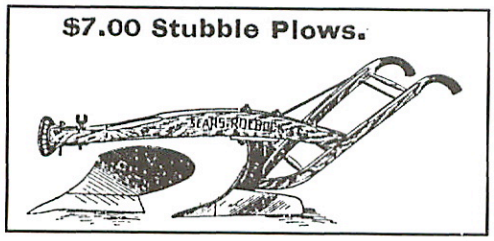
Farming

The homesteading era, with the influx of thousands of people of all nationalities, quickly changed this area from the wild west of big ranches to a more domestic nature. The farms became diversified, producing grain, livestock, vegetables and poultry in order to provide all the necessities of living.

The first, and for a long time, the only farming implement early homesteaders had available was the walking plow with a breaker bottom. This basic machine, costing about $7, would be drawn by either horses or oxen with the farmer walking behind, driving the team and holding the plow upright. This plow cut and turned over one strip of sod 12 to 14 inches wide, so it is easy to see that preparing the prairie for farming in those early days was a slow task. But farming wasn't the only use for the breaking plow. In this area of few trees or other building material, the early homesteader would use the one commodity that was available — sod. The strips turned over by the breaking plow would be built into walls, something like laying bricks, and often used to cover the roof, as well. With a door and window installed, a cheap and relatively comfortable dwelling served the purposes of many early settlers.

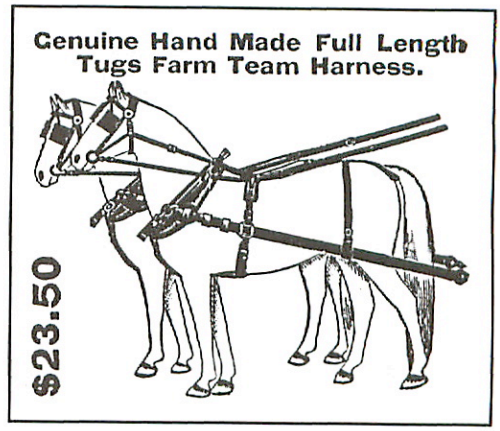


Of course, many of the early settlers had no horses or oxen to start with, and in order to comply with strict homesteading laws had to hire their plowing done, usually at a cost of $3 to $4 per acre.

After the sod had been turned over, it was seeded either by hand broadcasting or by a carried whirlwind seeder which scattered it quite uniformly. The seed would then be covered by using some kind of a home-made brush drag. If the farmer was planting corn, he would merely drop the seed in the newly cut furrow and it would be covered on the next round. No cultivation was necessary as weeds never grew on newly broken sod.

In the early homesteading days, all the hay was cut with a hand scythe and gathered together with a homemade wooden rake; the first job my grandfather had after coming to Sims was cutting hay for Ben Ramsland with such equipment. Of course, the hay had to be brought in from the field, and with very few draft animals or wagons in the area, most of the folks transported it as they had in the old country, on their backs.

A team of horses would cost a farmer about $400 in those days, plus the cost of harnesses, while a yoke (team) of oxen would cost only about $200, and would need only a wooden yoke to pull any equipment. Oxen were very slow, however; and my dad, who hauled hay for Ben Ramsland with oxen, said that in fly season they were very hard to manage. When badly bothered by the flies, they would just head for the nearest patch of trees or brush, paying no attention to anyone's 'gees' or 'haws'. Some of the more ingenious farmers were able to save money by making very serviceable harnesses from rope. Mr. Ramsland was one who made this kind of equipment and also made a hand powered threshing machine when everyone else was threshing their grain with a flail. He made the threshing cylinder for his machine from a large round timber with nails driven into it. Dad said that Mr. Ramsland also had the first mower and the first grain binder in the area. When the first mowers became available, they cost about $60 and a horse-drawn rake about $25.



Unloading wheat at Sims to go on the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Grain was grown as a cash crop, of course, and could be sold at the Timmerman Store in Sims as there was no grain elevator. All the grain had to be sacked on the farm, hauled to Sims and weighed on the wagon scale in front of the store, graded, and then loaded directly into boxcars parked on the siding.

When haying season came around, the big ranchers would

be sure to start early, and with a mower cut a swath around as big an area as they could, sometimes enclosing a section or more of prime unclaimed hay land. It was understood that the area within that circle was his to cut for hay and serious trouble could result if anyone went inside and took for themselves. Sometimes the big operators claimed so much in their circle that smaller farmers and ranchers had no other place to put up feed for their stock and were forced to go inside and cut. This frequently caused trouble and friction between families that often lasted for generations.

In this dry area few streams could be depended on for a year-around water supply, so wells had to be dug. The first were very shallow wells, dug by hand and curbed with rock, with the water drawn by a bucket and rope. The well drilling machine was a welcome invention. It was powered by a team of horses walking in a circle turning a shaft (tumble rod) through a set of differential gears. The 'tumble rod' in turn operated the gears which turned the drilling bucket and dug the well. The first hand pumps were made of wood and were efficient for shallow wells. The windmill, patented in 1867, was a great help for ranchers with the need to supply water at remote locations. Most of the early windmill towers were made of wood.

