

Rebecca Owsley

Folk Studies 373

Dr. Collins

November 20, 1996

The items submitted for this project are examples of farm folklore. These articles have been collected from Farm & Ranch Living magazine. Some show the themes of generations working together and others show ways farmers might predict the weather. The articles vary in their way of portraying farm folklore. An interesting thing about this magazine is that most of the articles are written by their readers who send in the stories and pictures. This makes these articles a form of "friend of a friend" stories.

The themes of generations working together and thinking about old times are prevalent throughout these articles. Most of the time the grandfather is mentioned more than the grandmother. The generations passed down treasured tractors they had fixed up and maintained. They also shared memories of doing things together, like the memories of walking around the farm with a memaw. The people who wrote these articles looked back at old times being better and a good time. They talked about old farming techniques and how much fun they had farming that way when in reality it was harder work back then. This is a part of farm folklore, looking back to the way it used to be and remembering it fondly when the new ways actually help you more and many don't farm the old ways

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anymore. These articles deal with looking back on things, nostalgia.

Weather forecasting techniques are also a part of farm folklore. When a farmer's arm aches it will rain, when the dog acts up it will storm (I always heard when the cows acted funny it would storm), and they consult the "Farmer's Almanac" for weather information.

The folklore example I found the most was overalls. Overalls were pictured in cartoons, on children, and on a few old men. All farmers do not wear overalls. The representation from these selections would make one believe they did. Overalls and old times were the only two topics that I found an example of in every issue, this is shown on the charts and graphs.

The topic that comes in second to overalls as being most frequently mentioned is animals, shown in the total percentage graph. These are typical farm animals like chickens, cows, dogs, critters, roosters, mules, mustangs, and draft horses. It is not surprising to find animals mentioned frequently in these articles because they are found on a farm and are mentioned in farm folklore.

When farm wives were mentioned in these articles they were pictured as and described as, cooking, having children, high school sweethearts, and being alone while the farmer is out all day so they gabbed on the phone. These are often the representation of all farm wives in farm folklore.

Owsley 3

Barns are often a part of farm folklore. There is one article in particular that mentions a barn being rebuilt after a storm. Rebuilding after a storm is a part of farm folklore and farm life. It shows strength in adversity. There is a barn pictured as a country billboard displaying a message for those driving by to see. The barns pictured are not new metal barns but the old wooden red ones.

Tractors are seen as a treasure in these articles. They are kept in good condition and passed down from one generation to the next. They are named and remembered fondly. Children are pictured on their toy tractors ready to be the next generation of farmers. Farm trucks are also seen as treasured. Although they are torn up and old they are a part of the farm. The sound the truck made was considered a good memory. The trusty old farm truck is a part of farm folklore. Every farm is supposed to have one but all do not.

Most of the folklore contained in the articles from this magazine are about looking back and remembering. They also cater to the beliefs some have about farm life. Examples of these beliefs are; every farmer wears overalls and has a run down farm truck, or the farm wife stays at home all day alone while the farmer is out farming. Sometimes these are true and not to be ridiculed. These stereotypes are not necessarily bad, but all farm lives are not like this. These articles portray folklore about farm life.

### Farm & Ranch Living 1996

Topics	Feb/ March	April/ May	June/ July	Aug./ Sept.	Oct./ Nov.	Total
Animals						9
Barns						4
Grandparents						3
Weather						4
Tractors						6
Children						5
Overalls						10
Crops						5
Generations						3
Old Times						6
Farm Trucks						2
Farm Wives						4
Total	20	5	11	14	11	

# Farm & Ranch Living 1996

## Article Numbers

Topics	February/ March						April/ May				June/ July				August/ Sept.				Oct./ Nov.	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Animals		\		\	\	\		\		\									\	\
Barns		\				\				\							\			
Grandparents	\									\					\					
Weather			\		\											\		\		
Tractors	\										\	\	\	\					\	
Children	\	\								\	\	\								
Overalls	\	\	\	\			\	\					\			\			\	
Crops														\			\		\	\
Generations	\									\				\						
Old Times				\					\	\				\					\	\
Farm Trucks									\								\			
Farm Wives		\		\													\		\	
Totals	5	5	2	4	2	2	1	2	2	5	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	6	5

