

Times To Remember



by Robert Thompson

My wife and I are senior citizens, and our parents were pioneer settlers of Douglas County.

My wife Hilda was born and raised on a farm east of Evansville, Minnesota. She was the daughter of Erick and Helen Ediem, her father Erick came from Norway, and her mother Helen was the daughter of the pioneer family Herbranson who farmed north of the village of Evansville, Minnesota. Helen was the first child to be baptized in the Norwegian Lutheran Church of the village.

I was born and raised east of the village of Brandon, Minnesota. My fathers name was Thomas, the son of pioneer Ole Thompson, who homesteaded south of Brandon in eighteen sixty eight. The farm was partly in Brandon and some in Moe townships. My mothers name was Maren and she came from Norway. Mother died when I was six years old, and Dad when I was eleven, I had five sisters and one brother, we all lived on a farm until mothers death in nineteen hundred and eight.

Hilda and I have been married over fifty years, and had two sons who are married and have families of their own, their children being the fifth generation of the pioneer families.

Robert Thompson, Author

The title of this book will no doubt bring back memories of long ago, especially to those folks that were born in the early nineteen hundreds. I am sure many of these events are but a repetition of your childhood, as things were much the same in most areas of the United States.

That is the reason why I am writing this little book, so my wife and myself can tell our grand children how things were when we grew up. I have heard this comment made by so many folks. Isn't it too bad that our grandparents failed to write down the events of their lives, from the time they left some home from across the sea perhaps. Just think, if such were the case the record would go back into the past at least a hundred and forty years or more.

True, there are many books that go back centuries, but what I am referring to is our own family history, as that deals with our own heritage. It can become useful in checking back on the family tree as well, and of course will be accurate I am sure.

So we are dedicating this little book to our two sons and their families. To David and Diann, and their children, Robyn, Troy, Darrin and Stacy. To Bruce and De Ette, Sheryl and Nora also to all grand parents and their children who had a part in the history of early America.

Robert Thompson, Author

The place where I grew up had an old log house on the premises, although it was not in use it was well preserved. The barn was also of logs although it had been improved upon by covering the logs with wide boards which ran up and down, the spaces between the boards, being covered with narrow strips or bats as they were called. A hay loft had then been built above the log barn making it quite large.

The log house was a fair sized building also, with an upstairs floor or loft with a rather low ceiling. No doubt the cabin was a comfortable home in its time. The folks that lived there were of Norse descent, and had immigrated here in the late sixties over a hundred years ago. My grandfather also was in this group with his family, although him and another man had been here in the mid sixties as scouts looking for desirable land to homestead. Records have it that the first train arrived in this area in 1869.

When I moved in with this family in nineteen ten, the pioneer mother, Mrs. Hanson, one son and a daughter lived in a huge new house that had been built a few years earlier.

I was a loner you might say, as the farm places where there were children was at least a mile or more away, so I had to amuse myself as best I could and spent many an hour in that old log cabin playing.

Mrs. Hanson was quite elderly when I moved in with them, she did not speak the English language so I had to converse with her in Norwegian, my parents also were of Norse origin so I was familiar with the language. She was a jolly lady even if she had lived through a lot of hardships, her husband had died long before I came to stay with her. She knew all about kids as she had raised thirteen of her own. As the years went by I got to know most of her family, including her grandchildren. When they came to visit their mother they would at times bring their children along, so at times the house was full of people both young and old.

She used to tell me many stories of things that happened on the farm, most of them I have long forgotten, but I do remember one she told quite often. She was baking bread one day, the door open when all of a sudden as she glanced up, there stood a big Indian. She said they stood there looking at one and the other neither one saying a word. He stood like a statue and she was at a loss as to what to do, as the man I am sure could not speak Norse much less English. She picked up a loaf of the newly baked bread walked over and offered it to him, he took it without a word, then pointed to the other loaf on the table, when she had given him that also he left and disappeared into the woods as silently as he had arrived.

She said they had a number of visits from the Indians, but they were always friendly only asking for tobacco as a rule, so they were never harmed by them in any way.

As their land became more settled by the whites they moved westward into the plains, so when I was a kid there were no red men in this area to my knowledge.

I wish this nice old lady would have written a story of her early childhood and her life on the farm as a pioneer mother. She often told of the severe winters, the dread of illness, shortages of food, fear of the Indians of course, and loss of crops due to grasshopper plagues. So, life in her time was no bed of roses to be sure, it is a surprise to most of us that they even survived.

Oxen was the mode of travel, so many of these pioneer men, rather than being bothered, would walk to the nearest trading post or fort for a sack of flour or other items they were in need of and carry it home on their backs. They would sometimes be gone for days leaving mother and the kids on the farm, so I assume there were many anxious moments waiting for dad to come home.

This history of course was long before my time, I merely pass it on to you as it was told to me when I was a youth, the things and events in the booklet, of course, is as I remember it.

Remember when Brandon was introduced to electric lighting? This era was certainly a radical change from kerosene lamps and lanterns.

