always change over night. More often they creep up on us slowly, almost unnoticed, piecemeal here and there. Only when they are of real, proven advantage, they snowball and completely replace old conditions. Mr. Hupe, shrewd and cautious, summed it up in the maxim: Never be the first one to go “whole hog” for a new thing, and never the last one. The former is too risky, the latter simply stupid.

While we pushed our headers through the wheatfields, employing many men and horses, only to pile our wheat into stacks in the field, fully knowing that another small army would be needed to thresh the grain, we could hear and see one or two of the new machines, called combines, cut and thresh the crop in one operation right in the field. Mr. Hupe wrote to a cousin in Germany about the newfangled invention, who sowed his disbelief by reporting that they had such machines in Germany, where the bakers caught the loaves of freshly baked bread when they spilled out of the rear end of the contraption.

To operate the combine, only three men were needed, a tractor driver, a combine operator and a grain hauler. The combines belonged to well-to-do farmers with large wheat acreages. They were heavy and clumsy, often too much of a load for the equally primitive tractors of the days. The low drawbar output often forced the farmer to hitch a team of mules in front of the tractor when the steel wheels of the combine cut deeply into the sand or the going got rough on hillsides. To the early tractors seen in the fields here belonged the Titan, the Rumley Oilpull, the 15-30 International, Wallis, Twin City and Caterpillar. One enterprising farmer, Joe Felke, bought a battle-scared armored tank of W.W.I. vintage from army surplus. As farm tractor it was no success. About all it could pull with its mighty fuel-consuming engine, was its own weight, not to mention the inconvenient maintenance of the clumsy monster.

The benefits of the combine were only too evident. Even though it could operate only when the crop was dead ripe and bone dry, it still caught up with the headers in acres covered. When a field was finished it was finished for good. The wheat was safely in the bin without the waste we had from wind and weather in the stack. Better still, the combined wheat could be sold right away in June or July, before the wheat harvested by the old method arrived and glutted the market, resulting in lower prices. Better yet, the tractor could pull a lister plow in the stubble field as soon as harvest was over and the soil was still moist and workable. Best of all, it didn’t eat all winter long as our horses did.

As much as we admired the first pull-type combines, we had to admit that they were too expensive for the small farmer. We could not invest a fortune in a machine that worked perhaps a week or two in a whole year, then stood idle the rest of the time. As consolation in our frustration we found other faults with the combine. It wasted all the wheat straw in the field, while our large strawstax furnished bedding and a lot of feed for cattle and horses. What would we do without straw? That the
straw returned plant food to the soil, that it helped maintain some humus in the sandy soil was not considered important. The opinion generally prevailed that ours was young soil, still full of pep and fertility that wouldn't wear out for a long time to come. Besides, we couldn't do without horses. The heavy tractors were useless when it came to tending row crops. None of them could be made to stay on top of a lister ridge. And since they had no individual wheel brakes they needed a wide headland just to turn around. Wheel spread was not adjustable and the front axle so low to the ground that it broke off the cornplants in the row it straddled. Horses were needed for mowing, raking and hauling where the tractor was not practical because it had steel wheels with iron spade lugs which cut holes in the earth and chopped up hay and live vegetation in the field. "Tractors with lugs prohibited" was the message on numerous road signs because lugs could destroy blacktop mats faster than anything else. Must we have tractors and horses? Unacceptable on our Wheat-Feed-Livestock farms. The tractor would have to learn to do everything horses could do before we were ready for it. I suspect that the older men were simply a little scared of the tractor because they did not understand how it worked and had no experience in things mechanical, while the young men took to the new tool like the duck to water.