Just finding a place to drill for water was a chancy operation and usually done by a "water witch" or "dowser." This person would hold a forked stick, a small tree branch, in front of him and walk across the prairie. As he crossed an underground supply of water, the stick was supposed to point to the ground, indicating the place to drill. Some people were more successful at this operation than others, and whether it can be classified as an art or a science, it worked, and still works, amazingly well.

The earliest cash crop was flax, commonly grown on newly broken sod as there was no competition from weeds. And it was for flax that the newly developed reaper was first brought into the country. Other small grains grown for feed and for cash, then as now, were wheat, oats, barley and corn. The corn was usually 'hogged off' in the field if pigs were raised, or cut, shocked and fed through the winter if it was intended for cattle food. Many farmers also raised a few sheep, primarily for their wool, so the spinning wheel and loom to make yarn and cloth for clothing were common household items, making these early settlers even more self-supporting.

As horses became more plentiful and affordable, they gradually replaced the oxen, and it wasn't long before a span of those slow moving beasts became more and more of a novelty until today they can be seen only on special occasions, like county fairs. Farming with horses was hard work, not only during the work day, but in off hours and off months, too. Horses took a lot of feed when kept in the barn, and a lot of pasture when turned loose. Temporarily patching harness was an everyday chore during the work season just to keep operating, and during the winter, repairing and oiling all the sets of harness was regular work. We usually bought half of a hide of leather just to use for patching and repair, and when we had them all in shape, a good soaking in neatsfoot oil would lengthen the harness life and make them more pliable and easier to work with. In the fall our horses were turned out on the free range on some open land south of our place and we would ride down to check them about once a week.

Harness I repaired and oiled during winter months - 1939.

Eight horses on three bottom plow. Tractor and plow following. — 1942

When Barney and I started farming in 1928, we used only horses; breaking sod with a team of eight, four in the lead and four behind. We were using six horses on the drill and disc at the same time so it meant feeding and harnessing fourteen horses each morning. The horses were expected to pull an implement 20 miles a day, that is 20 rounds on a ½ mile field. My favorite six horse team was five mules and a bay gelding, and with them it was no problem to make 20 miles a day or more. Backsetting, or plowing the second time, also took eight horses, but in following years we used eight horses on a three bottom stubble plow. We didn't have a three bottom horse plow but instead used a tractor plow with power lift with no pole or seat. Standing on the plow beam all day was tiring, and turning at the end of the field was a tricky maneuver.

When working four to six horses abreast on grain drills, disc harrows, etc., we had reins only on the center team. The other two or four horses were controlled by jockey sticks and hold-back straps. The jockey stick was usually a round metal rod, about three feet long with a snap on each end. One end was snapped to the hame of the center horse, and the other was snapped to the outer ring of the bridle of the outer horse. The hold-back strap was fastened to the belly band of the center horse, and snapped to the inner bridle ring of the outer horse. This sounds complicated, but it was a very satisfactory system.

We had to watch the horses' shoulders for sores, especially in the spring before their winter coat of hair had been shed.

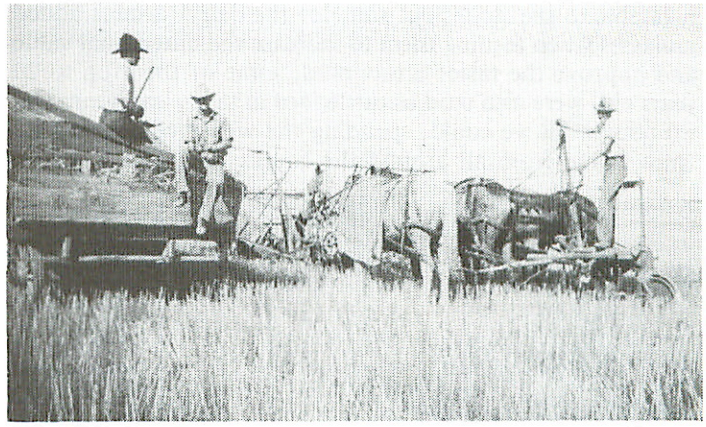
And because young horses' shoulders were extremely tender, we usually used soft open-throat canvas collars on them which also allowed the air to circulate more freely. When gall sores did appear, we used several kinds of salve that worked quite well to help the healing process. Different problems were evident when using horses on a mower because the extra weight on their necks and the vibration of the machine often caused a sore neck. When that happened, we had several different kinds of pads to use, the most effective being one made of deer skin.

Of course, farming with horses required breaking or training a few young horses each spring as replacements. One of the ways this was done was with a sturdily built two-wheel cart made just for this purpose. The young bronc would be teamed with a steady, reliable older horse, hitched to the cart, and started off on which was usually a wild ride. In the days of few fences, this worked quite well; but after barbed wire was strung across the prairie, you had to have a way to stop this headlong rush short of disaster. We sometimes put what we called a "W" hitch on the front feet of the young horse to accomplish this. This involved a rope attached to one front fetlock by a strap; the rope from the one foot ran through a ring on the belly-band of the harness, down through the ring on the strap around the other fetlock, up through a ring on the harness hame and back to the driver. Pulling on this rope would make the young horse either slow down or fall down. In the spring of 1942, I broke three horses for work and five for saddle and, of course, was involved in many spills and incidents in the process; but luckily no serious injuries or accidents occurred. As I look back now, I can't imagine pressing my luck as I did. Maybe it's lucky I wasn't as old then as I am now or the job would never have been done!

