

# Steam Threshing



*Threshing Crew from about 1890. On John Saenger Sr. Farm.*

One of the most exciting events of the good old days on the farm would be steam threshing: the giant huffing steamer with its appetite for wood, the mysterious threshing machine, the fireman, the water tender, the bundle-pitchers, the growing straw stack, the bins in the granary, cold water from the pump to wash down the chaff, and dinner fit for the threshing crew.

Grain ripened somewhat later in those days. The binder strewed the bundled grain in its wake. It was then necessary to prop up the bundles in shocks until they cured. Shocking required some skill and a lack of a good excuse to have something better to do. Some shockers worked in pairs with pitchforks to set the bundles in place while others worked alone, carrying and setting up pairs of bundles by hand. A field of shocked grain could be a pretty sight but a good wind could reveal who had not done his job well.

Marvin Saegner was in the threshing business for 55 years, since he was 17 years old. The threshing season went from July to Christmas. Marvin's day started about 4:00 AM each day when he fired up the boilers to make steam. About 6:00 AM a hearty breakfast of fried potatoes, fried eggs and kuchen was served. At noon a banquet dinner was prepared by the women. In mid afternoon there was another lunch, followed

by a huge supper, at 7:30 p.m., when threshing quit for the day. A crew usually consisted of 8 or 9 men plus family and neighbors.

Threshing was a time of neighborly cooperation and exchange of work. Farmers helped each other with butchering, silo-filling, sawing wood, shingling barns and houses, but threshing was the highlight. Threshers played an important role in our agricultural history and one must regret at least a little that they have been succeeded by an efficiency that offers little romance for the kids of today.



*1932 Threshing Crew*