

# The Dairy Business

By Newton Bair



### MEMORIES OF SOME MECHANICAL MARVELS

At different periods of my life I have had a series of re-curring dreams, most of which I'd rather not discuss. But there is one nightmare that keeps cropping up that should be passed along so that a younger and more innocent generation might understand something about their crusty old forefathers and how they got that way. It's the stuff that those re-curring dreams are made of.

At the age of ten years and the weight of 65 pounds, a boy was ready to take on the mastery of a team of mules, and assume his role as one of the farm hands. After all, it must be a lot more satisfaction to do work with those mechanical marvels pulled by a real team than to hoe the garden, pull weeds, or dung out stables. Did I say 'Mechanical Marvels?' Well, they were the best we had 'way back in the Twenties before the advent of the Farmall F-15 and the John Deere GP.

Papa owned two Syracuse #2078 walking plow. They had sturdy cast iron beams that refused to bend. Really good implements for clean, level soil. Our farm was hilly and riddled with limestone ledges. The ledges all slanted downward at an angle of 60 degrees in a Northeasterly direction. Plowing toward the south or west, the plow slid nicely over the rocks—most of the time. But a 65 pound boy was always in great danger of flying over the wooden handles when the plow hooked under a limestone ledge going the other way. The mules didn't like it either, and some were very smart about rocks. If they were dumb, as some mules are, a very expressive language was developed to help one cope with the situation.

The cast iron plow point was always at peril over those rocks, and often had to be replaced. This was accomplished with the help of a 'monkey wrench,' the standard tool with which you couldn't farm

without. A real knuckle skinner, it was a relic left over from the first Model-T Ford purchased in 1917. It was also used to adjust the front clevis of the plow to make it slide over the rocks easier when you bore down on the plow handles. Only the first time the plow hooked a rock, the clevis bent into a permanent vertical position, making it impossible to adjust. A special language was used with the monkey wrench.

We had four-horse (or mule) harrow, which stayed in use longer than any implement on the farm. The adjustable curved teeth kept wearing down, but there was always more life left if you kept feeding more curve. We even learned to cheat by bending the adjusting levers. Bolts were of every species and variety, whatever was handy—if it had a nut that fit. If an occasional tooth got lost, we didn't worry as it always turned up the next time over the field. The mower or hayrake were sure to find it! You always had your eyes on the ground and you got pretty intimate with every inch

of a field in those days.

The old land roller was a delightful implement. One of the few tillage pieces that you could ride! The iron seat was rusty and loose but it sure beat walking. I can still hear The melodious tunes squeaked by its' uncoiled bearings, set to the tempo of the loose spoke in the middle drum that flapped at every revolution. It bounced right over the hardest clods, and it made a convenient vehicle to haul off an occasional rock that was too big to ignore. Anyway, a plowed field was never smoother or prettier than right after it was rolled. Never mind that the first thunderstorm fingered a random design of gullies down every slope that didn't have a strip of sod to hold it.

The other implement that still gives me nightmares was the walking corn plow. No other tool could compete in building muscle on a ten year old kid, especially when cultivating on a steep slope. It took brute force to keep from

digging out the row of corn, especially the first time over when the corn was barely out of the ground and the team couldn't see the row. If the ground was hard, as it often was, a dull set of blades took enormous pressure to penetrate enough for good weed control. And heaven help you if a weed was missed the first time over! The next time around it was permanently established on a hard ridge that defied any attempt to cut it out. I was either get out the old hoe or settle for weedy corn.

There were other mechanical marvels sixty-odd years ago. The best of all was the three and one-half horsepower Hercules gas engine that we used to power the washer, butter churn, wood saw, fodder shredder and a few other jerry rigged pieces. It never wore out, and I'm proud to say it has stayed in the family and is alive and well. Modern machines should learn a lesson in durability. Some of those other marvels I'd rather forget.

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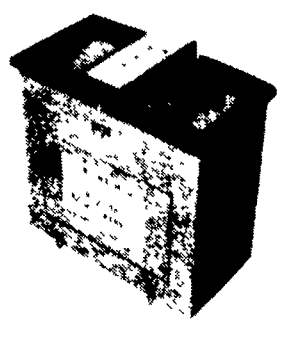
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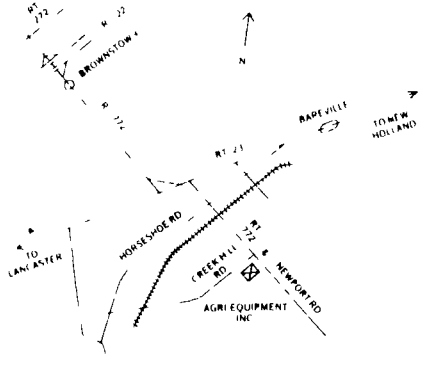
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