The plant was located in a garage and it was not a very large building, as it was the first body shop here for a few years, there was some changes made, some more space was added on to the rear, a cement floor replaced the wooded one.

When it was remodeled there was a large cement base in the center of the floor which has held the diesel engine the motive power used for the operation of the generator. Removing this base was needed before we could pour the floor, which by no means was an easy task.

When we were kids it was quite an adventure to visit this plant, stand in open mouth wonder as the engine banged and wheezed away turning the humming generator. The engine has two tremendous fly wheels (the secret of its power) for every exhaust the wheels would increase in speed until the maximum power was reached. There was a governor that controlled the speed so that when it slowed down it would automatically fire more often to carry the load.

When its top speed was reached it would coast along on its momentum until more power was needed, so at times when it became overloaded it became overheated and had to be stopped so that it could cool off, in the cooling process no lights of course, so it was back to the old kerosene lamp until power was restored.

In the early evening when more lights were in use, it had all it could do to keep up, so there was a continuous exhaust of the engine which was heard all over town and on a still night quite a ways into the country.

The lights would dim then grow bright in variation with the speed of the engine, and if you were in the plant when it was running at its full capacity the entire building would vibrate and shake, in fact it seemed it could blow apart in any second.

Do you remember when the highway went right down the main street in Brandon, turned right at the Post Office, north one block and then left at John Renkes store, west past Lunds farm home, north again then left just south of the Jack Korkowski home, then due west past the Brandon cemetery. After crossing the tracks the road continued on west past the Ira Bergh home, from there on it wound its way west following the high ground.

The road was then known as the National Parks Highway. There were cement markers following this road. There are some of these markers still standing.

There are some old buildings from a pioneer homestead still standing. From this place with many a curve, over hills skirting dense woods and lakes, following the old stage lines this road entered Alexandria just east of the depot there.

This highway was rebuilt shortly after the first world war, I helped gravel this road after it was completed in 1919 and 1920.

The road was built by the use of mule teams, also some horses were used. A team of six mules pulled a large sod cutter and elevator, which plowed up the soil and elevated it into dump wagons pulled by a team, which in turn hauled this soil to where it was needed, oh yes there was what was called a pusher team consisting of a team of four mules, coming up behind this elevator.

The men that drove these mules were called mule skimmers. they used long whips that when used properly could be made to crack like a pistol, these drivers were real experts as they could handle these teams on steep hills and side slopes.

Many men were used in this operation, so they had their own cook shack and cook of course. They had bunk houses for the workers, and also feed bunks for the mules and horses, so it was a self contained unit even to an office for the boss man who did the hiring and firing.

Remember when the county fair was held in Chippewa Park north of Brandon? The fair was well attended the two days it was there. It was a beautiful setting but because of the needed public facilities and lack of space it was held there for two years only.

There was a merry-go-round, and some other attractions, some cattle, sheep, farm produce and I believe other exhibits. It was more or less a beginning of a permanent fair in the county, so it actually did spark the establishment of a permanent fair, which has since been held in Alexandria, and has grown to such an extent that it is considered one of the foremost fairs.

Of course there was entertainment by bands during the day, and of course speeches by politicians, and fireworks at night that were sent out over the lake.

Families brought their lunches so stayed on through the day, taking time to go home to do their farm chores and come back for the evening, you guessed it right, lighting was by kerosene lanterns, and of course there was a host of unwelcome visitors, such as flies and ants, and don't pass up the ever present pest the mosquito, even so people enjoyed these two days very much and I am sure there are a number of the older generation that remember many things about this event that I missed.

I have checked with some folks here in the village and it seems the fair was held during the years 1922 and 1923, which goes quite a way into the past, a lot has been said about that we should look forward and forget the past, but how can we appreciate progress unless we think back as to how things used to be when we were kids, and be thankful for the wonderful changes that have taken place in the last fifty years.



Do you remember when the Brandon fire department consisted of a man drawn hose cart and a stationary fire engine run by steam? The engine being located in a small building on main street.

Beside this engine room there was a large well for the storage of water. This well had been dug by hand and was quite deep, it was lined with rock and cement. Beside it was a quite large stock tank, where farmers could water their horses when in town, as horses were the motive power in those days, water was the low test gasoline, that had a part in the operation of this horse power.

Of course all up and down the street were hitching posts to tie the horses to while country people were in town.

There was a fair sized hotel also where Citizens State Bank now is located, to the rear of this site there was a livery stable. Just in case you do not know what a livery stable is, it was a place you could stable your horses just in case you took the Great Northern local train to Alexandria for some reason or another.

This was before the time of buses, so train service was the real mode of travel, as there were several trains each way every day.

When you reached your destination, you either had to rent a horse and buggy or walk. So you had to call a rig as it was called to get to your destination, so naturally the livery stable was called, as they had teams for hire with or without a driver.

This was almost like the present day rent a car, altho much less expensive, as this four legged motive power was propelled by oats, hay and water.