The big ponderous steam engines, fueled with coal, wood or straw and pulling 10 to 12 bottom plows were the first heavy farm machinery to be used on the prairies. They were perfect for breaking sod, as they were very slow and the plows they pulled would roll the turf over in one unbroken strip. These early plows were fitted with a separate lifting lever for each bottom, and at the end of the field it kept one man hopping just to lift each bottom out of the furrow and then drop them back down again after the rig had turned. Several such steamers were in use in this area, operated by such as: C.W. Wright, Morton James, W.W. Bond, Herman Timpe, Tenius Ramsland, Peter Hoovestol, and I'm sure others I have failed to mention.

Gasoline tractors didn't come into the picture until about 1920, and in 1925 a Fordson could be bought for about $500. The first tractor I can remember was a Fordson, bought by Johnny Larson who lived just north of Sims. Shortly after he bought it, he was plowing next to a creek bank when the bank caved in and the tractor rolled over, pinning Johnny beneath it. Help came to get him out, but he never regained his health and died a few years later. Our first tractor was also a Fordson on steel wheels which we bought at an auction sale for $375. It was a typical Fordson of that day and caused us many problems, especially starting it on cold mornings. After driving it a few days, Barney developed ulcers, caused, we thought, by the fact that the exhaust was right under the seat and the fumes were around him all the time.

This country was in a very dry cycle in the early thirties and the small grain crops, although headed out, never grew tall enough to be cut and tied with a binder. Consequently, the 'header' came into use and proved to be the perfect



Header and header box.

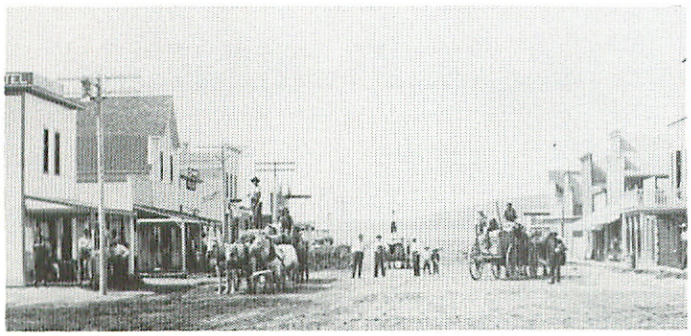
harvesting machine for the short grain. The header machine was pulled, or really pushed, by a six horse team and would cut the grain and elevate it into a header box on a wagon being pulled alongside by a separate team. The cut grain would then be drawn to a central location where it was pitched off into stacks about 12 by 16 feet. Two header boxes were used so that the header could run steadily. It took at least a five man crew to harvest this way: one header operator, two header box drivers who also did the unloading, one stacker and one man to spread the cut grain as it was elevated into the box. The header cut a 12 foot swath and about 30 acres harvested per day was average unless the stand was very heavy. In the thirties, the yield was not very good and 10 bushels per acre of wheat was considered excellent. We harvested a lot of three bushel wheat.

Prices were just as poor as the yields and I well remember selling wheat for 25¢ per bushel. Pauline Anderson gave me a price list taken from the *Killdeer Herald* of December 27, 1932, quoting these prices paid by the Farmer's Elevator of Killdeer: wheat - 17¢, barley - 4¢, oats - 1¢, rye - 7¢, and flax - 80¢ per bushel! You can easily calculate a return of 51¢ per acre of three bushel wheat. My brother, Thorliev, threshed for most of our neighbors at that time at a rate of 5¢ a bushel for wheat and 3¢ for oats. The oats, if sold, would not even pay for the threshing!

In 1931, Barney and I raised quite a few hogs and had planted 80 acres of corn just north of the hog lot so they could hog it off in the fall. We drove them back into the pen each night so they were accustomed to being chased and in December when they were ready for market, we decided to drive them into the stockyards in Almont, as we had no truck, and hauling 68 hogs by the wagon load would take many trips. It was a crazy idea but worked out quite well, even crossing the bridge at Otto Felands; but we found out, however, that if a hog makes up his mind to go home, you might as well let him go with your blessing! When wheat was at 25¢, we decided we didn't want to sell for that, so we bought more hogs and tried to fatten them on the wheat. Although we made out all right, we did have some problems as they were evidently getting too much protein and not enough carbohydrates. We should have consulted our county agent before experimenting that way.

1934 was a very dry year and there was practically no harvest to speak of. The Russian thistles grew quite well though, so they were our main hay crop; and, in fact, throughout the thirties, thistle hay was our main source of feed. If they were cut while young and tender, they were quite

palatable to the stock; but some of the dairy farmers added molasses when feeding them to increase the nutritional value and improve the taste. Straw piles, some of them up to 20 years old, were also used as cattle feed in those lean years and we bought all we could, spending the whole winter hauling straw home from all around the country.