There was a place, however, where this early type of tractor fitted in already, namely the large wheat farms in western Kansas where rainfall is barely sufficient for wheat but not enough for corn. Here they followed a simple crop rotation, half wheat, half summer fallow, a one-crop agriculture. There was no livestock on the place. Occasionally timely rains produced an abundance of volunteer wheat in the stubble fields after harvest. This is wheat sprouted from grains that were lost on the ground during harvesting operations or were scattered by the wind. In that case they imported cattle to graze on it from fall until snow covered all vegetation. Then they sent them back to market. It didn't take long until the dangers of this wheat-only agriculture became apparent and it turned into a menace for the whole state. But newer, better tractors came on the market until they revolutionized agriculture to a higher degree than the invention of the plow had done.

How did it come about? There is seldom one clear-cut, isolated new invention alone. The United States could place men on the surface of the moon only because a great many different sciences had produced the necessary knowledge and techniques exactly at the same time in history. Astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, as well as the technical know-how to work with rare metals made lift-off appear feasible, while electricity, radio and television, computers and experience gathered from the airplane development, such as the parachute, enabled man to exist and function in space. Just as important was the fact that a government existed at the same time which committed millions to the project, and an economy existed strong enough to finance the venture. Only some sixty years earlier a number of the most important ingredients for space travel were still missing.

Similar circumstances came together and set the stage for the agricultural transition of the last fifty years, the ones I was lucky enough to experience first-hand on the farm. From the day in the dim past, when a man first planted some seeds for harvest, instead of gathering them from wild plants, and from the day, when he domesticated some animals instead of hunting them, farm life had changed hardly any. The same seeds were planted with the same crude tools: the spade, the hoe, the pointed stick drawn by man or beast, from which only recently the steel plow evolved. The curved knife for harvesting, and the flail, or the hooves of the oxen for threshing, were basically the same in the Bronze Age as they were in the 18th century.

With the efficient mining of coal went hand in hand the production of iron and steel in quantities never known before, a prerequisite for the steam engine. It in turn made manufacturing on a large scale possible. Factories replaced the home industry and the individually producing craftsman. Agriculture benefited from the industrial revolution. Tools, formerly made entirely of wood, became longer lasting and more efficient when they were reinforced with iron parts. A few real "machines" came into use, making the horse the all-important source of energy on the farm and replacing much human labor. They were the steel plow,
the drill for sowing small grains, the reaper for harvesting. All of them did not only speed up the work but did a more thorough and exact job compared with hand labor. A wholly new concept and construction element, the steel disc, was introduced. It replaced the sliding motion of the moldboard plow with a rotating motion which resulted in reduced friction and consequently lighter draft in the field. The disc is still with us in many applications: the single and tandem disc harrow, disc plow, row crop weeders, ridge busters and the modern one-way plow, to name just a few. Belt drives, chains drives and gear drives made it possible to apply power at a distance from its source which was either direct pull or a rotating motion derived from the axle of a wheel on the ground. All these improvements only whetted the appetite for bigger implements. Four, six or more horses were needed to pull ever larger machines.

The steam engine as a new source of energy never got past the use as stationary power source in agriculture, here or in Europe. It was belted to large threshing separators or pulled up to 10 plows arranged side-by-side as a unit on cables back and forth on square, level fields. For other farm uses it was not practical to carry heavy loads of water and fuel along for prolonged service. Besides, a better system was on the way. The new technology had leveled off at that stage when I took my courses at the University of Leipzig, and would probably have remained there, had not a technology on a different front made rapid progress. It was the automobile and its heart, the internal combustion engine.

The principle is simple. Take a small amount of an explosive liquid or gas, mix it with air in a strong-walled container, light the mixture with a spark, and—bang—you have a powerful explosion. The expanding hot gases can drive a piston against a load. As was often the case in history, the same idea inspired inventors independently in several places at the same time. The new motor was lighter than the steam boiler, easy to control and did run a long time on a small amount of fuel, such as alcohol, benzine or similar compounds. The first practical application was the construction of a horseless carriage, the forerunner of our modern cars and trucks. Later it powered ships, railroads and the heavier-than-air flying machines.