This vehicle would not go fast enough to squeal the wheels around a corner, but I will say one thing, if you were a poor driver, you might loose control of this rig, as these horses came in various speeds and temperment.

This is why it was important to be alert at all times, just in case a dog should take a dislike to the horse and decided it was something to chase, in this case you might just loose your outfit and have to walk the rest of the way. Were these the good old days?

Do you remember laundry day on the farm in years gone by when we were kids going to school? You will probably say without a second thought, how do you expect me to forget?

This I think would be pretty hard to grasp by the younger set, as this goes back long before the automatic washer and dryer, or the modern laundromat, where we can drop a few coins in a slot and put the dirty clothing into a revolving cylinder, sit down on a chair pretend to be tired and watch our clothes get the ROYAL treatment through a round glass window in the washer.

Well in the good old days there was more to it than this, if you were lucky enough to have a cistern under the house that caught the run off water from the roof of the house, not too bad because then it could be pumped up into the kitchen with a cistern pump then the water was transferred to a copper boiler on the wood fired range where it was brought to the desired temperature.

If you were not lucky enough to have a cistern, and needed soft water, in the summer it was to head for the nearest pond with a couple of buckets, or haul it from a lake in barrels with the team and wagon, or do you remember melting snow or ice on the back covers on the old kitchen range in the winter months.

Well, now we have the water now what, a bench that would hold 2 tubs, one for scrubbing and one for rinsing, the scrub board went into the tub where all the work was done, some called this board the back breaker or a knuckle skinner. After a session on this board a woman would know she had done a days work. Those days I think womens lib would have thrived, but then everybody would have to run around in dirty clothes.

Next on the agenda (after heating the water) was to take the item to be scrubbed place it across the board give it a lick or two of soap, then proceed to rub the item until clean, then rinse in the tub of clean water, if you had a wringer that the clothes could be cranked through fine if not twist the water out of the clothing by hand, the stronger you were of course the more water could be gotten out.

When the basket was full, out to the clothes line winter or summer. Summer was a cinch for drying, but winter was something to be remembered especially in cold weather as in nothing flat these clothes were frozen crisp as dry "lutefisk" if you are familiar with the fish you know what I mean, if not ask any Norske you may run across which shouldn't be difficult in or around Brandon. Did you know that clothing on the line will freeze dry in time, if you doubt it just try it sometime although I doubt if you will find it is worth it unless you want to experience what women went through not too many years ago, your mother perhaps.

Would you believe the (gals) made their own soap, out of homemade lye from wood ashes and lard. But that is an entirely different story.

Remember when Brandon had a resident doctor, most of the older folks I'm sure had Dr. Meckstroth call on them at one time or another, or where there was a large family quite a number of times over the years. I think much can be said for the country doctor such as that he was ready to make a house call at any hour day or night.

How he managed to keep up the pace year after year was a remarkable accomplishment in itself. He was an excellent doctor for treating pneumonia, also I do believe he delivered most of the babies in this area for many a year.

Without a doubt I think he was a typical pioneer doctor, and got around with a team of horses and a buggy in the summer time, and a cutter in the winter. These cutters had a narrow gauge and tipped over very easily, so I imagine he had a few upsets in his years of being on the road. He used this means of travel until cars began to appear.

In summer months he did his own driving much of the time, but in winter time he had a driver, usually it was rather dangerous to be out on a lonely road in the middle of the night, especially on a stormy one. Men of the village took turns driving for him, John Knutson, Frank and August Lehn and several others drove many a mile for Doc, as he was called.

He was rather a gruff man in many ways, but none the less he loved children, and always had time to visit with them so as they grew older they grew to think highly of him. I personally know he did a lot in this area among the young and old. There were instances when he would spend hours, or sit the whole night through with someone to make sure everything would come out alright.

When I first got to know him he had his office above the drug store, that was located about where the Super Market is now. This store burned down so he moved into an office in the rear of the Brandon Co-op Oil. He worked out of this place for a number of years. I think many a person can think back and remember the many things Doc did for them with very little compensation, so I think he should remain in our memory as a considerate, quiet man, who did much to help his fellow man.

If you were a country school teacher, I imagine the things I am going to write about will bring some memories of bygone days, some good and some not.

Did you by any chance wade through the snow to the school house on cold winter mornings to start a fire in the heater or furnace as the case may be, so it would be some what warm by the time the children would arrive? or were you lucky enough to have someone to build the fire for you?

Do you remember sitting as close as possible to the source of heat, in a cold school room trying to get some lessons done. On real cold days it was not unusual to wear an overcoat for a while. I know we used to put our lunch kits next to the stove, so our sandwiches would thaw out by noon most of the time they would not. If one had to walk a mile or two to school the lunch was frozen solid by the time of arrival.

By mid-afternoon the room would be fairly comfortable, but then it was about time to go home. This meant getting into frozen overshoes and cold coats as well. There was a cloak room or entree in every country school, usually right under the bell tower but strange as it may seem it was never heated.

