EARLY FARMING IN WALWORTH COUNTY:
FROM MUSCLES TO MACHINES

As you study the photograph above, you can see that work is being done by humans, animals (horses) and machines (a steam engine) on the left.

As settlers began to move into the Wisconsin Territory and to what would become Walworth County another change was well under way. Power is the ability to get work done. During the earliest years of settlement most of the work was done using muscle power—human and animal. Trees were cleared to make farm fields by hand—human muscle power. Fields needed to be plowed using animal (horses and oxen muscle power) guided by humans. Harvesting of crops in the fall was by humans working through the fields of wheat using a scythe and cradle to cut and stack the wheat—human muscle power. The problems of using just muscle power to get work done on the farm and in the field was that 1) it was hard difficult work and 2) only a small amount of work could be done slowly over time.

Times were, however, changing. People began inventing machines or mechanical power to replace human and animal muscle power. Inventors (see page 3) started using their creative genius to build machines that could do the work of animals and humans more efficiently, that is with less work and much more work in shorter amounts of time. Machines operated by steam power came first. They were replaced by machines with gasoline engines that could do even more work in even less time than steam engine powered machines. These changes took place over a long period of time and are still going on today. In between times humans and animals continued to provide some of the power that got work done on the farm as they still do today!
A Cousin’s Letter Home...

Dear Ben,

It seemed like we had been traveling forever. At times it seems as though we would never get too Wisconsin. Down the Erie Canal, over the Great Lakes to Southport. Finally after buying a wagon and two oxen as well as supplies, we made our way too Walworth County to the property my Father had claimed over a year ago. We were able to stop off for an overnight stay along the way with some very friendly people who had settled here a few months ago.

Once we arrived, Father and Uncle Joseph began building the cabin we are now living in. It is built of logs from oak trees that grow everywhere here. It is much more primitive than our house back home. It has only one window and one door but it will do until we can build a better house some time in the future.

Please write to me soon as I miss you and all of my family back home dearly.

Anna

Reapers and Knotters

As mechanical power of machines began to replace the muscle power of humans and animals, two Walworth County men became important inventors. They each helped make great changes in how work got done. George Esterly invented a harvesting machine for cutting and stacking wheat. Pulled by horse power this machine allowed for much more work to get done in much less time.

An advertisement for one of Esterly’s inventions

John Appleby invented a machine to knot the rope that holds bales of hay together for easier transportation from field to barn. Remember machines were beginning to replace muscle power to make work more efficient on the farm.
WALWORTH COUNTY’S 150+ ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS

One-room schoolhouses were among the first public buildings built when settlers came to Walworth County, Wisconsin. For most of Walworth County’s early history the rural one-room schoolhouse was where most people got their education. Students met daily in a single room with the younger students seated near the front and older students in the back of the room. There were eight grades in the one-room schoolhouse with but one teacher. Courses taught included geography, reading, arithmetic, writing and history. Students often memorized and recited their lessons in these subject areas.

Researchers using information gathered by citizen historian Ken Amon have uncovered that there were approximately 150 one-room schoolhouses in Walworth County over the years since settlement began in 1836. Some of these school buildings still exist such as the Blooming Prairie Schoolhouse located on the fairgrounds of the Walworth County Fair in Elkhorn and operated by Walworth County Historical Society. Half day field trips acquaint elementary students of our county with what a school day in the life of a student was like in the average one-room schoolhouse many years ago. Other old school houses may be seen around the county that have been changed into homes and other uses.

Looking for adventure?
Join WCHS
History Club For Kids
Today!!
An Historic Document
From the Archives of the
Doris M. Reinke Resource Center

Another building in early settlements was a grist mill. Do you know what they were used for? See the next issue of Legacy for Kids!

JUST FOR FUN:  WORD SEARCH

MACHINES  APPLEBY  WORK
MUSCLES  HORSEPOWER  KNOTTER
REAPER  BINDER  HISTORY
ESTERLY