The automobile industry developed in America as well as in Europe, based on the principle of mass production at low prices, and on the assembly line technique introduced by Henry Ford. The importance of the new method cannot be overemphasized. A car, or any other product, is assembled from prefabricated parts so that each wheel or shaft or cast-
ing is absolutely identical and interchangeable with the same construction element in every completed machine sold. No more was a car the handywork of a craftsman who carefully made and fitted each part separately in the way the gunsmith or locksmith worked. The assembly line technique provided spare parts for repair work. They fit like the original pieces they replaced. Soon the tractor manufacturers and the producers of agricultural implements adopted the methods of the automobile industry.

New implements now came with a list of replacement parts. Some crude tools for the do-it-yourself repairman were included, such as the adjustable monkey wrench which was useless in tight places and responsible for many skinned knuckles. Nevertheless, the farmer was able to do many repairs right on the spot of the breakdown in the field.

The rugged individualists at the drawing boards as well as management effectively stymied efforts to norm certain commonly used parts. The desirable concept regrettably didn't progress much farther than norming the sizes of bolts and pipes and the corresponding thread numbers. In most other construction elements there reigns a happy, helter-skelter confusion of 1001 similar parts, so made, that they will fit only one model. Even the same manufacturer uses dozens of different pumps, carburetors, headlights or doorhandles. They will fit only one model of his line, never the product of a competitor, and often become obsolete within one year. This extravagance is extremely costly to the consumer. The only justifications for it are more jobs in the industry and more profits for the stockholders.

The assembly line technique alone, important as it was, would have never accomplished the rapid mechanization in American agriculture. As in space exploration, there had to be several factors acting simultaneously. The second one was the convenient discovery of mineral oil deposits in Pennsylvania and many other regions. The first uses found for this new product were kerosene for our lamps and axle grease for the horse-drawn wagons and other wheeled conveyances. But soon refineries turned out gasoline, the standard fuel for the internal combustion engine. It was priced so low that every farmer could afford to operate a tractor. Forthcoming too was a lubricating oil, able to withstand without much deterioration the high temperatures on the inside of a gasoline motor operating hour after hour under load.

Finally, tractors became more powerful and versatile. The dangerous crank disappeared with the introduction of the electric starter motor. A battery-powered ignition system replaced the magneto. Lights were added, belt pulley, power-take-off shaft and hydraulic controls. Eventually even the bellyshaking, rough ride on lug-studded steel wheels gave way to a smooth comfort when rubber tires became available for tractors. There was no more need for the sharp skid rims on the front tires, as soon as individual rear wheel brakes facilitated short turns. All in all, the clumsy tractor of the early 1920's had grown up into a sleek, sturdy, powerful and responsive machine.

An additional, very important step toward total mechanization was accomplished when International Harvester Co. introduced the famous Farmall Tractor, designed to work in row crops. Its high-clearance rear axle straddled two corn rows without breaking any plants, the front wheels were set close together in order to fit the space between rows. Automatic wheel brakes allowed the operator to turn this tricycle tractor on a dime, thus eliminating the need for wide headlands. At the same time integrated implements made their debut. Cultivators, listers, even combines were offered which were not pulled, but mounted direct on the tractor. They had to be lifted from the ground by hand for turning and transport over the road. The several levers for lifting demanded a lot of hard labor. In the evening, after a day of cultivating corn, one had certainly done his share of physical exercise. Even this problem soon found a solution in the Ferguson System, a three-point suspension of all carried implements, with hydraulic lifting. Once before man had delegated a big share of backbreaking, physical labor to the horse. Now again man's inventive genius overcame the limitations of his frail body. The labor-saving techniques, long employed in industry, began to find their way to the farm, slowly removing the stigma that made the farmer appear as a thoughtless toiler, a necessary cog in the economy, but somehow condescendingly treated as the hayseed, while the politicians called him
the backbone of the nation, when they needed his vote.