## Farm & Ranch 1996

### The Breakdown of the Topics

#### Animals

Chickens	\
Cows	\
Dogs	\
Critters	\
Roosters	\
Mules	\
Mustangs	\
Draft horses	\

#### Barns

Signs	\
Windmills	\
Rebuilt	\
Cartoon	\
Pictures	

#### Grandparents

Memaw	\
Grandfather	\

#### Weather

Almanac	\
Dog	\
Aches	\
Tornado	\

#### Tractors

Named	\
Passed Down	\
Toy	\
Modernized	\
Thrashing	\

#### Children

On Toy	\
Tractors	
With	\
Grandparents	
Cartoon	\

#### Overalls

Cartoons	
Children	\
Man in a Picture	\

#### Crops

Soybeans	\
Silage	\
Hey	\
Wheat	\
Straw	\

#### Generations

Tractors	\
Memories	\

#### Old Times

Crank Phone	\
Old Farming	
Farm Truck	\
With Memaw	\

#### Farm Trucks

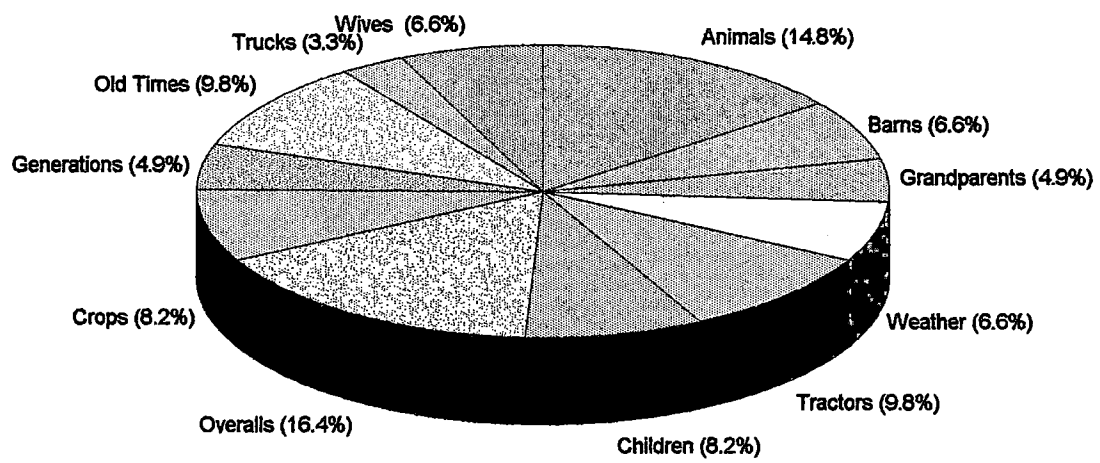
Torn Up	\
Sound it Makes	\

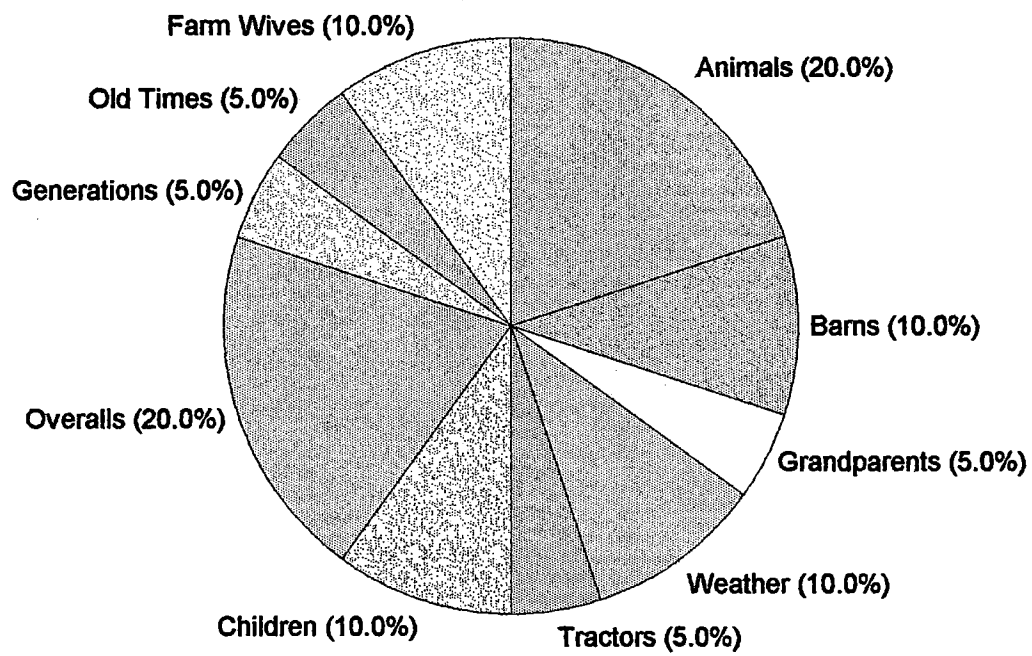
#### Farm Wives

Cooking	\
High School	\
Sweethearts	
Children	\
Isolated using phones	\

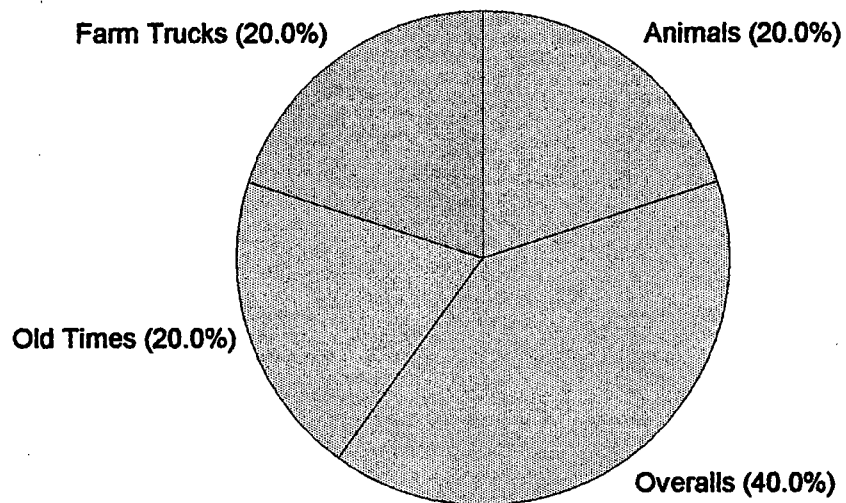
# Farm & Ranch Living 1996

## Total Percentages

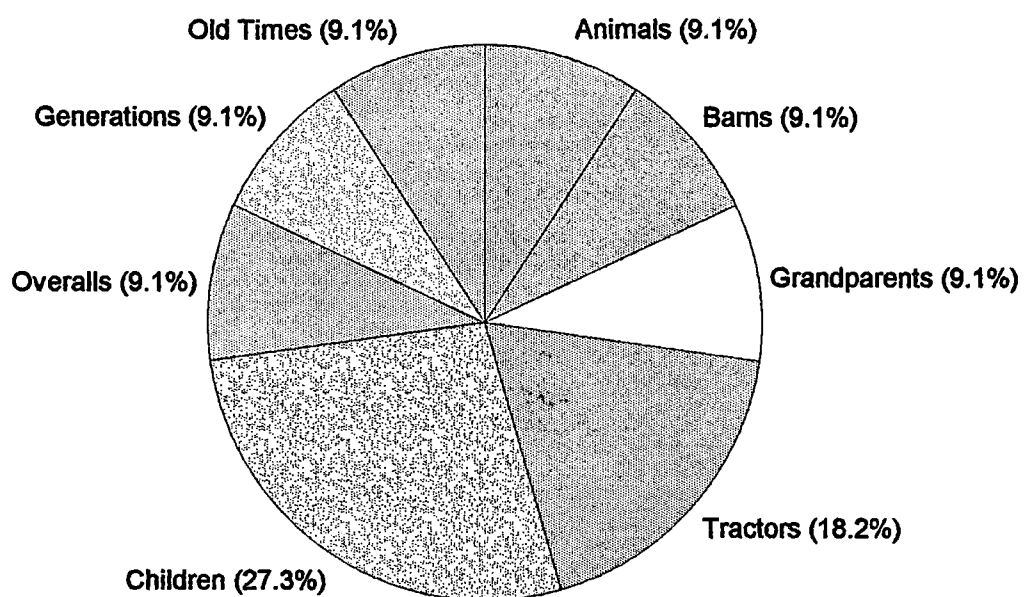


**Farm & Ranch 1996 February/ March**

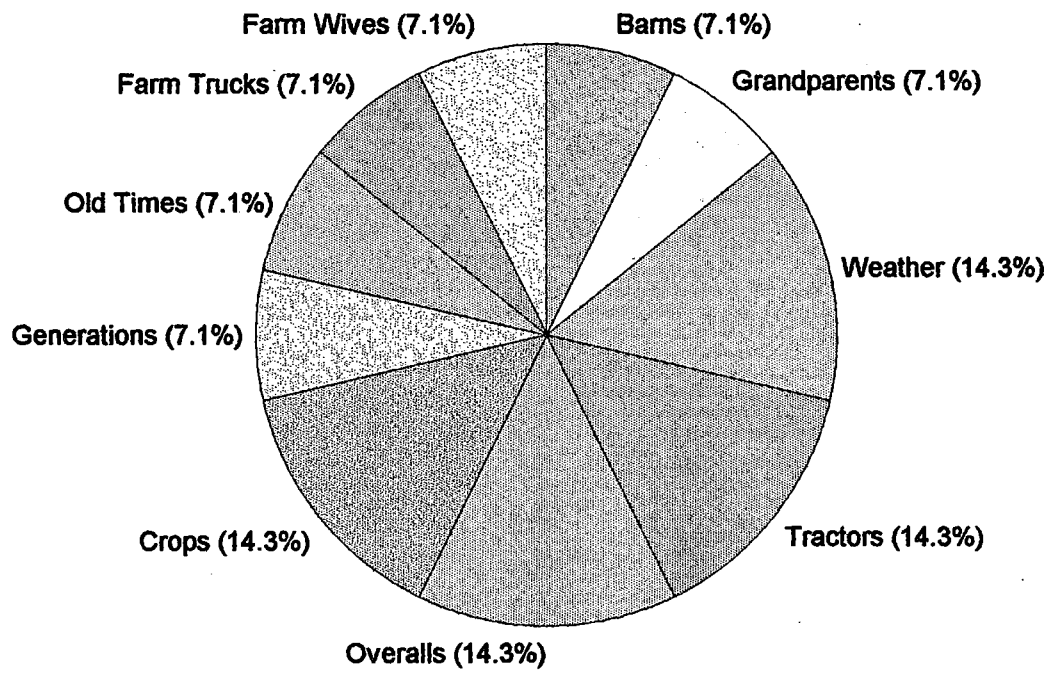


**Farm & Ranch 1996 April/ May**

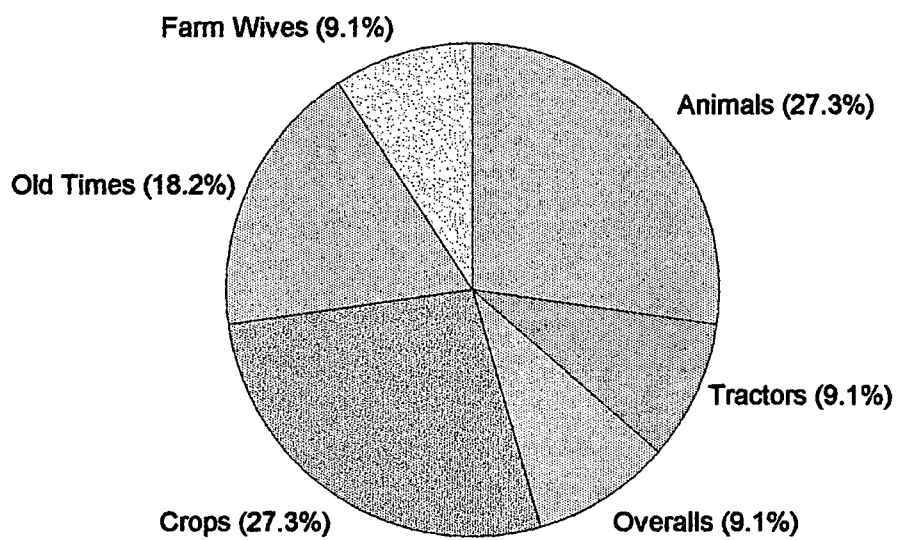
# Farm & Ranch 1996 June/ July



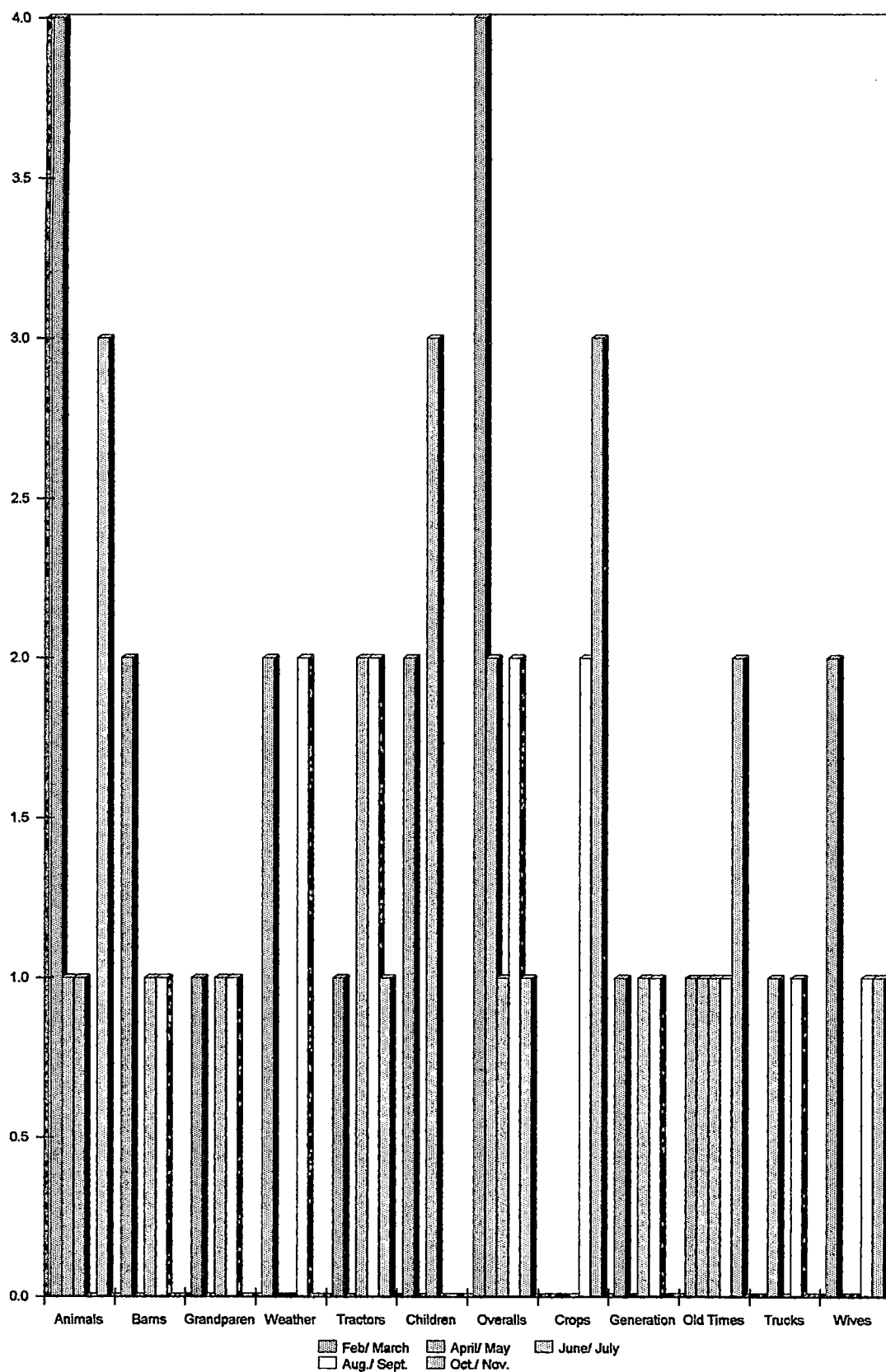
# Farm & Ranch 1996 August/ September



# Farm & Ranch 1996 October/ November



# Farm & Ranch Living 1996



Article 1

**Reliable "Old Fergy"**

I grew up in a small town in eastern Kansas. My dad had a threshing machine, a corn shredder, an ensilage cutter and a sawmill for custom work.

These machines were powered by steam engines. The first was a 12-horse Case...later, we had an 18-horse under-mounted Avery.

In 1925, I left home and went to Kansas City, where I worked for 40 years. Then my wife and I bought 100 acres in Taney County, Missouri.

To help get around in the rough, hilly country, I bought a 1952 Ferguson TO 30 tractor. I used "Old Fergy" to do all kinds of chores, including getting in firewood. Each summer, I helped a neighbor mow his hay.