Loads of sacked grain about 1910.

1935 was a pretty good year and the grain grew well as we received about normal rainfall, but the wheat yield was cut severely by rust as strains of wheat resistant to that blight was just being developed. A lot of wheat that year weighed only 30 pounds to the bushel, 60 pound wheat is about normal. The crop was about worthless. In 1936, the rains never came and it turned out to be the driest year ever. The grass never did turn green and not even thistles would grow. Very hot temperatures and hot, dry winds out of the south made conditions even worse.

During these dry years, as if the drought wasn't enough to put up with, grasshoppers added to our problems. When they invaded the country, they feasted on anything and everything green, except that they didn't like thistles. They didn't like the hot weather either and would cling to the north side of fence posts as thickly as they could in order to stay out of the sun. From a distance the posts seemed to grow in size! When we did harvest in those days, it was a race against the hoppers as every day could make a big difference in the yield. One year in the thirties, I don't remember just which, army worms marched through, mowing down everything in their path. They moved straight through the country and when they came to an obstacle, be it fence post, house or other building, they went right over the top!

During the early 30's, largely because of conditions I have just described, many of our Almont area farmers left their farms in North Dakota and headed for Montana and further west. With crops so very poor, there was little or no income and more and more people faced foreclosure on their farms. In 1933, Governor Langer, in a bold attempt to stop this loss of family farms, declared a moratorium on farm foreclosures, enforced by the National Guard. His actions were illegal at the time they were taken, but the U.S. Congress, also recognizing the need for drastic action, soon approved the issuance of moratoriums on farm foreclosures. Yet there were still many farmers who could not even pay the taxes on their acreage, and if these went unpaid for five years, anyone could get title to that land by paying all that was due. Much land changed ownership under these conditions with real estate companies, lawyers, doctors or other individuals with available money acquiring a lot of cheap land.

In 1939 I rented grassland in Grant County for $40 per section per year from the Bondholders Bureau in Minneapolis, while the actual taxes on that land were $60 per section. After renting, the Company's agent in Carson offered me a warranty deed to section 17-136-86 for $100 plus unpaid taxes, making a net cost of about $2.50 per acre. I bought a section and a half under these terms and could have acquired two more sections of the same good grassland, but we didn't have that kind of money available.

When we started farming and raising cattle in Grant County, we also milked cows, raised quite a few hogs, had a flock of chickens and worked a large garden, keeping both Margie and I quite busy. On one occasion I went about a mile south of our farmstead to pick corn for the hogs and had snapped a pretty good-sized load into a header box mounted on a steel wheeled wagon and was on my way home when I met Margie on a saddle horse on her way into the pasture to get the milk cows. She said, "I'm in a hurry as I have bread in the oven. Can we trade, I'll take your team home and you fetch the cows?" I helped her through the pasture gate and she started for home while I headed out into the pasture. The team I had been using and which Margie was now driving was a small pair of dual purpose horses which I used both for pulling and riding. When I came home, the header box and the load of corn was up against the south wall of the barn, covering the four foot door! Margie had been in a hurry to get home to her bread and let the team break into a trot, which got faster and faster. With the corn bouncing more and more behind them, and the fact that they were headed for the barn, the horses soon broke into a gallop, and by then Margie knew she had a runaway! The team headed for the open barn door and both went in at once with the wagon stopping so short that all the corn slid to the front end! Luckily Margie wasn't hurt, but it must have been an abrupt stop! The horses weren't hurt either and only one harness strap was broken.

Farming and ranching has always been a hazardous occupation and we had extremely good fortune in escaping serious injuries, not only this time but on many other occasions, also. I know that as a young man I took many chances that were dangerous and often foolish. I wouldn't think of pressing my luck to that extent now.

Ranching

Early settlers on these northern plains soon realized that it was great cattle country, and perhaps it should have been left as native grassland, as the ranchers and others before them believed. As we now look back, it is easier to understand what that Indian was really saying when he approached John Christianson breaking the virgin prairie sod just east of what is now New Salem. The Indian reached down, turned a piece of the newly broken sod back in place and solemnly stated, "Wrong side up."

In the 1880's the first of many large cattle herds, sometimes numbering up to 10,000 head, were driven up from Texas and surrounding states to these vast northern plains. The Texas cowboys, accustomed to the long, coarse grass of the southern plains, at first thought the cattle would surely starve on the short grass covering these hills. They soon realized that this grass had strength and food value unknown to them and that cattle grazing here would actually fatten for the market without supplemental feeding. One such Texas cowboy, Ben C. Bird, took part in a number of cattle drives to this country before deciding to settle down and stay in this area.

Ben Bird - taken at Weeks Brothers Rodeo - 1922.

The Northern Pacific Railroad Co., recognizing the need for facilities to handle the ever increasing cattle population, soon constructed a 20 pen stockyard in Sims from which to ship to the markets in either St. Paul or Chicago. Ranchers from as far away as northern South Dakota drove their cattle to Sims as this was their closest shipping point.

