



**Barn raising on the Wade Rethmel Farm south of Evansport in May 1911**

trip the planter and release seeds at specified intervals, allowing cultivation between and across rows in a checkerboard pattern.

Local farmers have long used barns to shelter livestock and store hay, straw, grain, and farm equipment. Barn raisings were community events – neighbors, friends and family members of all ages gathered to construct a barn. While men built the barn, youngsters carried water and fetched needed items, and women prepared bountiful meals for participants.

Livestock and dairy operations have grown from a few animals to supply a pioneer family's needs to large herds including Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations with hundreds of animals.

Agriculture related businesses have included gristmills, grain elevators, farm implement dealers, dairies, creameries, condensories, stockyards and others.



**Manual corn planter manufactured by Stryker's Werum Novelty Works circa 1890s**

Farm related organizations have included 4-H, the Grange, Ancient Order of Gleaners, and Future Farmers of America, along with agricultural societies and fairs.

The change from horses to motorized equipment occurred primarily between the first and second World Wars. Increased mechanization, larger equipment, fertilizers, herbicides and other improvements allowed farmers to till more and more acres and produce greater yields.

Despite many changes in the methods and technology employed, agriculture and agribusiness remain a significant local industry.

*Brochure by Kevin M. Maynard 2008*

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**Our Agricultural Heritage**



**The area's first farmers harvested small grains manually using a grain cradle**

## Our Agricultural Heritage



Fred W. Norris' Stryker-area threshing rig circa 1920.

**A**griculture and agribusiness have strongly influenced local life, customs and the economy from pioneer times to the present.

In the early 1830s settlers began pouring into the Evansport, Lockport and Stryker areas, primarily farm families seeking inexpensive land and new lives on the frontier. Many were European immigrants or the children of immigrants willing to perform the backbreaking labor necessary to clear forests, drain swampy areas and convert them into fertile farmland.

Before motorized equipment, farm work was performed manually or with the aid of oxen or horses. In 1952, local historian J. R. Mick wrote, "Ohio pioneers began with a few hoes, a plow, harrow, a scythe, sickle, a hand rake, and a flail—the total value of the entire equipment being no more than \$20. It took little capital for the married youth of 17 or 18 to set up in

the farming business."

Fields were prepared using plows drawn by horses or oxen. Area farmer LeRoy Blaker recalled that farmers walked eight miles while plowing each acre and could plow two acres in 10 hours with two good horses.

From Biblical times until well into the 1800s, seed was sown by hand—called broadcasting. By 1880, forced feed grain drills were in general use.

The area's first farmers used sickles, scythes or grain cradles to harvest grain by hand. A single laborer could cradle about four acres per day. Horse-drawn reapers that cut grain were demonstrated in Williams County by the 1850s. In the 1880s farmers began using horse-drawn binders, which cut grain and bound the stalks into bundles ready for threshing.

Local pioneers separated grain from straw and chaff using flails or trampling by horses or oxen. A flail composed of two pieces of wood joined by a leather strap was used to separate grain from straw and chaff. Loose chaff was removed by winnowing—whipping a sheet back and forth to create a breeze to blow chaff away, or by the use of a fanning mill. By the late 1800s threshing machines powered by

steam engines were common. Bundles of wheat were placed into the threshing machine using pitchforks. The threshing machine cut the binder twine, separated the grain from the straw and chaff, filled bags with grain, and blew straw into a stack.

By the 1930s combines — so-called because they combined the functions of a reaper and threshing machine — were being used locally to harvest grain. Early combines were pulled by tractors and later replaced by self-propelled models.

Pioneer farmers planted corn with a hoe — a satisfactory method when fields were filled with the stumps of trees felled to clear farmland. Hand planters that dropped three or four kernels, eliminating the need for hoes to cover corn, were in use by the 1890s. Later came drills that dropped single kernels, and about 1890, two-row check planters that used chains to



LeRoy Blaker uses a cyclone land roller in this 1911 photograph. A horse-drawn walking plow rests in a furrow on the left.