But the most important thing I did

are both still running fine, and...who knows? Maybe one day another generation will take its first tractor ride on my reliable old Ferguson TO 30.

—Fred Hartman, Kirbyville, Missouri



**THREE GENERATIONS.** Fred Hartman, his grandson and great-grandson pose with "Old Fergy".

with Fergy was give my grandson his first tractor ride. About 30 years later, this grandson used Old Fergy to give his son his first tractor ride.

Now, as I sneak up on 92, I'm still driving Fergy around our 100 acres ...and neighbors sometimes say, "There goes Fred on his sports car."

After all these years, Fergy and I

Article 2

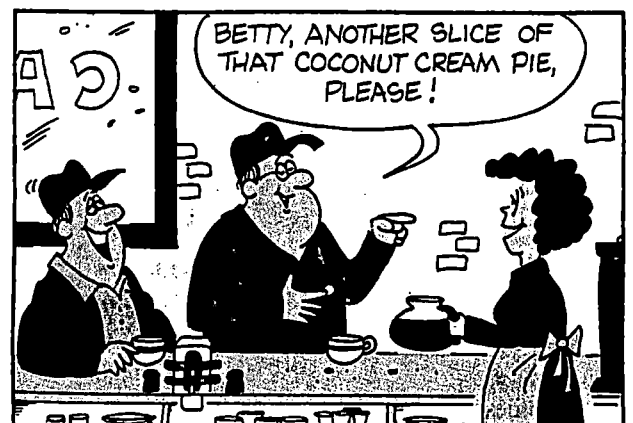


"The teacher asked us to bring something to class for show-and-tell today. I'm taking one of our cows."

Article 3



**UNCLE LEN** BY DAVE CARPENTER





## Article 4

**Readers share recollections about old-time rural phone systems...do any of their memories ring a bell? Have other subjects you'd like to discuss? Write to "Roundup".**

*By Rick Van Etten  
Managing Editor*

IN A recent issue, Paula Hunt of Nampa, Idaho described the early rural phone systems developed by innovative farmers and ranchers who purchased crank telephones and linked them along adjoining barbed wire fences.

After reading that, lots of other folks wrote to share their memories of early phones. Just about everyone still remembered the specific series of long and short rings assigned to their particular phone. Let's "listen-in" on a few of their comments.

"Few farm wives drove cars back in those days, so the women were pretty isolated," writes Alden Gillings of Arvada, Colorado. "Party lines became their domain."

"You didn't notify the phone company when a line needed repair, because you and your neighbors were the phone company," Alden continues. "Usually the fellow who ended up repairing the line was the one whose wife missed using the phone the most. As I recall, my dad made more than his share of repairs!"