The Beisigl brothers, originally from Minnesota but ranching in the Lemmon, South Dakota area were among those who shipped out of Sims. Because of the distance and possible delays involved, they kept a parcel of land in the Sims area where they could graze their cattle until rail cars arrived. They also had a spread up in the Grassy Butte area. Two of the brothers married Kling girls of New Salem, who were aunts of Mrs. Margido (Caroline) Willman of Almont. In 1935 the Beisigls moved to California.

Another large livestock operation was the Riverside Ranch Co., established in 1883 with headquarters south of Mandan. In 1898 this company controlled 23,680 acres, plus having access to additional free grazing on public lands. A branch of the Riverside operation managed by Steve Weekes, was on the Heart River about 12 miles south of Sims, also taking in the lake bed area north of Carson. This operation by itself ran about 2,000 head of cattle, 400 horses and 4,000 sheep, making it a frequent user of the Sims stockyard. Mr. Weekes later bought out that branch of the Riverside operation. He always employed a number of young people in his operation, including my dad and his sister, Anna, who both worked at the Weekes ranch in the early years after they came to Sims.

Mrs. Steve Weekes, who was of Norwegian decent, came to the Morton County area in 1871. She came to visit us at the farm a few times, and always requested that we sing "Kan du Glemme Gamle Norge." She told of how the Indians had tried to kidnap her oldest son, Steve, Jr. She had left him in a swing in the yard, and as she checked on him from the kitchen window, she saw an Indian running off with him. She ran out of the house screaming, which attracted the men on the ranch, who came running from the barn. The screaming must have been too much for the Indian as he dropped the child and fled.

When cattle were wintered in that dry lake bed area with no open water, all water for the stock had to be pumped by hand. A well house, large enough to provide living quarters, was built over the pump and Charles Jacobsen of Sims was employed for the winter for the sole purpose of pumping water — a full-time job!

Steve Weekes, like other large ranchers, both in real life and in the movies, was firmly opposed to homesteaders coming into his grazing area, and would let them know in very emphatic and no uncertain terms. The 'Nesters', however, were a stubborn lot and made it very plain that they were here to stay. I remember one time when we were living in

Sims, I was with some kids playing in the street when Mr. Weekes came by in his buggy and ordered us into our house! His tone of voice, plus the large herd of cattle we saw coming into town from the south, left no room for doubt. We scooted into the house and stayed there until the last rider had passed!

The Tysdale, Wade, Ferguson and McGregor ranchers from north of McIntosh, South Dakota told of frequently shipping out of Sims, a cattle drive of about 75 miles that would come right across the land that is now our home place. We were amused by the name they gave to the little creek through here. They called it 'Deep Creek', obviously not because of the depth of the water, but the banks are about 15 feet deep, making it difficult to drive cattle across.

Laura Holritz told of 'Caboose Hops', a locomotive and a caboose only, coming out of Mandan on several occasions to pick up a trainload of cattle at Sims bound for market. We don't know how many carloads comprised a trainload in those days.

A story was told about groups of cowboys from two different outfits meeting at opposite ends of a bridge just out of Sims. The very natural question arose as to which group would cross first. I'm not sure who won but I'm told the discussion got rather loud and violent. In those days of little or no other recreation, cowboys often looked for any excuse for excitement.

A 1902 North Dakota State Brand Book show 70 cattle and horse brands registered to people with a Sims address.

In the 1890's, new federal regulations required that all cattle be dipped for scab. To meet this requirement, a large dipping operation was set up about six miles west of Sims, just east of what is now the Sam Thiel farm, managed by Oscar Feland and Louie Hamre with Emil Willman as bookkeeper. It consisted mainly of a chute leading to a large, deep tank filled with the dipping solution. All cattle would be held in the surrounding area until their turn came, and at that time they would be driven into the chute and forced into the tank to be totally submerged, including their head. Quite naturally, the location of this operation came to be known as 'Scab Creek'. A similar facility was also operated by the Weekes ranch on the Heart River.

Licensed veterinarians were located in Bismarck or Mandan, and as we didn't have trucks or trailers for transporting livestock, we had to treat the sick animals ourselves. If we couldn't handle the situation, we would call on our local practicing veterianrians — Simon Johnson, Joe Pederson and George Monson. At times they were kept very busy.

There was not much fencing done in the early years, in fact Territorial Law stated, "It shall be lawful for cattle, horses, mules, ponies, swine, goats and sheep to run at large from December 1 to April 1 each year, except within the corporate limits of cities and villages." Because of that law, no claim for damages done by livestock to standing grain, haystacks, etc. could be made during the winter months. During summer months livestock owners were liable for such damages; however, so herding was generaly done to keep animals within their grazing area. Joe Hoovestrol herded cattle on the site of Almont, before it was a town. The Hoovestol family lived on a farm nearby. This law stayed in effect until sometime in the 1940's when it was repealed.

With the scarcity of fences, it is understandable that livestock, especially horses, were not easily acquainted with the finer points of barb wire fencing. The result was that many animals were badly wire-cut from running against it. To avoid this, some horse pastures were fenced with smooth wire.