I like horses and I always felt sorry for them. They were forced to pull the deadweight of a plow or plister hour after hour, often in 100 degree weather, sweating and molested by insects. Restrained by the harness they were unable to fight off bloodsucking flies. Another tormentor was the botfly which laid its eggs onto the horse's legs. The resulting larvae ended up in the horse's stomach where they caused painful colic. Sore shoulders, caused by rubbing and pressure of the leather collar, occurred often, rendering the horse unfit for work until healed up again. Still the work had to be done. Now we were offered an unfeeling machine. When properly serviced, it could run day and night without stopping or tiring. In fact it was only a matter of how long the human driver could stand up against such blind, obedient, mechanical power.

It became now possible to change drivers and work day and night as long as soil conditions were favorable. The size of the farm was no longer a limiting factor in production. One or two tractors can do the same amount of work as dozens of horses and many hired men formerly could on large estates.

Horses get sick and die unexpectedly. The investment in a horse or mule can be wiped out in minutes by disease or a broken leg. A tractor, by comparison, is theoretically immortal. Any worn or broken part is replaceable. Actually, of course, that was not quite true. Newer and better models made the old tractor obsolete and its immortality had surely an end when the manufacturer decided to discontinue the production of replacement parts. These had become so sophisticated as to special alloys, temper and tolerances that even the best blacksmith, the fix-it genius of by-gone days, was unable to duplicate them. The expression "built-in obsolescence," a means by which continued production in a manufacturing plant is insured, is not unknown in the realm of agricultural machines. It is part of the price we pay for progress.

In the horse days the owner could raise his own colts as replacements for old animals. The tractor owner was at a disadvantage in that respect. A new tractor always meant a considerable cash outlay, in most cases a promissory note at the bank which was glad to advance credit to all responsible borrowers. The policy of "pay cash or do without," such a virtue in pioneer days, lost out to the motto "buy now, pay later."

There were many more factors which contributed to the changing picture in agriculture, and they affected me as well as every other farmer. When I started farming, one could always find exchange labor or hire teenage boys for $1.00 a day. This supply dried up as all young men went on to high school. From there they moved to jobs in nearby cities or left Kansas altogether until it became almost impossible to find any part-time labor. Very few of us could afford full-time help. Farm work is so seasonable and affected by the weather. Only dairy farms had steady work for employees. Nor could the average farmer afford to hire full-time help at wages comparable to the ones paid by industry in the city. A quarter section homestead, (160 acres), was barely able to support a family. The farmer never included fair wages for his own labor when he calculated gain or loss in his operation. And very often he would have been able to realize a better interest on his investment in some other enterprise. Only other intangible benefits kept him in the country, such as rent-free housing, healthful surroundings for the whole family, the satisfaction of being his own boss, and the hope for better times.

Under these circumstances it would have been necessary to own another 160 acres of land to support a hired man and realize enough net profit to pay the real estate taxes and other incidentals. But even then no industrial worker would work in the country, at any price. Here the 8-hour day is impossible, he misses the conveniences of city living and city entertainment. There remained only those who couldn't compete with the demands of industrial jobs, the drifter, the alcoholic, the mentally retarded. None of these was a desirable farm worker.

The farmer who wanted to stay in business had no other alternative but to arrange his work as far as possible as a strictly one-man operation. The implement manufacturer met his need splendidly. Farm machines were so designed that they could be controlled from the tractor seat, eliminating the need for a second man to ride the drawn implement. Incidentally, the steel seats formerly provided on combines, grain binders or corn binders dis-
Erich Fruehauot gradually changed his methods of farming with the changing times. When he traded his horses and a used tractor for a new Farmall with cultivator attachments, he broke with the past, and for the first time owed the bank a sizable amount on a personal note. He also had room in the horse barn, left, to keep more cows.

appeared. Especially the cast iron variety has since become a collectors item which fetches fancy prices at farm sales. Most noticeable and welcome was this trend in the hay meadow. Haying had always been the time of peak demand for manual labor, aggravated by the fact that it came for everybody at the same time. By and by the side delivery rake, the pick-up baler with bale accumulator, and the bale stacker eliminated manual labor altogether, and for the farmer the ever recurring headache of finding help on the precious days when the weather was perfect.

