Hugh Wesley Alger started life on a farm in northern Pennsylvania, and was seven years old when the decade of the 1890's began. As the oldest son, he became his father's principal helper in the farming of several hundred acres of hilly land near North Orwell, Bradford County.

When the new century arrived, Mr. Alger, although only seventeen, began teaching in the local rural schools. Later, he studied at Bucknell University, and earned degrees from West Chester State Normal School, Yale University, and Temple University.

During World War I, he was at Hampton Institute, Virginia, where he was supervisor of the academic program. In the 1920's, he went to Mansfield State Teachers College, Mansfield, Pennsylvania, where for twenty-two years he was critic-supervisor of student teachers in science and geography.

Following his retirement in 1945, Mr. Alger moved to Towanda, only eighteen miles from his boyhood home. There he became interested in telling the story of the farm life of the 1890's as he knew it. For eight years he wrote and rewrote, talked with old friends on the
farms of Bradford County, checked his memory with theirs, and consulted with his younger brother, who still operates the family farm.

Through all his years as a teacher, Mr. Alger retained his love of the land, of nature, of the birds, of fields and woods. Today, he has returned to farming, maintaining one hundred acres of the family homestead as a tree farm, and summering in a cottage on a windy hill overlooking the Wysox Valley he loved so much as a boy.

Mr. Alger's story of the bleak years of the farmer in the 1890's tells of hardships, yes, but it also recalls a way of life on the farm that is now history. The account which follows is a selection from these reminiscences.

Vienna, Virginia

F. W. GAPP

**Chronology of Farm Life**

The harsh years of the 1890's brought to my parents a constant realization of hard times. To the wealthy class in the cities that period implied gay years—the Gay Nineties—not "gray nineties" as farm folks looked upon that decade. My father and mother keenly felt the pinch of those days but entertained no idea of running away for a more favorable break. Along with their struggle, hope sustained them in believing better times would come. With a family of six children—all sons—they assumed no undue risks involved in moving to a new home.

Just how did I, a farm boy, growing from a seven-year-old to seventeen, fit into that period? First, let us try to get an over-all picture of the farm.

Where did we live? Our region formed part of the hill-and-valley Appalachian plateau in northern Pennsylvania. Our home and farm were located in Orwell Township, Bradford County, one of the so-called northern-tier counties, about 42° north latitude. Our altitude ranged from 900 feet in the valley to about 1,400 feet on the hill tops. Several generations of the Algers had lived back east in Connecticut until my great-grandfather, Roger Alger, settled as a pioneer on this
farm in 1812. They represented typical Yankee stock, formerly from England.

The north-south valley road paralleled the Wysox Creek and divided the farm into two parts—the east hillside and the west hill. Only a very narrow strip of flat land lay in the trough of the Wysox Creek valley.

The east side of the farm contained about twenty acres and was less steep and rough than the west. About half of this acreage produced cultivated crops; the other half consisted of mixed hardwoods with a good maple “sugar bush” on the south side nearest the house, which was likewise on the east side of the main road.

The west fields stretched about a mile across a lower valley terrace and then up a long, steep hill; beyond the hill crest lay a rather broad upland terrace formation. On this west side about twenty acres consisted of mixed hardwoods and hemlocks. We reserved some forty acres for cow pasture. On the south edge of this hill pasture stood an old but excellent orchard of winter apples: Spies, Baldwins, Kings and Russets. At the foot of the steepest part of the pasture a never-failing spring broke through. Even in summer its water never registered much above 45°Fahrenheit. The family and all neighbors rightly called it the “Cold Spring,” and the land around it was known as the “Cold Spring lot.”

Near the spring and above it, stood a large chestnut tree. It looked like a sentinel that might have watched over the spring for a hundred years. With wild apple trees nearby and brambles of blackberries, it made a perfect rendezvous for man, birds, and four-footed animals. Grazing stock went out of their way to drink, as did men working in adjoining fields. Farm boys going after the cows generally found it convenient to circle over to the spring for a refreshing drink and perhaps pick up a pocketful of chestnuts that the wind had blown down since the last time they had visited this popular spot. Blackberries and apples offered special attractions to birds, woodchucks, and rabbits, while the short green grass about the spring offered still another inducement to all animals, wild or domestic, that passed that way.