The country school teacher was a mother, diplomat, doctor and nurse combination for emergencies, also a counselor and cop to enforce and keep some semblance of order. This dedicated person therefore had to have an abundance of patience and understanding as she had to be a substitute mother to the younger students and the wisdom to get along with the ones in the higher grades. Some of the students in eighth grade were bigger in size than the teacher, and sometimes not much younger, so I must say she had her job cut out for her. If she had the misfortune of having some older boys that seemed to feel they could come and go as they wished, especially during the trapping season.

Trapping season was the event of the year, as then was the time when it was possible to earn a few dollars trapping muskrats and sometimes creatures that did not smell so good, sometimes these venturesome fur trappers would come to school smelling to the high heavens, so it was no problem figuring out what they had caught in their traps, result was they were sent home and told not to come back until after they got rid of the odor, of course their presence lingered on for the rest of the day.

There was also a language problem, some children could not speak English, so it was a little hard to communicate. Some spoke Swedish, Norse, Dane or what have you? So on the play ground it got to be quite a hassle especially if they all tried to talk at once. In fact though I think they learned more about English in play. The language problem was among the first graders mostly, as their parents spoke in their native language, so in some cases the children would in turn teach their parents.

There were many churches in the area, that continued to use their native language and seemed to be very reluctant to make a change. Time changed this practice, and as of today it is difficult to find a church where foreign language is used.

There were many advantages in a one room school as it seems the teacher took a special interest in every individual. It was not unusual that there was only one student in some classes, so if such were the case these children got some real personal attention, creating a closer bond as to teacher and student.

Then of course during class periods students could not help but hear discussions in other classes, thereby learning from each other.

It wasn't unusual to have three or four children from the same family, so you can be sure they would check on each other, as to personal behavior, and were also ready to come to each others defense if there was an injustice in one way or another.

I think the country school teacher had a lot to be proud of, but there is seldom anything mentioned about these dedicated people who were willing to teach under adverse conditions for the sake of helping the younger generation in so many ways. I think it would have been difficult times for some folks if it hadn't been for them.

Remember when the ice harvest was a mid winter event? When farmers would get together to help each other put up a supply for the summer months.

Each village would usually have someone that would put up ice for domestic or commercial use. There was no electricity then so of course no refrigerators. Wood and coal was used for cooking and heating, kerosene and in some places, gas was used for lighting.

In the later part of January, or when the ice had become the proper thickness, the ice harvest would begin. The snow would be cleared on a section of the lake quite a ways from shore, to keep the ice free of weeds. Then the area was squared off, so it looked like a big checker board, then the corner square was chopped out, next the lines were followed by an ice saw. This saw had a handle on either side of the blade, so the man that operated the saw would straddle the mark sawing out a channel, so that he could run the saw both ways, thereby sawing the ice in the desired size.

As the cakes were sawed free and floating, a long pole was used to guide them to a corner, where they were caught with a pair of ice tongs, bounced up and down a couple of times and hoisted up on the ice. By this bouncing in the water, the block would come out of the water to a great extent, by giving a lift at the proper time, when the cake was on its way up it could be lifted without much difficulty.

The ice was then pulled up a chute onto a bob sled, in later years a truck, a chain was fastened over the end of the load to keep it from sliding off.

The driver of the rig would usually sit on a blanket thrown over the ice, guiding his team of horses from there. If for some reason or another the chain would come loose going up hill, the load of ice would depart over the end of the rig, driver included at times.

The ice was stored in the ice house, the floor was covered with a layer of saw dust when the ice was all stored it was covered with saw dust on all four sides and top. To cover it carefully was the most important procedure, as the saw dust was a very effective insulation but if there was the least little bare spot or air leak, the ice would melt rapidly. By checking it often the ice supply would last all summer.

Every village had its own ice man, who would haul ice to the homes and business places where it was cut into the desired size, carried over the shoulder to the ice chest.

The ice man had a protective apron over his shoulder to keep the cold out and also to keep dry.

We have a man in our village that toted many a cake of ice, not only off the lake and into the ice house, but from there to the many homes and business places.

Do you remember when Brandon had its own newspaper? I think it was called the Brandon Forum, or when the village had a furniture store, two banks, a drug store, meat market, three dry goods and grocery stores, two restaurants, three grain elevators, and a farmers equity. Also, a flour mill, the mill was not operating when I was a kid, but the mill was still standing.

There was a resident doctor, a shoe repair shop, a harness repair shop, a farmers creamery and a tile factory, Greyhound Bus service right down main street, train service via Great Northern R. R. east or west. Also a hardware store, with an Odd Fellows hall upstairs.

There was a jewelry store and repair shop, a couple of car repair shops, a new car sales and service. Its own light plant and at one time even a shoe store.