An often misunderstood sight was two parallel fences about 12 feet apart, causing most folks to imagine that neighboring ranchers really didn't get along very well! The real reason for this arrangement in most cases was to protect the horses. With horses in each pasture, especially stallions if they met at the fence, they would probably rear up and strike at each other with their front feet and possibly catch their fetlock in the barb wire, causing very bad cuts. The separation of a few feet kept that from happening.

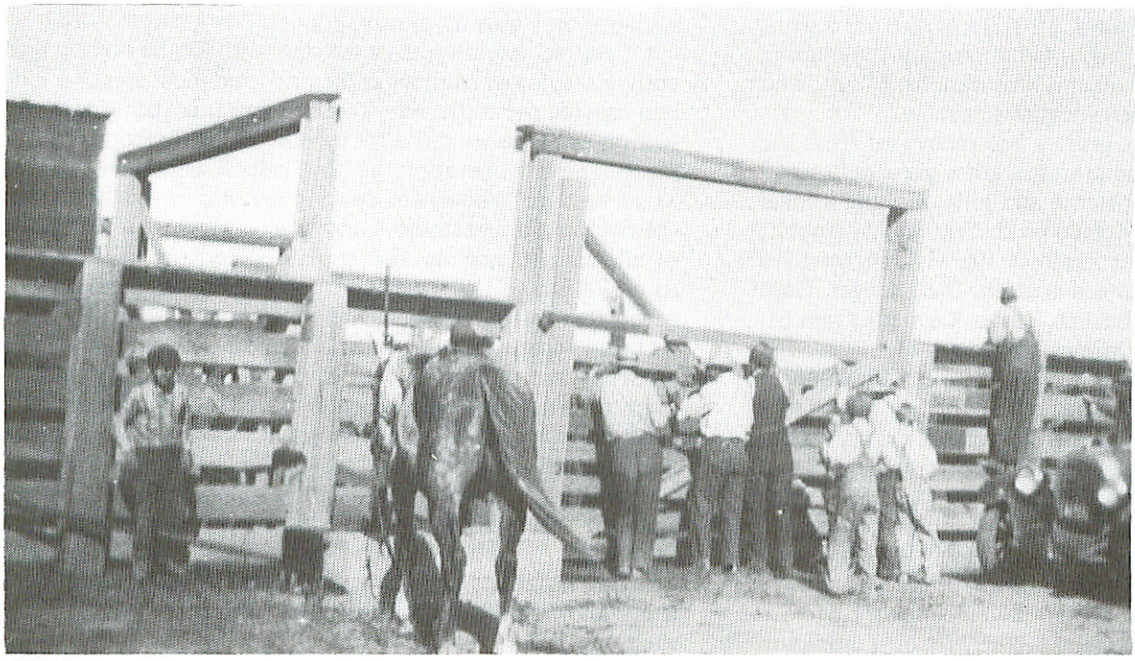
As old-timers will remember and travelers will have seen, in Norway fences were commonly made of the ever abundant rocks. One of the first Norwegian settlers to this area, Ben Ramsland, made such a fence on his ranch in the Ramsland Hills. Part of that rock fence is still standing!

Some of the early settlers elected to try their hand with raising sheep instead of cattle. Otto Feland told about a sheep operation he and his brother, Rudolph, ran from 1890 to 1894, grazing their flock on what is now the townsite of Almont and along Owen's Creek, about a mile south. The creek, named after Frank Owens who had a large sheep camp about four miles further west, is the one going by Lover's Cliff. Mr. Feland also told about a Mr. Hauser who, in1896, got a permit to run 10,000 sheep on railroad land in this area. With railroad land being only the odd numbered sections, and all unfenced, it proved to be too much of a problem keeping the animals out of neighboring settlers land, and the operation lasted only one year.

The shipping of cattle every fall was a gala event, especially for the big ranchers, and it usually called for a celebration by the cowboys (who didn't need much of an excuse) once the cattle were safely in the stockyards. Along with riding through the street firing their six-shooters, some of the more daring rode their horses right into the saloons! On one such occasion at the Hurley Saloon in Almont, the floor gave way and horse and rider fell into the cellar. Extracting the horse, of course, proved to be quite a problem, and on this instance the rider was fined $15.

$\frac{o}{o}$ herefords

It was a big day for town kids, too, when Steve Weekes shipped his cattle; as he enjoyed scattering handfuls of coins on the street just to watch the kids scramble for them. Mr. Weekes also liked to show off and entertain during these flush times by lighting his cigars with greenbacks!



Almont stockyard.

When a herd of cattle arrived at the stockyards for shipping, prior arrangements would have been made to have sufficient empty stock cars on hand for loading. If only a few cars were to be loaded, the local men could spot an empty car at the loading chute, and after it was filled with cattle, could start it moving with a 'pinch bar' behind a wheel. After that, three or four men could keep it rolling and push it away from the pens. If there were a large number of cars to be loaded, we would have to wait for the local freight train to arrive, usually between 10 a.m. and 12 noon on Saturday. Then the train crew would spot and move the cars and would come with their sticks and help prod and 'poke' the cattle up the ramp into the car — the beginning of the term, "Cow Poke."