Silo filling was not quite as pressing otherwise as haying, though at times it was a race against freezing nights. Here one got by relatively easily with exchange labor or custom operators. Ensiling of row crops became very popular when we learned that good silage could be made in a simple trench dug into a hillside. The trench was excavated by a bulldozer in a few hours at a fraction of the cost of an upright silo and filling and packing of the greencrop could be accomplished with the tractors and wagons or trucks already on the farm.

I took the first step in the direction of progress and changing times when I bought my first tractor, a cheap used Fordson. The seat on it was so located that the driver straddled the transmission housing like a rider straddles his mount. The housing got hot enough to fry my legs, the wormgear drive howled and since the tractor was not equipped with a governor I had to work the throttle lever constantly by hand, wishing that it would open another notch to develop just a little more power. It was hot, dirty, and noisy, this tractor, and constantly in need of repairs, but it relieved my aging horses and mules of the hardest job, plowing.

I gathered enough experience with the Fordson so that I could judge what a good new tractor should be able to do, and developed a lively appetite to own one. After much soul-searching and with some trepidation, but with the tacit consent of my father-in-law who was now practically retired, I took the fateful step. I traded the Fordson and my horses excepting my saddle horse, for a new F20 International Farmall tractor with cultivator attachments, costing me $1,200.00. For the first time I owed the bank a sizable amount on a personal note. I admit that I had some sleepless nights when I thought what might happen if the Farmall didn't keep all it promised. I worried whether I would be always able to pay for fuel, oil and repairs. Without the horses I would be completely immobilized in case the tractor was not capable of duplicating all the work my horses performed. But I was lucky. It worked for me as it did for others. I had broken with the past, with the old way of farming. There were anxious moments, to be sure, when one installment term fell right before harvest, just when my bank balance was at low ebb and hiding the checkbook was no solution. I weathered that crisis too. A good friend, Emil Fischer, then a salesman for Ford tractors, assured me that it was more complicated for the seller to repossess a tractor than I had feared.
In later years I owned a F30 Farmall, a D John Deere, a Minneapolis-Moline G and a WD45 Allis-Chalmers, now in its 21st year, old enough to vote and still going strong.

I was well aware that there was a whole family of farm implements designed to go with the tractor, adapted to its size and power. I was also aware that at the moment my finances were stretched to the limit. At the outset the horsedrawn machines would have to stay in service a while longer. They needed some remodeling though, to go behind the iron horse. I shortened the wooden tongues of lister plow, mower, rake and grain drill so that the stubs could be attached to the tractor drawbar. Two Ochel sleds coupled side by side worked well behind the tractor.

I didn’t need any jogging or calisthenics to keep myself in shape in those days because for every simple adjustment on the implement I had to dismount, work some levers and climb back up onto the tractor seat. Moldboard plow or lister had to be lifted out of the ground by hand at the end of every furrow, the outfit turned around, then lowered again to plowing position, a lot of climbing in a day’s work. Soon all of us plowed around a field instead of back and forth, as we used to do with horses. This method allowed us to stay on the tractor and make better time. Of course, in the end we had to plow out the four corners where we had left halfmoon-shaped pieces of stubble while making the 90 degree turns. This was very rough going for men and machines, but we didn’t mind it too much knowing that the main job was finished.

Only when mowing I needed a second person to ride on the mower seat and work the sicklebar lift when turning corners, or to evade the occasional high mounds of dirt a badger had dug up in the hay meadow. My son once filled that position, when we unknowingly ran over a skunk, hidden in the heavy growth of alfalfa. Irritated by the noise of the mower the animal employed his time-proven weapon and hit the boy directly in the face with a well-aimed squirt of his perfume. The poor kid rolled backwards from his seat, half blinded, choking and sick. To add insult to injury, everybody kept at a safe distance from him, even though we tried all the supposedly unfailing remedies recommended for such incidents, such as burying the clothes of the victim.