Then of course there was a barber shop, a pool hall and at one time a bowling alley, with two or three lanes. Then there was a produce called the Egghouse, a blacksmith shop and an implement store, a lumber yard, several coal sheds, as coal was a much used fuel at that time. There also was a livery stable, where one could rent a rig with or without a driver.

There also was a fairly large hotel and a land office. There was a sales lot where auctions were held frequently, a city hall with a bell and a small jail for overnight customers. One old timer said the town had four saloons at one time, which perhaps accounts for the village jail.

These are some of the things we did not have, radio or television, in fact if someone in the early twenties had predicted that we could in the coming years be able to view things happening around the world on a screen in our living room, would think we were getting a little (teched) as the saying goes.

No we did not have jet planes and moon rockets, outdoor movies or French Fries, drive in hamburger stands or Dairy Queens. High School basketball or football or a cafeteria in the basement of the school. There was a local volunteer Baseball team that played towns in the area on Sunday afternoons, the games were played in a pasture close to town.

On the farms there were no hay balers, combines, milking machines or weed sprayers. No supermarkets or modern filling stations, cars, trucks or motorcycles. There were a few bicycles less the coaster brake so it was important to keep your feet on the pedals at all times to keep your shins from being bruised.

I could go on and on about things we did not have, but then I wouldn't be telling some of the older generation something they did not know.

I feel that I have had the opportunity of living in an era when the inventive genius of man has made the greatest strides in the fields of science of all time, maybe its good and I am sure some of it is bad, but only time will tell.

These articles are a look at my home town of years ago, maybe you lived in a town similar to it. Anyway I think it is a cross section of the history of small villages most anywhere in the United States taken from before the twenties.

Do you remember when the harvesting of the crop was an operation that involved everybody, Ma, Pa, the kids, and the hired help?

The farms were not as large in those days because of the mode of farming, but just the same it was no small task to gather in the crop.

The grain binder was the machine in use in those days, horse drawn of course, it was rather small and cumbersome, some took a six foot swath, and some of the late ones eight feet. At that time it was a far cry from cutting the grain with the scythe as the pioneers did to begin with.

The binder cut the grain, elevated it up into the machine, where it was tied into bundles and dropped onto a bundle carrier which carried from three to four bundles, the operator could trip this carrier when ever he wished. If carefully done the bundles could be arranged in windrows making it easier to shock.

Next came the shocking operation, which involved setting the bundles on end grain side up of course. There were different ways of setting up a shock, some of the heavy grain such as wheat contained less bundles, oats and barley contained more, oats especially as they were lighter so the wind could blow them down easier.

Wheat and oats were not so bad to shock, but barley with its beards was not so great. If the weather was hot and you were in a hollow and no breeze, the beards would work their way through your shirt sleeves, or overalls creating a condition combined with sweat, heat and a few Canadian thistle stickers thrown in would become rather aggravating. Oh, I almost forgot the peat bottom land, the dust from peat combined with the mixture above could very surely wish you were in another business, or at least somewhere else.

After being cut and shocked, the next procedure was to stack the grain, in the farm yard usually, because of the need of the straw which was used for feed and bedding for stock and horses.

Sometimes the grain was stacked in the field so after threshing the straw was set afire, so late in the fall there were a number of red reflections in the sky, in the early evening as a rule on a still night.

Some farmers got together with a number of wagons and hauled shocks directly to the threshing machine, thus avoiding the need to stack. That was called shock threshing. This method was quite a procedure, as it involved the whole family and most of the neighbors as well. Mother and the girls had their job cut out for them feeding the crews at least two full meals a day, plus forenoon and afternoon lunch as well.

Dad and the boys were usually responsible for hauling the grain from the elevator to the grainery. The separator had an elevator on its side, which was cared for by the bagger man who put grain sacks onto the chute of which there were two.

The filled sacks were loaded into the wagon, from there it went directly to the grainery where it was dumped into bins. This became quite a job at times, especially when the bins begin to fill up to the top. If the haul was long and it took longer to unload, there was a shortage of sacks at the threshing machine so at times they would have to shut down. So if short of sacks everything came to a grinding halt, and the engineer would get on the whistle, blow a series of sharp shrieks as much to say, come on you guys get on the ball, don't you know you are holding up a bunch of good men? Those that were pitching bundles, enjoyed these breaks as it gave them a chance to take a smoke or get a drink.

The combine displaced all the machines and hard work involved in this process, as now one man and a machine can accomplish all this without as much as touching the grain in any way by hand only perhaps to look at the quality.

The oldsters only have to think back and probably recall the many sounds of the whistles of these machines of the past, and recall also some of the pleasant memories of days long gone by, especially the hum of a smooth running outfit and the many good friends that part in the harvesting of the crops.

Do you remember the early grain harvest in or about nineteen hundred ten or so and on until the combine came into its own? I wrote an article about shock threshing family style some time ago, so I decided to dedicate this item to the crew members of the early thresher men that followed the harvest until the snows came or even later.