Recalls Kenneth Johnson of Peoria, Arizona, "Sometimes we kids at school would set a specific time to listen for a certain ring, then all pick up our phones at once so we could talk to each other. We didn't realize it then, but we invented what's now known as the conference call!"

### Shorts and Disconnects

Kenneth also relates the following: "There were two lines outside our house for our phone, about 10 inches apart. If they touched, a 'short' would cause the phone to go out temporarily."

"To solve this, Dad stapled a block of wood between the two wires to hold them apart. But I discovered I could turn this piece of wood like a propeller to wind the two lines together, thus disconnecting the phone when I thought Mom or my sister had been talking too long!"

Affirms Edith Svenson of Joplin,

Montana, "With the top strand of barbed wire used for the phone's power wire and the bottom strand for the ground wire, it didn't take much to short out the circuit. Sometimes a short was caused by tumbleweeds getting caught between the strands, and Dad would have to go out and drive the fences to find the weeds and clear the lines."

"Despite their shortcomings, however, those phones came in mighty handy for helping neighbors keep in touch. Of course, when you rang someone, everyone else on the line could pick up their phones and listen in—we called that 'rubbernecking'."

William Ferreira of Danville, California says his father ran a general store with the only phone in town. William remembers his dad having to tell a nosy towns person to get off the line every time the phone rang. Farmers wishing to reach someone in town would call and leave

messages with William's dad, and the eavesdropper apparently just couldn't resist listening in whenever a call was placed.

