

ST. THOMAS PIONEER RECALLS INTRODUCTION OF FARM HELPS

It is probable that previous articles we have written for the Herald have convinced readers that Belle Plaine business men were almost as enterprising and progressive back in pioneer days as they are today. It does not appear that their activities and accomplishments suffered by comparison with those of merchants and dealers in neighboring towns; on the contrary, they usually were at or very close to the top of the list just as in the case at the present time.

Last week the writer encountered a St. Thomas resident, who recalled that the first steam threshing outfit seen in the neighborhood, where he lived as a boy, in Tyrone township, was brought into the neighborhood from Belle Plaine. The writer's informant was Cornelius Ronayne, 74 years old, who came to the St. Thomas community with his parents when he was four years old and has resided there most of the time since.

"When I was a lad in Tyrone," Mr. Ronayne recalled, "we did our harvesting with a cradle and our threshing with a flail. I wielded both many a time. They were making threshing engines and separators then, but they were new-fangled things and the old lads didn't take much stock in them.

"When Johnnie Hanlon and Joe Stratton brought that first outfit out from Belle Plaine there was more excitement than when the first airplane passed over our part of the country. It was a small portable rig, with a separator that would be considered a joke today. But when it came up the road, drawn by horses the old fellows, who had spent most of their lives threshing grain with a flail, were almost afraid to look at it. They soon learned, however, that the new scheme was far better than the old-fashioned method and threshing rigs were soon common. When the first traction outfit came in, also from Belle Plaine, with smoke and sparks flying from the engine and the steam in the pistons making a great racket, some of the old-timers decided it was safer not to get too close and they thought us younger fellows were almost too reckless. I guess more than one of them came close to having an attack of heart failure when the safety valve let go."

"In the period of more than 60 years since I started work on a farm I have seen some wonderful changes right here in this section. In the earlier years we had to get out and look for new things and ideas, but now they come right to us. Sixty-five years ago we raised a half an acre or so of grain, a few vegetables and maybe a couple of hogs or so. We did all the work by hand and didn't get enough for our season's work to keep the average farm boy in gasoline for a week. But the changes came gradually; new kinds of farm machinery came out, a few improvements were added each year and finally farming became more a matter of business than drudgery."

"I have noticed," the pioneer continued, "that the greatest number of changes occurred in the past 25 years. When I was a youngster going to dances and parties in this neighborhood, oxen were common, stages brought in the mail and whatever else we found out was furnished by travelers or some of us who visited neighboring towns. Now, with telephones, mail routes, automobiles and radio we are just as well off out here as we would be in Minneapolis as far as keeping up with the times is concerned."

"I have seen a lot of progress," he concluded, "but I expect to see more yet."

Mr. Ronayne was born in Boston, June 9, 1852, so it will be seen that he has just rounded his 74th milestone. He can remember seeing his father's departure for service in the defense against the Indians. The elder Ronayne served at New Ulm. Two well known fiddlers of

the early days whose lilting tunes still linger in Mr. Ronayne's memory were Pat Burns and Tom Perry.

The pioneer left his father's farm when he was 20 years old and went up into northern Minnesota and Wisconsin where he was employed cutting railroad ties. Later he spent a few months in St. Paul. September 15, 1877 he married Miss Ellen O'Connell. The couple lived on a farm near St. Thomas until they retired a few years ago and moved to a home in the village almost withing the shadow of the church. Three sons of the couple reside in the community. A daughter, Mrs. Samuel Dougherty is dead.—Midland Feature Service.

By Win V. Working (for the Belle Plaine Herald, July 1, 1926)

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