About thirty acres of the best land in the low terrace of the valley we cultivated for crops—hay, oats, buckwheat and corn. Those fields constituted our main source of hay and grains for the stock,
besides some to sell for cash. The barns and other farm buildings stood on this west side near the road and creek, facing the house on the opposite side of the highway.

My parents entered the 1890 decade in their early thirties. Three young sons accompanied them. The seven-year-old—myself—could help from the start; the other two boys soon grew into that stage. As the years passed along, we three brothers assumed an increasing part in operating the rather rough but fairly fertile hill-valley farm.

During those early years, while we boys were still too young to do heavy work, Father kept a hired man whom he hired by the month. Wages ranged from $15.00 to $20.00 per month, with board, lodging, and washing. I recall some of those hired men: Art Brown, Hyme Eiklor, George Demarest, Hugh Nichols, Den VanSice, and my cousin, Walter Alger. Besides the chores connected with caring for the cows and horses, these men performed all kinds of field work involved with the planting, cultivating, and harvesting of crops.

Occasionally, Father needed extra help during the planting or harvesting season. He would hire one or two men "by the day," paying about $1.00, with meals. The length of the day received scant attention, no fixed eight-hour day. During the slack time of winter he might have no regular hired help, but would hire a man by the day to help get out the year's supply of wood.
In order to form a picture of the lives of the Alger family during the 1890's, let us attempt to realize it by making a farm calendar. No occupation depends so much on the roll of the seasons as that of farming. We shall, therefore, unfold our story according to the "Log of the Sun." Beginning with January, we shall recall the outstanding things or events that generally occurred during that cold month with its dark, short days.

The other eleven months will follow in their respective order. To be sure, many topics will overlap the boundaries of a particular month; but we shall endeavor to describe happenings that were typical of each individual month.

January

During January, the coldest month, the sun, far to the south, still shines almost directly over the Tropic of Capricorn at midday. With practically everything outside frozen, no tillage or working the soil was possible. Like most farmers we had our own wood lot, two of them. Accordingly, we "got up" our year's supply of wood during this winter season.

In going into the woods, we selected those trees which showed signs of decay or had blown over. Most trees were chopped down with a single-bitted axe. If the tree was large, two men sometimes cut it off with a crosscut saw. Generally, the hired men felled the trees while Father, with his pair of horses hitched to a bobsled, "snaked" the trees outside on the edge of the woods.

After a number of trees had been skidded out, the wood choppers trimmed the limbs off the trunk of the tree. They laid the limbs orderly into a great pile to be chopped up later into 16- to 18-inch lengths for the kitchen stove. To cut up the large, heavy logs, two men first rolled the log with cant hooks or hand spikes up on skids. With the log resting on a couple of skids, the two men began to saw the log into proper lengths with a crosscut saw.

After they had sawed up a number of logs the men started to split the blocks with axes and wedges and then threw the split pieces into a conical pile. They might leave the wood there for several weeks to season in the wind and sun, or draw the split wood on a double bobsled to the house for outdoor seasoning, or throw it directly into
the woodshed. Large knotty lengths, too difficult to split, they threw aside to be burned in the sitting room chunk stove.

As for the pole wood, the choppers might cut it up by axe just outside of the woods, or drag the poles to the house and chop them up there. We boys fell heir to the job of cording the wood into straight rows in the woodshed. That made an ideal job. We rather liked it as jobs went.

We used wood constantly the year around for cooking purposes and for heating the kitchen and dining room. Through much of the year we also ran a chunk heater stove in the sitting room. We required a great many cords of wood as a fuel for cooking and for heating our household.

For another winter job, we marketed farm produce to realize some cash for general family expenditures and to make a payment on the farm. Nichols, New York, was our nearest and best shipping point, ten miles north, on the D. L. and W. (Lackawanna) Railroad. This road then as now connected Buffalo and New York City. We sold our hay, grain, and potatoes to buyers in Nichols who shipped them to New York City. On rare occasions we drew produce to Wysox, eleven miles south, where buyers shipped the produce to New York City via the Lehigh Valley Railroad, which also connected Buffalo and New York City.