The Almont stockyards were built shortly after the town was started, but they were not as large as the Sims yards, having only six pens and two loading chutes. A scale was built into the yards for weighing a few head, and the N.P. Railroad provided a good well for watering the stock. The Almont Shipping Association was soon organized, with Sigval Olson as Manager. This was a very efficient organization and in the early days the yards were quite busy, with shipping activity almost every Saturday during the Fall. With many small operators in the country, if one man didn't have enough stock for a full car, he would list his stock with Sig, who would then be able to arrange for a full load. Sometimes he would have to arrange for a mixed load of hogs and cattle in order to fill a car. In those instances the stock car would be partitioned.

Conditions in the general area were still very favorable for ranching during the early 1900's. Though the days of the very large operation were gone, most medium sized ranches continued to flourish, and many farmers diversified their holdings by adding a herd of beef cattle. The drought of the 30's hit very hard though and many operators had to make adjustments. 1936 was the driest I have ever experienced. The grass never did turn green and not even thistles would grow! That meant that in order to save our cattle we had to graze them on any old grass stand we could find. My brother Barney and I had bought a herd of good quality Hereford cows in 1934 for $20 per head and during the summer months of 1936 I herded them about six miles south of our place. We soon faced the choice of selling out and giving up, or finding a place to winter our herd, so that Fall the two of us took off touring the state to try to find suitable winter grazing and feed. We tried all the various government agencies, such as the Greater North Dakota Association in Fargo, but no one could advise us of any available place to take our cattle.

About that time Andrew Willman came home to Almont from working with a shock threshing crew in the Sheyenne, N.D. area. He told us of a former sheep camp with large areas of good grass on the Ft. Totten Indian Reservation, which could be rented. He said that hay could be bought from the Indians and more could be cut. After quickly checking this out further, we and the Willman brothers decided to go for it. George Ormiston, facing the same problems we were, heard of our venture and asked to throw in with us, which we okayed. This made a total of about 500 head of cattle to be moved.

We then approached the Northern Pacific Railroad and were able to make an arrangement, whereby they would transport the cattle, all horses needed for riding and working, and machinery for haying, from Almont to Sheyenne and return in the spring, all for a one way charge. We felt very fortunate, and grateful to the N.P.R.R.

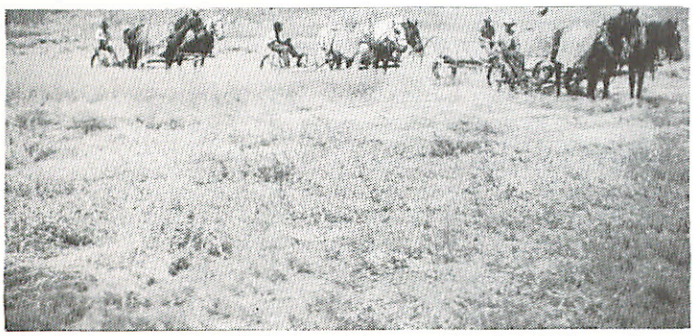
The horses and machinery with six men, two from each outfit, were shipped first and work was begun immediately partitioning off the end of a large sheep barn on the property, and converting it to living quarters. By the time the cattle arrived, we had purchased hay from the Indians and the Fort Totten Indian Agency and had commenced to cut and put up our own crop of prairie hay. What followed was a long, hard winter with lots of snow and record breaking low temperatures. A full crew of six men stayed throughout the winter, with plenty of work for all of them, what with having to daily feed the cattle by hand with pitch-forks. Thorliev was cook for the crew while Barney and I changed off spending time there.

We brought the cattle back to Almont on June 10, 1937, just three days before Margie and I were married. It had been raining for a week or more so prospects for grass were good at that time. Things didn't develop quite as well as expected though, and the grasshoppers were again a very serious problem; but the Russian thistles grew well so they were the main source of feed that Fall.

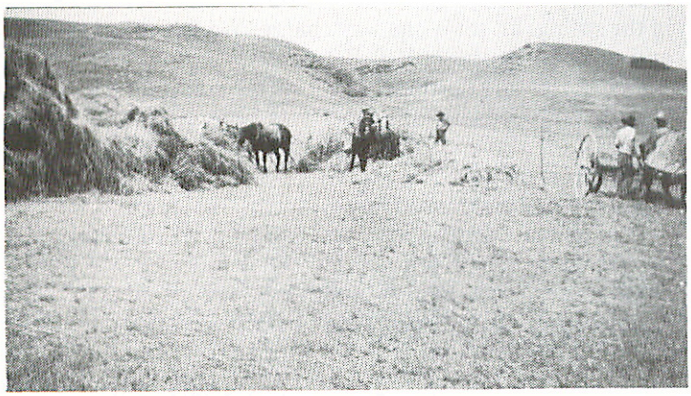
Margie and I started ranching down in Grant County a couple years after we were married, and those first years were very interesting. Each and every one of the farming and ranching operations involved manual labor and horse power, usually