I remember the engineer got up in the wee hours of the morning some times the weather was none too good. He would fire up the engine, using straw or a rule, moving from one place to another, wood or coal came into use as it burned slower and gave more constant heat. This fellow really put in a full day from before daylight until late at night. The only thing good about his job that I could see it was always warm close to the engine. This man was a real professional and usually knew his machine and what it could do, as I think he was required to have a license.

The engine would use a lot of water, so there was a special water tank mounted on a horse drawn wagon. There was a special water pump on this tank which could draw water from a pond, lake, river or from any source conveniently close by. There was a barrel on the ground close to the engine for a reserve supply, this barrel was also used when moving from place to place, and then was put on the platform on the stern of the engine for a constant supply.

The separator or threshing machine came in many makes and sizes, the larger ones had what was called a wing on either side, really two elevators which fed the bundles into the machine itself, these wings would be raised up and down as needed and when moving from one place to another were folded up against the sides of the thresher.

When the bundles of grain entered the machine they were hit by a cylinder which had a series of knives, which chewed up the straw pounding the grain loose from the stems sending it into the interior of the machine where it crossed some sieves and shakers separating the grain from the chaff and straw. There was also a large fan that applied air to remove the chaff and small foul seeds and in turn blowing the straw up brought a stack out onto the ground. The blower as it was called was equipped with a crank, so it could be moved from side to side, also it could be raised and lowered so if operated properly this blower would construct a neat straw stack. The man who operated the separator was of course called the separator man or tender.

Next there was a man tending the chute where the grain was bagged, there was two outlets on the end of this chute, so when one sack became filled, another could be tripped sending the grain into the empty bag. When there was a good crop it kept this man pretty busy tending this operation, oh yes, he was called the sacker or bagger man.

There were two men on either side of the machine feeding the grain into the wings, they had to know their job well also, because if the separator was loaded down with too much grain the belts would fly off and the whole operation would come to a stop, and the separator man would have his job cut out for him, a little angry too, I might say.

So the crew consisted of an engineer, the water hauler, separator man, bagger man, four bundle pitchers, eight men in all, that followed the rig. The farmers were responsible for taking care of the grain.

This crew stayed on the place until the job was finished, as there were no cars in those days. They sometimes slept in the grainery, hay loft in the barn, and some times even in the straw stack, or on the floor in the farm house if there was a spare room.

Remember all the preparation that went into the week before the day when the threshing outfit would arrive? How we worked at cleaning out the grain bins getting the old grain out of the corners of the empty grainery. Most of the grain had been used for feed during the year, so all that was left was perhaps some wheat, and if there was a good crop coming up, that was usually hauled into town and converted into cash.

Then we had to go through quite a number of grain sacks, sew up the holes and weed out the badly torn ones. These sacks took a lot of punishment as they were handled so much as that was the means by which the grain was transported from thresher to grainery, or to market. Then of course if there was any repairs to be made on the bins or steps on the grainery that of all things was important; so no one would get hurt when the big operation began. Then the wagons were patched up and the axels greased, in fact everything was gone over thoroughly.

We had a straw shed in the lot behind the barn, this was built out of poles and when threshing the straw was blown over it making a shelter for young stock. During the summer the cattle milled around, tramp the straw down and broke some of the poles, so this had to be gone over also.

In the house there was a lot of activity also, getting ready for the mob of hungry men they would feed for a couple of days. Bread to bake, cookies and doughnuts, for lunches, not to mention other things that had to be lined up. On the farm where I was raised, the house was large so the crew slept in a couple of rooms upstairs, on the floor as a rule on straw mattresses. The mattress was a big cloth bag filled with straw, so we filled these bags and carried them upstairs which was quite a job in itself, then after the crew had left, it was a job to carry them back out, empty them and put them away for another year.

There was a real clean up job after all the men had slept there for a couple of nights, their clothes were full of chaff and straw, being a long time before the advent of the vacuum cleaner it was no easy task.

The big problem was keeping fresh meat for hungry men, so a hurry up trip to town with the team and buggy in time for dinner was required. The men were fed well at most places, but they really worked long days for little pay, so I think they earned whatever they got in the line of food. Forenoon and afternoon lunches were expected, so the poor gals in the house sure had their job cut out for them.

It was quite a let down when all was done and the outfit was on its way to another farm. We as kids hated to see them go, as it was quite a change for us to watch all this activity going on all around us, so it was a sad day for us when they left. I still get a big thrill watching an old steam engine make the old separator hum, but of course, this is a thing of the past.

We can dream about and go to see when these threshing bees take place among the Buffs still hanging on to the old ways and have made a hobby of keeping up the old rigs for their enjoyment and others.

Remember when the sun had set, the sound of a steam whistle here and one over there, how we got to recognize the outfit by the sound of these sometimes shrill and sometimes hoarse sounds calling their crew as much as to say "thats all for today boys, lets go get our supper."

Do you remember, when south of the Great Northern tracks in Brandon there was a flour mill in the center of a pasture, a section house as then called, southeast of the Co-op oil bulk? It was located less than a hundred feet from the tracks; the section foreman, who lived there had charge of several miles of track. How he managed to sleep is beyond me, with all trains roaring past whistling for the crossing all hours of the day and night.