Betty Tubbs of Arbon, Idaho tells of using such a phone system to keep track of her adventurous young son, who often wandered down to the farm of some elderly neighbors. "And sometimes my husband would get a call to come down and lend a hand with chores or some project," she adds. "Those old phones made it a lot easier for neighbors to 'watch out' for each other."

### Critter Conversations?

Sidney Coombs of Garden City, Kansas says that his family's pasture fence, which was used for their phone line, ran through a slough that filled up with water following a heavy rain. Muskrats then built several houses in the slough, one of which completely covered the fence.

"My Uncle Howard used to tell everyone he had the only muskrat in the state with a direct phone line into his house!" Sidney relates.

Fred Fundus of Butte, Nebraska remembers being responsible as a youngster for keeping tree limbs off the phone line between his dad's place and the nearest town, a distance of 14 miles. Lloyd Henn of Farmington, Iowa grew up in New Mexico and recalls that tall posts were usually set on either side of a ranch gate to "jump" the wire across the gap.

And finally, Adele Jackson of Alcester, South Dakota notes that folks were always very good about clearing the old party lines if someone had to place an emergency call, such as summoning the doctor from town.

We enjoyed all of these accounts and think they reaffirm a basic truth: Farmers and ranchers will *always* find a way to maintain a sense of community, no matter what the odds.



**EARLY PHONE SYSTEMS**, utilizing crank telephones (above) connected by adjoining barbed wire fences, provided isolated rural folks with an inexpensive way to keep in touch, and also served as a vital communication link in cases of emergency.

### Join the Discussion

SHARE INFORMATION or get answers to your questions by writing to "Roundup", *F&RL*, 5925 Country Lane, Greendale WI 53129.

Article 5

## **Farm Dog Was Forecaster**

WHEN my father was doing his fieldwork, our old dog, "Prince", was out there with him chasing rabbits or running alongside the tractor.

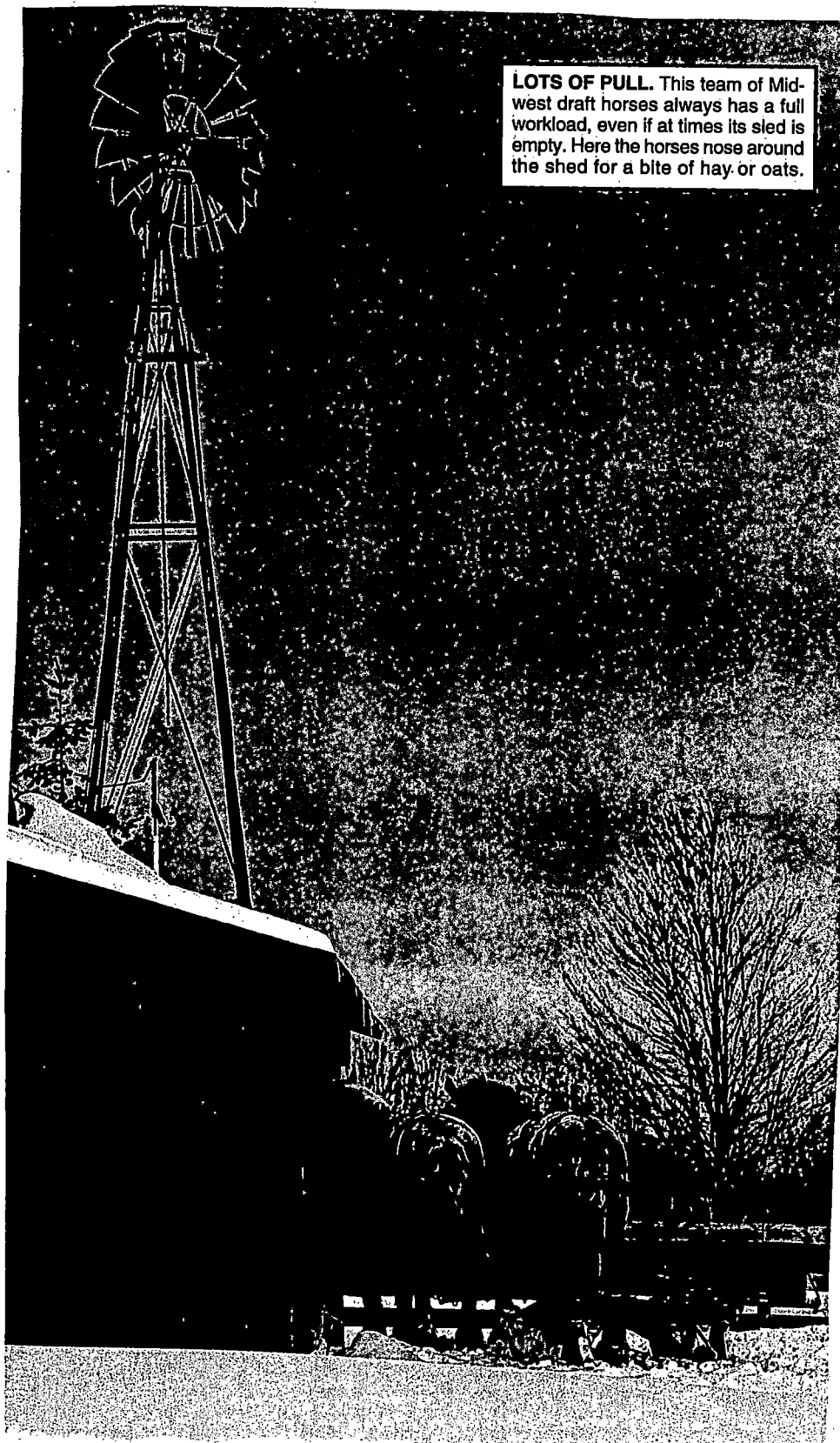
Dad and Prince always seemed to enjoy each other's company. But Prince brought Dad more than companionship.

Dad learned to read Prince like a barometer, gauging the approach of storms by the way Prince acted. As a storm drew closer, Prince would run nearer and nearer the tractor.