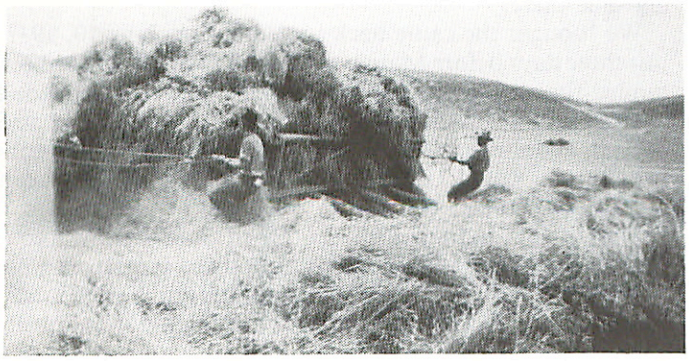
running to 14 and 16 hour days. In spite of the hard work and long hours, we enjoyed much company; including Margie's relatives from St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minn., who generally spent their summer vacations with us.

In 1939 most of the native grasses had recovered from the severe drought years and the gramma grass grew dense and 12 to 16 inches high on the priairie and hills, making it ideal for haying. I probably would have tackled the job by myself, with Margies help, but that summer the visiting relatives earned their keep! My 15-year-old nephew, Dick Kruger, from Mandan and Margies two cousins, Buster Kennedy from St. Paul and Ben Gardner from Minneapolis, ages 16 and 18, and I put up all the gramma grass on section 17. We operated three mowers and one rake and then bucked all the hay into stacks — all with horse-drawn equipment. We turned the horses out to graze the whole section each night so each morning we had a little round-up before being able to go to work. I had the extra chore of getting up at 4:00 a.m. each day to sharpen sickles as the tough grass made it necessary to have two sharpened sickles for each mower in order to get through the day. Margie's brother, Burt, would have been working with us, too; but he had employment at the Nelson-Templeton Hardware Store during that summer, but came out often to socialize and give us moral support.



City boys — summer help.



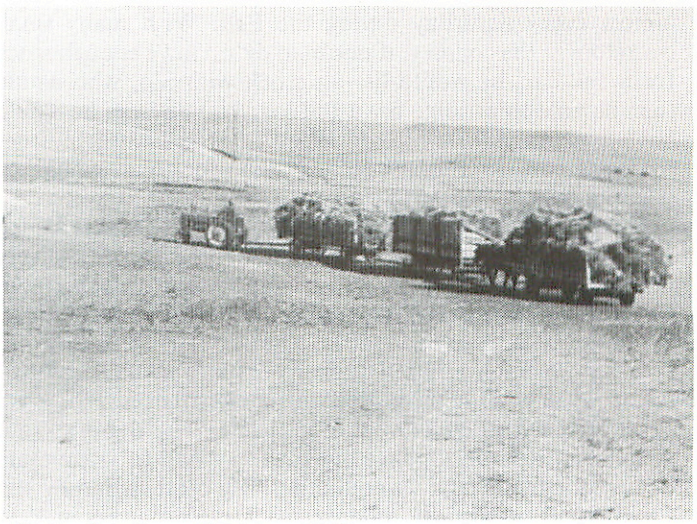


Of course, haying wasn't the only activity the boys helped with that summer, and what they enjoyed most was checking and moving the cattle. We were running four pastures of one section each, so we did a lot of moving cattle from place to place. The last operation the boys helped with before having to go back to school was hauling green corn bundles from the field into a trench silo. That was by far the heaviest work of all, but the boys never complained and were always able to make fun of the worst and dirtiest jobs. It goes without saying that with a crew made up of city boys of that age group, working with farm machinery and some rather green saddle horses, some interesting and exciting events were bound to happen. And they did, but with no serious consequences.

These lads worked with me for a number of summers after that and became quite adept at farming and ranching — well, maybe the corn rows weren't planted quite straight, and maybe some of the machinery tended to break down a little more frequently, but they were needed and appreciated helpers, bringing a fresh viewpoint and outlook to our operations. I think and hope they also benefited from that rural break to their city life.

All of these young men enlisted in the Service during World War II, leaving us without our accustomed summer help. When that happened, Margie pitched in to help me as much as possible, and became quite an accomplished ranch hand.

In the fall of 1942 or '43, we decided to ship a carload of steers to St. Paul. Margie, Barney and I rode out to section 9 to cut out the stock for shipping. Margie had the job of holding the selected steers in a group as Barney and I brought them out of the herd. I was riding a green young horse which was not responding to my liking and seeing as how Margie was riding a better cutting horse, we traded. That evening Margie said, "If I have to ride that dumb horse tomorrow, I want spurs!" Well, she had a fine pair that Thorliev had made her, and the next morning she was mounted on the same horse, wearing the spurs. We had gone only about a mile toward town when we met a truck, and when her horse started acting up a bit, maybe she spurred him and held him back at the same time, but no matter the cause, he reared up and went over backwards! Margie was unhurt and got back on and stayed with us the rest of the eight miles into Almont, but from that time, she has never been completely comfortable on any horse.



Sig hauling hay - 3 racks - 1943.