Farther west the depot was located, and is presently still there. The original Brandon school was up the hill a short distance. Up hill a little farther the Chippewa Church, which is still there also, on its original site.

North of the tracks there were three grain elevators, and a potato warehouse, which was built by the Farmers Equity, a company owned by local farmers.

The largest elevator farthest east, burned to the ground, and was never rebuilt. There was a series of coal sheds east of the elevator, which in later years were torn down.

There was also some coal sheds west of the present Farmers Grain Company. Almost all people burned wood or coal in those times. Train engines also burned coal and would lay out a plume of black smoke as they pulled their heavy cargos, so we had a great amount of air pollution then, also.

Men spent a lot of time putting up a supply of fire wood, this was usually done in the winter time in cold weather when the snow was powdery, so if warmly dressed one could at least stay dry. No, there were no chain saws in those days.

There were one-man and cross cut saws which were operated by two men, and, of course the faithful axe, so it was the arm strong method. After felling a tree it was cut in stove lengths to use in a kitchen range it was split into smaller pieces.

There was a lumber yard directly across the tracks from the depot, farther west the stockyard of the Farmers Shipping Association then beyond that the Brandon Tile Factory, operated by the Newhouse Brothers.

There are probably some things I have missed, but this is the way I remember it.

Do you remember when the streets in Brandon were a poor grade of gravel, when the sidewalks were of plank that were spaced quite far apart?

Most of the roads were of dirt, just trails full of wagon ruts. There were no cars in use, horses could go most anywhere so there was no need of having good roads.

If roads got too bad, there was in those days which was called a poll tax, which meant putting in sometime with your team putting the roads in usable shape, with a scoop or grader. If you had no team there was always the shovel.

Walking down the street in Brandon on a windy day, in the summer time, you just might have to walk backwards to keep the dust out of your eyes.

Winter time, now that was something else again, snow drifts crossed the street, and there were no snow plows, except a horse drawn grader, and of course the faithful old scoop shovel which was very much in evidence.

After a severe snow storm, trains would be snow bound for days. Farmers cut across fields to get to town, as cuts through the hills were narrow and drifted full of snow, and there was just no trace of the wagon roads.

We as kids walked to school when we could get there, we didn't miss very many days in spite of weather. We waded through snow knee deep or more, for two miles, in below zero weather many times.

If you were lucky enough to own a pair of skis not bad, but did you ever try to ski against a strong wind in loose snow?

Skis were fun things for going down hill tho, so that was the favorite winter sport.

Just southeast of Brandon, at one time there was a ski slide if my memory serves me, that was over eighty feet tall. This was located on a large hill.

Many ski tourneys were held there, and there were a number of Brandon men that were tremendous on skis, so this slide was used for many years, and many long distance jumps were made there, by men from near and far.

This was no amateur slide, as some of the younger set discovered me included, most of us lost our nerve just climbing half way to the top. Those that dared to go down one trip seemed to be enough others developed into very good skiers.



Do you remember when the first cars made their appearance? If you owned one I presume you would answer the question, how could I forget?

The first car I drove was a nineteen fourteen Model T Ford touring car with a split windshield made of plate glass, this glass was later outlawed because when hit, it would shatter into many sharp particles. It had side curtains made of cloth with Isinglass windows and a cloth top that could be folded back as on a buggy thereby converting into an open air outfit.

The early models had thirty by three inch clincher type tires, which were fine as long as they were full of air, but if by chance they would become low on air the tire would turn on the rim thereby tearing out the valve stem in the inner tube. So it was a must to carry a spare tire, and an inner tube or two if going any distance. By all means remember to take a tire pump, some tire irons, tube patches, a jack, and a lot of patience, a pair of overalls, maybe it would be a good idea if you were dressed in your Sundays best.

If a trip was planned from Brandon to Fergus Falls, most people got up early did the farm chores, got the old flivver out of the shed checked the tires, radiator, the gas tank, which by the way was reached by tipping the front seat cushions, as I remember this tank held about ten gallons of gas. Of course there was no gas gauge so if the tank had to be checked the occupants of the seat would have to get out so it could be measured with a wooden stick.

The gas was fed to the carburetor from the tank by gravity so no fuel pump was required, this had its advantages as well as disadvantages, if the tank became low on fuel, and were by chance going up a steep hill, the fuel would not flow into the carburetor, so the only possible solution would be to maneuver around so that it became possible to back up, so the best program was to keep the tank as full as possible at all times.

Getting back to the Fergus Falls trip, better take along some sandwiches and plenty of water, as this rig had the habit of coming to a boil thereby losing the water in the radiator. Oh! I forgot the most important thing, a set of tools was very much in demand as this car had what was called a planetary transmission, which contained the brake, controlled by a band applied to a rotating flywheel, which was stopped by pressing on the foot pedal. There were three of these wheels, one for the clutch, the brake, and one for reverse. These were all controlled in the same way, by stepping on a pedal.