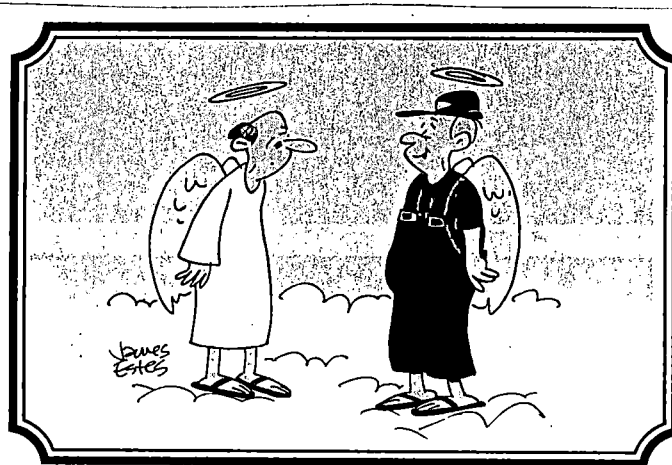
Finally, when Prince was within a couple feet of the tractor, Dad would pull out of the field and head for home, arriving at the house just ahead of the rain.

—Betty Nash, Santa Cruz, California

Article 6



Article 7

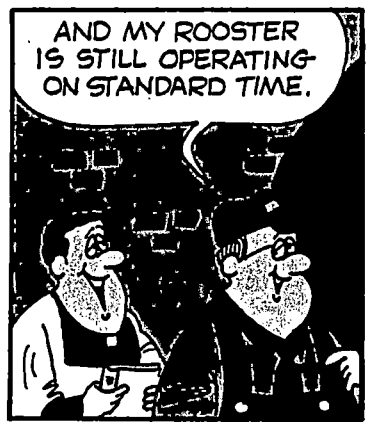
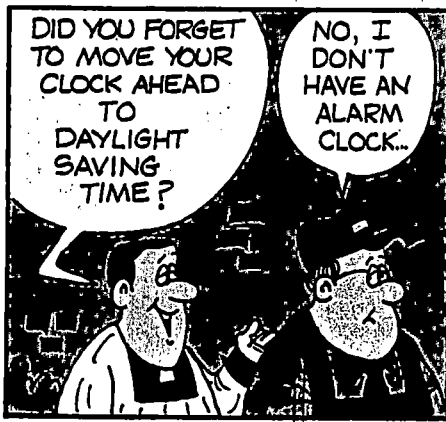


"I was a farmer for 57 years...they made these special  
so I'd feel at home up here."

Article 8



**UNCLE LEN** BY DAVE CARPENTER



## Article 9

**Every Farm Has a Truck Like This**

*"MY SON works in the dairy barns at the college where he's studying agriculture," relates Barbara Bell of Dexter, Michigan. "I recently had to borrow his truck while my car was being fixed, and I was reminded of the pickup we had on the farm when I was a girl.*

*"That led me to write the following piece, which describes a truck that has probably existed at one time or another on every farm in the country."*

IT'S A HOT summer morning when you get the message from Dad out in the field: "Take the truck to town to get a belt for the tractor...and don't waste any time!"

You quickly run a comb through your hair, hoping to look halfway presentable. Before climbing into the pickup, you brush as much dog hair off the seat as you can.

When you start the engine, all the red warning lights on the instrument panel flash, and the broken fuel gauge stays on empty. At least, you hope it's broken.

Amid a symphony of rattles, you head off down the road, reminding yourself not to open the air vents—they'll just blow hay and wheat chaff into your eyes and nose.

There's a pair of muddy chore boots on the floor and an open toolbox near the gear shift. The glove compartment door keeps flopping open...and when you get to town, you can't angle-park because reverse might not work.

Of course, you use hand signals whenever you make a turn—the electric turn signal hasn't worked in years. By the time you get home, your clothes have absorbed every conceivable farm aroma.

But after you give Dad the belt, you suddenly realize there's no vehicle you'd rather drive...even into town where folks will see right away that you're a hardworking farmer!



## Article 10

**'Memaw's' Shadow**

I CALLED my grandmother "Memaw". Whenever I visited her farm, she'd let me "help" her gather eggs. The chickens moved their nests to strange places, but Memaw inevitably found them. If little chicks were hatching, she made sure I saw them.

I admired Memaw's knowledge of nature and loved her patient explanations of farm life. When I gazed up at her from my little-girl height, she seemed to tower above me.

As we walked around the farmyard looking for eggs, my shadow would sometimes grow as large as hers. Whenever that happened, she would laugh and point it out. What a fine time we had...she knew the importance of a grandmother passing on wisdom and lore to younger generations.

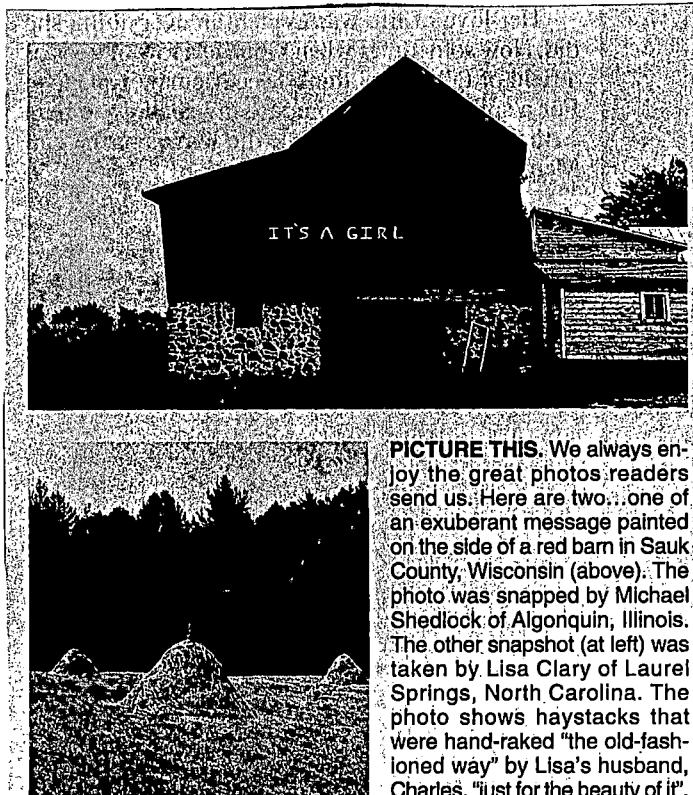
When nanny goats or cows failed to care for their babies, Memaw fixed a place for them behind her wood-burning stove. She let me prepare the bottles and feed the babies. I learned from that a sense of responsibility for all the creatures on the farm.

Memaw tended her garden as carefully as she tended her animals. I helped her pick peas and turnips, and her shadow kept the hot sun off my back. She loved sharing her vegetables with family and neighbors. She also enjoyed going on long walks to pick wildflowers and quiz me on their names. As we walked, we played games with our shadows, making them stretch and shrink.