To replace the old hayrack I built a 4-wheel trailer from an automobile running gear. It was so constructed that I could convert it quickly from a flatbed for hauling bundle feed to a grain box or a stockrack for sheep, hogs or calves. It helped me to postpone the purchase of a truck for several years.

I soon got tired begging neighbors to combine my wheat after they had finished their own harvest. To see my ripe crops exposed to the weather during the best harvest days while others filled their granaries, was too much of a mental strain. A rain could make weeds grow taller than the wheat and harvest became a nightmare. So I bought a six ft. IHC combine.
with motor for $1010.00. Six ft. is a very narrow strip of wheat in a large field, so I tried to make up for width of cut with higher speed in light wheat. It was a jolting ride in high gear on spade lugs, left hand on the steering wheel, right hand extended backward to a crank that lifted the combine platform. I was enveloped in the noise from the tractor motor in front, the combine motor in the rear and in a cloud of dust that emanated out of the machine. Whenever I ran a combine I worked together with my good friend and neighbor Charlie Willinger. I threshed his wheat and he did all the grain hauling, a very practical and efficient arrangement. Later I replaced the small machine with a 12 ft. pull-type Baldwin combine, doubling the capacity of the first machine. Eventually I got stung with a used self-propelled Case combine. After a couple seasons of breakdowns and frayed nerves I retired the worn-out veteran and depended on custom cutters from Oklahoma.

Since the horse barn stood empty I kept more cows, up to the carrying capacity of my native pasture. Horse mangers made room for cow stanchions. Now cows lived on what was formerly horse feed; their milk provided cash in summer and winter. As the children went to school, the frequent filling of my gasoline barrel made ready cash still more important than in years past. There were no school buses. Everybody hauled his children in his own car.

With the help of Hedwig and the older children I milked 12 cows by hand. I sold cream but tried once selling whole milk to a cheese factory at Larned. A truck picked up the milk every morning, quite convenient for me. When the first milk check amounted to less than the cream used to bring, I knew I had just given away the skim milk I needed for my calves and had taken a beating on the butterfat to boot. I quit selling milk that day. To my surprise the manager of the cheese plant came personally to inquire why I dropped out. In the conversation he asked me how many cows the truck driver had. I told him: “none,” because I knew the man who happened to live in my neighborhood. Then I learned that he sold 10 gallons of milk every day from his nonexisting cows, while he probably made up the shortage at his water pump. Even though his services were terminated as of that day I went back to selling cream. The skim milk was too valuable a by-product as feed for calves and hogs.

For several years I kept a flock of sheep in a partnership venture with the County Extension Agent, Harold Daily. I found that they made a profit, but with their bad habits of breaking out through fences and not claiming their lambs, they took up so much of my time that I had to decide whether to keep cattle or sheep, but not both. I stayed with cattle.

New methods of farming arrived almost imperceptibly. The farm magazines brought constantly new ideas, partly from the Land Grant Colleges, partly from inventive readers. The former were based on sound evidence while the latter came either from practical experience or were only fanciful notions. We tried some and made use of the best. There was for instance the man who advocated strongly to starve all baby chicks that came from the hatchery for several days so they would use up what yolk was left in them from the egg. The practical result of this newest fad was that the little birds ate litter and each other’s toes because they were hungry, despite the new theory. Everybody could see that a mother hen didn’t starve her brood but fed her chicks right from the start all tidbits that came to light under her scratching feet. An old farmer once saw me setting out some curdled skim milk for the chickens. Shaking his head he opined: “If God Almighty had wanted the chicken to eat milk He would have put teats on the old hen.”