These wheels or transmission was contained directly under the floor boards, and needed adjustment quite often, so if it should be your misfortune that this had to be done on the road, a set of tools was a must.

This car did not have a starter, so had to be cranked by hand to start. There was a hand brake, which by the way seldom could be relied upon, well this brake had to be pulled half way back to put the thing in neutral thereby making it possible to crank the motor. A wise idea was to put a block of wood in front of the back wheel as these tempermental Ford products did not make any bones about running over the man in front after they got going. A good practice was to be prepared to make a flying leap into the front seat as soon as it got going, or be prepared to run. There were quite a number of people that were chased around the yard by an angry Ford.

They had a nasty habit of kicking back on the crank, a mule did not have a look in when this monster decided to let you have it. So many a man lost a bout and came away with a broken arm.

Do you remember when game in this area was really plentiful? When in the spring of the year the little creeks were running full of fish of all kinds. There was no object to take these illegally as one could practically pick them up with ones hands in shallow water, in fact few people ever gave a thought, but that the fish were there to be used and there was no object in taking fish except for food.

In the summer catching fish was no problem, in fact the sunfish would bite as soon as the bait would hit the water. As kids we would enjoy sitting on a bank with a long willow pole catching them as fast as we could haul them in. Believe me we didn't take any more home than we could use as it seemed there was an unwritten law, if you catch them you also clean them brother. We made it a point to keep the big ones and put the smaller ones back in the lake.

The privileges were abused in those days as well though, some folks just went out for the sport to see how may they could catch with never any intention of using them, when they had a nice string, many a (sportsman) would dig them down in the sand.

There was much game when I was a kid, we had prairie chickens by the hundreds, partridge drumming on a log in the then thick timber, and the lakes were litterly covered by ducks in the fall.

There was very few people who went hunting though, especially among the younger group as we did not have the cash to buy a box of shells much less a gun.

It seemed there were very few people that were fond of wild game, until there became a shortage. It seems everything tastes better when there is a shortage, or the price is up such as beef in our time.

Well the prairie chickens are long gone, the partridge in this area as well. In fact to catch a limit of fish takes a lot of patience, and a lot of time.

There were no Pheasants in this part of the country as I can remember, as I understand they were brought in from other areas. Now there doesn't seem to be too many of them either.

Perhaps because of the absence of dense cover, and the careless abuse of our privileges and the desire of most people to hunt and fish, has taken care of most of the wild life.

Personally I think much could be done to promote wild life, but it all takes time to do all these things, and the willingness to cooperate with nature as well as our fellow man.

One of the most outstanding things a boy remembers of the years gone by, (a farm boy that is) is the hours spent on the seat of an old sulky plow after the harvesting of the crop.

The sulky was a three wheeled rig with one plow, equipped with a seat located over the rear wheel so the operator could look down on the plow, thereby controlling it as to depth.

The rig was equipped with two levers, one to adjust the height or depth of the plow and the other to adjust the angle of the plow when on level ground or on a hillside.

This outfit was pulled by three horses and was equipped with a pole, which of course was the means by which the plow was guided by the two horses next to the plowed land. In fact the one horse walked in the furrow and the other two on the stubble or unplowed land.

If the field you were plowing was large, it seemed like an endless task, in fact many a farm boy lost the first month of school in the fall as a rule to help Dad turn the soil before the freeze up.

On sunshine days, it was rather enjoyable and on a long field you would sit there far away in thought, half asleep, when all of a sudden the plow would hit a rock which certainly would jar you back to earth, or down to earth as the case may be. In fact I hit the ground many a time, especially on a hill side when the plow itself would sometimes tip over sending the rider flying, the levers did not do your ribs the least bit of good either. I guess this is why it was called a sulky, as it had that kind of temperament, and it seemed jarring your eye teeth out was one of its traits.

The sulky was an improvement over what was called the walking plow though the plow used by pioneer farmers. That plow was pulled by a team of horses or oxen, and was steered by two wooden handles and was also termed right, as it was truly a walking plow as the operator walked mile after mile behind it.

Sometimes it was called a breaking plow which also was a good title as it was used to break new land which had never been plowed before. If the operator was short in stature the handles would be so high it made it very difficult to handle, so if this rig did not succeed in breaking your ribs, it could lower the ego considerable.

The next plow that came into use was the two bottom or gang, pulled by five horses three next to the plow with two to the front. Just why this was called a gang I never could quite figure out, but it was a far cry above the others.

Horse drawn equipment, such as field drags, seeders, spring cultivators, stone boats, the driver dollowed on foot, so many miles were walked in an average day.

When we observe the huge tractors of today pulling modern equipment with the operator driving it from an enclosed cab, with the radio blaring out music or a ball game, we have to admit there has been strides made in modes of farming in the last fifty years. It would be interesting to know what the next few years will bring.