Her love of life was evident in everything she did. Now sometimes when I look at a row of trees or a field of tall corn, I think I see Memaw's shadow. For a split second, I compare my shadow to hers ...then a breeze comes up, the leaves move and Memaw's shadow disappears.

—Debra Maynard Herrera, Eastland, Texas

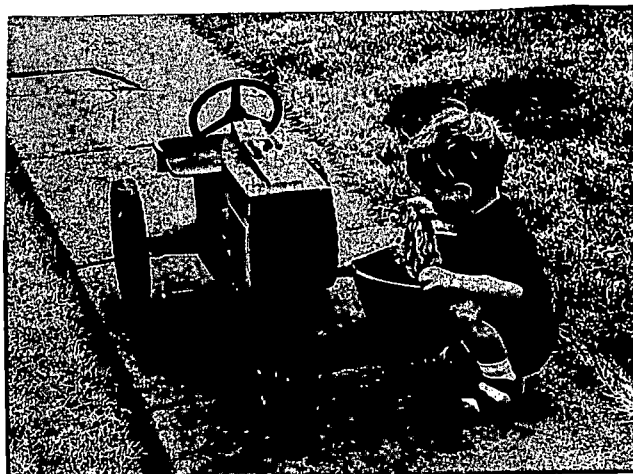
Article 11



**PICTURE THIS.** We always enjoy the great photos readers send us. Here are two...one of an exuberant message painted on the side of a red barn in Sauk County, Wisconsin (above). The photo was snapped by Michael Shedlock of Algonquin, Illinois. The other snapshot (at left) was taken by Lisa Clary of Laurel Springs, North Carolina. The photo shows haystacks that were hand-raked "the old-fashioned way" by Lisa's husband, Charles, "just for the beauty of it".



Article 12



**CLEAN UP.** When 2-year-old Joshua Kelly Flewelling found an old IH tractor in the grain bin, he got it out, cleaned it up and "went to farming", reports Great-Grandma Velma Kelly, Courtland, Kansas.

Article 13



**PEDAL TRACTOR**, a McCormick-Deering Farmall Super M, was restored by Francis Mehringer, Sussex, Wisconsin, for nephew Jared.

**FARM & RANCH LIVING**

## Silo-Filling Time Is Nearly Here

DUST AND CHAFF cover your shoes with each step as you inspect the field where your son has just finished making round hay bales. The late-summer sun is hot, and you pause for a moment, taking off your hat to wipe your forehead in the crook of your arm.

They're a wonder, these modern ma-

chines. Not only do they leave a field clean...they let you ride around all day in air-conditioned comfort! Doesn't seem that long ago that you were getting in crops on a tractor with nothing fancier than a metal seat. (On hot days just like this one, you could fry an egg on that seat!)

'Course, it wasn't long before *that* that you were making crops with horses. Well, never mind—there's way too much to do for a person to stand around daydreaming about the past. Fall is nearly here...besides hay, there's corn, beans and wheat to get in, and some mighty big silos to fill!



## Article 15

for 25 years. Last summer, we hauled the tractor into our shop and restored it. For 2 weeks in July, Jimmy and I worked 10 hours a day on it.

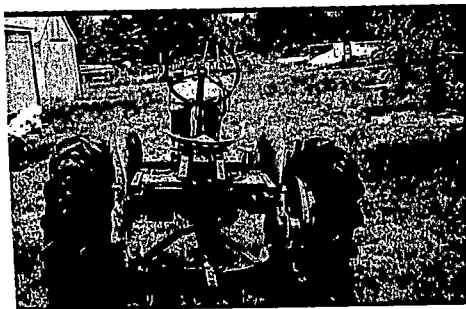
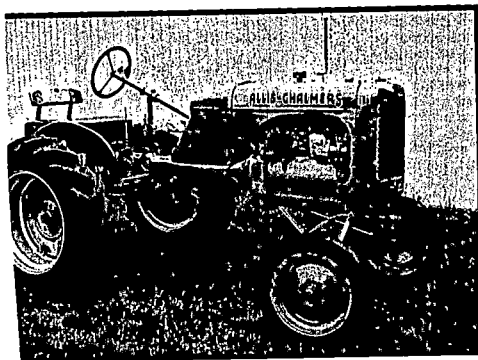
The tires were rotten, and the rims had holes rusted in them. We visited three "tractor graveyards" to find the parts we needed to get our tractor back in running order.

We could take the time needed to restore the B because we're both retired...except now Jimmy drives a school bus so we can earn a little extra "tractor money". —*Beverly Shillington Grawn, Michigan*

### Three-Generation Tractor

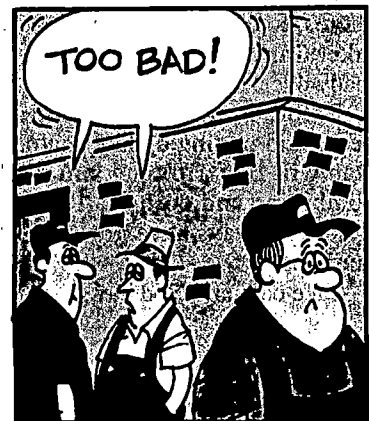
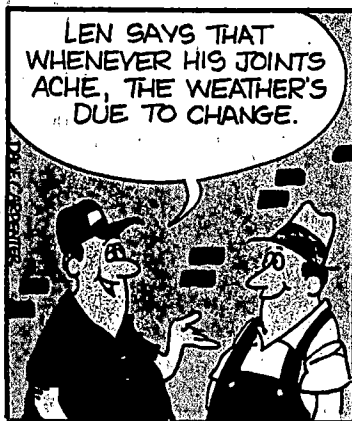
My husband, Jimmy, is the third-generation owner of our 1939 Allis-Chalmers B (below). Jimmy's granddad bought the tractor new, and his dad also used it.

The B sat out in a field unprotected



**BEFORE AND AFTER** shots show amount of work that went into this Allis-Chalmers B.

## Article 16

**UNCLE LEN** BY DAVE CARPENTER

## Article 17

**Forever a Farmer at Heart**

IT WAS the last summer that I ever made a crop. I was about to retire, and I wanted to make every moment something to remember.

One morning I stood on a hill on the east side of our farm and watched the sun come up. Harvesttime was just around the corner, and the air already had the chill of fall.