By and by even the crops we planted have changed. Every year new varieties of wheat came on the market, not all of them improvements. The Red Chief and related varieties were popular as high yielding varieties but the flour milled from such wheat was of inferior baking quality. When intermingled with the superior high protein wheat in the elevators the low grade wheat became a menace, as it threatened to ruin the good reputation which Kansas wheat had gained in the international market. Through an educational campaign, but more effectively through docking by buyers and through drastically lowered support prices, these “outlaw varieties” disappeared again. Kansas concentrated on growing only desirable hard red winter wheat for milling and export. More than once the price for wheat fell so low that it became competitive with the normal feed grains, corn and milo and was
included in cattle rations. During WW II quantities of wheat served as raw material for the production of industrial alcohol.

As to corn, it has disappeared completely from our fields here, and is planted only under irrigation. It really never did belong on the high plains as a dryland crop. Only in exceptional years is there enough precipitation at the critical time to produce a rewarding harvest. More often the corn burned up under the combination of a dried out topsoil and searing hot south wind. Yet it was the only plant we knew that yielded both feed grain and forage. We used Sudan grass to some extent for hay and supplementary pasture, and experimented with "cane," a mixture of sorghum strains that ran from tall to short, carried mostly open seed heads in all colors and had woody, unpalatable stems. From this reservoir of varied gene material plant breeders developed a true reproducing strain, called a Atlas Sorgo. About 8 to 10 ft. tall this miracle plant carried a solid, white, palatable seed head on a thick, juicy and sweet tasting stalk. Its leaves were somewhat narrower than corn leaves; the whole plant was covered with a white, powdery wax. I was the first one in my neighborhood to plant 10 acres to this new forage sorghum. I cut it with a rowcrop binder, a machine that gathers and ties the crop with twine into bundles. Then I wondered how I would ever get all the tall bundles set up in shocks to dry. It yielded so much more fodder than we normally harvested that I couldn't begin to use it all myself. I topped and threshed some for seed and sold a good deal out of the field for feed. And all that in a year when our corn was a near-failure. No wonder Atlas Sorgo became the standard forage plant for quite a few years. It replaced corn completely as fodder. The cornfields were now a little easier to harvest when the mechanical cornpicker became available. But just then an invasion of the European corn-borer caused many stalks to break over. The corn-picking machines left much corn in the field that had to be salvaged by hand, a laborious job, since we had no more horses and wagons. So it happened that we discarded both corn and cornpicker, an implement that had also caused many crippling accidents in the field. To give up corn as a major crop on our farms would have had serious consequences for our economy, had we not at the same time received another present from the plots and laboratories of the plant breeders.

Their next creation was a sorghum plant especially tailored for a high yield of grain on a stalk so uniformly short that it could be harvested with the same combine that had threshed our wheat a few months before. No more did the combine sit idle the rest of the year. It raised clouds of dust again in fall when it threshed the red seeds of the new combine milo. Again we worked with a domesticated plant that doesn't exist wild in nature in just this form, just as corn doesn't grow in any wild form, and would disappear from the earth if it weren't continually cultivated by man. There was an added benefit: the remaining milo stubble furnished cattle pasture at a time in the fall when native pasture grasses were exhausted. To top it all off, the new wonder plant can take everything in heat and drouth that the wheat belt dishes out. In prolonged dry spells it simply stands there in a sort of suspended animation while corn withers and dies. But when rain finally soaks the fields the grain sorghum resumes its growth as if nothing had happened and ripens a grain crop. It is no wonder that we preferred it and left the growing of corn to those regions where it is a reliable crop.

There are now many hybrid varieties of milo on the market, bred for short or long growing seasons, for irrigated or dry land, genetically resistant to a number of plant diseases and insect pests. The feeding value of the grain has come close to that of yellow corn. However, the farmer had to learn that seed of the high yielding and uniform hybrid strains must be bought every year anew from the seed producers, but the higher price is no deterrent as only 3 to 5 pounds of seed are required to plant one acre of milo. [To be continued in the Winter, 1979, issue.]