The cotton, lush and green from irrigation, was loaded down with bolls. Grain sorghum heads were plump and full and beginning to turn red. Soybean leaves were yellow and dropping off, and there were pods aplenty.

The only sound was from a neighbor's pickup on a nearby county road. I felt at peace with my God, knowing that I had given this farm my very best shot. I grew up not far from where I was standing. Wife Mary Ann and I were sweethearts in high school and college years ago, and it had seemed only natural for us to get married and start farming.

I've always been fascinated by the growth process. Of course, on a farm you're in the business of making things grow. But I could never get used to the idea that a little seed I placed in the ground would turn into a large complex plant.

Just as remarkable was the fact that a seed head would form on the plant...and from that would come the little seed I put in the ground next year.

What a miracle growth is...and how lucky I was to have been given a part in the process! I felt like a partner with God, who made sure the soil was warm enough to plant in the spring and the sun was there to make things grow during the summer. Then in the fall—my favorite time of year—He made it cool so the crop would mature for harvest.

My role in all this was humble—simply to turn the soil and run the machines and take the crop to market so that others besides Mary Ann and I could benefit from the partnership with Him.

As I stood there in the early morning light, I realized that by farming, I was bearing witness for Him. That's why I had become a farmer...and why I will forever remain one at heart.

—Joe McWilliams, Plainview, Texas

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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER/96

Article 18



## Barn Still Here Despite Winds

WE LIVE in the Oklahoma Panhandle, where the wind can really blow! Several years ago, it blew so hard it nearly knocked down our barn. When the storm was over, the whole barn was leaning to one side (see photo above).

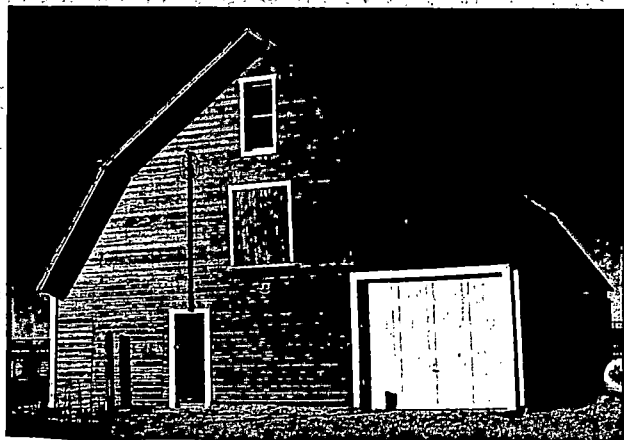
We were told when we bought this place in 1981 that the barn was built about 1925. Till the storm hit, the old barn had been in pretty good shape.

After the storm, we used three big winch trucks and some cables running through the barn to pull the structure back upright. All the nails had to be reset and hammered back in.

We also set well-casings on two sides of the barn, then bolted the barn to the casings. Now it will take a really big wind to knock over our barn again. Inspired by photos in *F&RL*, we repainted the barn, giving it a nice new exterior of red and white (below).

We use the barn for hogs and have 12 farrowing crates inside. We fully expect the barn to be around for at least another 70 years... despite the Oklahoma wind.

—Steve Johnson, Boise City, Oklahoma



## Article 19

# HARVEST

Fall always brings in many letters from readers about harvesting in the Old Days. Here are a few samples.

## Meal Only Came Once a Year

THRESHING was about the best time of year when I was a boy. For one thing, the meals were better than at Christmas—we got to eat like kings at each farm on the circuit for more than 2 weeks straight!

I got my first threshing job—taking jugs of fresh water to the men who loaded bundles on the wagons—when I was 10. The jugs were covered with wet burlap, and I carried them on my pony, “Dandy”.

When I was 11, I also had to arrange straw in Wayne Ellison’s haymow. With its low roof, the mow was too small a space for an adult to work in, so I had to get up there and shove the straw away from the blower to the back wall.

It was a hot, dusty job, and I wore a bandanna around my nose so I could breathe. I was proud to have been called upon for that job...and even prouder when, a year later, I started driving a bundle wagon.

I was given two of the finest black mules anywhere as my team. Their names were “Bill” and “Ike”, and they would stand patiently right next to the belt while the wagon was being unloaded and the bundles thrown into the noisy thresher.

Our farm was the third stop on the threshing circuit. That’s because we owned the big Wallis tractor that ran the threshing machine.

We acquired

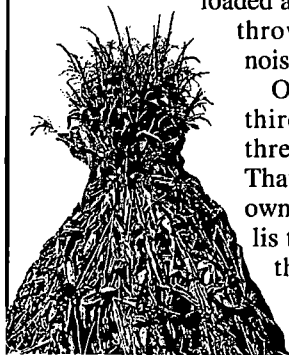
the Wallis by trading 26 mustangs for it. We got the wild mustangs from out West and broke them as workhorses. They were smaller than the usual workhorse, which meant they didn’t eat as much and, with their little feet, they were less likely to step on the corn while cultivating.

There were usually about 10 farms on the threshing circuit, and the last was always Sam Ewings’ place. He only had a few acres of grain but insisted that the whole crew come and thresh. Everyone did—it was the last dinner of the threshing season and pretty spectacular.

Steak...apple salad with real walnuts and marshmallows...sweet potatoes...several kinds of pie—we ate until we hurt. After all, just like Christmas, that meal at Sam Ewings’ only came once a year!

—Ken Fulk

Wildomar, California





Article 20



## 'He Is With the Lord He Loved'

SEVERAL DAYS before my father died, he explained to me how he wanted to be remembered. "I've been a lifelong farmer who tilled the soil and took good care of my livestock," he said.

It's amazing to me how a few simple words can mean so much. Dad's name was Wilbur Hey. He was born in the family farmhouse in the Finger Lakes Region of New York in 1915 and lived in that same house all his life.

He started milking cows when he was 7 and took over the farm at 18. He had a herd of Holsteins and also raised some sheep. The crops he grew to feed his

animals were hay, corn, wheat and oats.

Dad once remarked that each time he and Mom had a child, he would have to work a little harder to produce a little more. In a

way, that was his legacy—he didn't just believe in hard work; he loved it, just as he loved the soil and his animals.

After he died, for a while it was hard for me to go back to the farm. Now I feel his presence there, and it makes me happy. I know that Dad is with the Lord he loved...and that we will see him again someday.

—Lois Barrow  
Hartwell, Georgia



This Photo: John H. H. Photo: Anthony Mazzurco