Except for potatoes, January made a good month for the long hauls to market. It was a slack time on the farm, and a two-horse team or a three-horse team could make the trip more easily with a pair of bobsleds than with a lumber wagon. To keep potatoes from freezing, we threw several heavy blankets over the load. Father usually made these long tedious trips, and generally alone. Sometimes the hired man made the trip. We boys were too young or in school.

At this point let me quote some market prices for produce in the 1890's. (These figures come from diaries, account books, or from my own memory and that of contemporary neighbors.) Oats sold for 25 cents a bushel, buckwheat brought from 50 to 60 cents, while potatoes sold as low as 10 cents and not more than 40 cents per bushel. Apples hardly had a market. Hay ranked as our leading crop. After all the work and expense entailed, a farmer received at Nichols, ten miles away, $5.00 per ton for his hay. To make the long, hard trip count doubly, Father hauled home things needed on the farm. It might be a barrel of salt for the stock, a roll of barbed wire for fences,
or any other commodity not easily bought at North Orwell. The round trip took a full day.

Then as now the dairy cows brought in the most income. They produced the year around but less in winter, owing to the lack of green roughage or silage. As a rule, each farmer delivered his own milk in the morning to the creamery in North Orwell. It was sold by so many hundredweight and according to a butterfat test, as at the present time. The farmer carried the milk in cans holding forty quarts, the same as now. The creamery men separated the butterfat from the rest of the milk. The unused liquid they poured back into the farmer’s milk cans, and he drew it home to be fed to calves being raised for future milch cows, or fed to pigs and hogs being grown for pork. In the late fall, the hogs were killed and the dressed meat became hams, bacon, pork roasts, salt pork and sausage. Usually, Father sold one or two dressed hogs to a meat market or to some neighbor, but the family ate the most of it.

I mentioned that the dairy yielded most ready money. But do not doubt me when I tell you that the raw, sweet milk taken to the creamery averaged not more than $1.50 cents per quart. Besides the work and the time it took to produce that milk, the farmer had to buy some extra feed other than what he grew on his own farm. Likewise, he either had to hire someone to draw his milk over a mile to the creamery or take it himself by horse and wagon.

A few farmers managed to trade some eggs at the local stores for groceries or dry goods. The merchants generally allowed 10 to 15 cents a dozen for such barter. Some farmers with very small dairies made their own milk into butter. They received around 20 cents a pound at a local store in the form of exchange or barter.

As one recalls the different kinds of produce a farmer had to sell in the course of a year, he thinks it is not too bad. But when he considers the pitifully low prices the producer was compelled to take—then it arouses his compassion. Had it not been possible for the farmer himself to consume so much of his own produce, he would have been living on the fringe of poverty.

February

In winter we spent many hours of the day in doing barn chores. I shall not describe the morning tasks of feeding eighteen or twenty
head of cattle, and three or four horses, milking the cows, and after breakfast letting the stock out for watering at the creek, while someone cleaned the stables. Rather let us follow through the duties entailed in doing the early evening and night work about the farm buildings.

Caring for the poultry and hogs, we considered minor chores. On account of the short days in winter, I fed the hens and gathered the eggs as soon as I got home from school. Occasionally, we wintered a few ducks, geese, and turkeys, which also needed care. Father or I fed the hogs before dark. Thus, prior to suppertime, we had a part of the evening chores done.

Doing the barn chores in winter fell into a kind of ritual or method in its regularity. We three older boys had been to school all day with only a cold "dinner-pail" lunch for sustenance. Father, with the help of a man hired by the day, had worked in the woods, getting out logs for the mill or for firewood. Nightfall came early. Everyone was hungry and quite ready for the big meal of the day—supper (not dinner). By five-thirty o'clock Mother would call out, "Supper's on the table." Without a moment's delay, everyone sat at his usual place ready to eat (no silent or spoken grace till years later). School news or farm doings furnished the topics for family conversation. No one made complaints about the food; Mother was an excellent cook and everyone ate her meals with wholehearted relish. In a family of eight, no one thought of complaining. The unwritten law was—eat this or go without. Anyone fussy or finical just lost out. Often someone would say, "Ma, this is sure good." Mother would reply, "Eat all you want, finish it up if you can." Not many leftovers from our table.

Soon after six o'clock we men and boys felt well fed, warm, and contented, ready to project ourselves out into the chilly barns to do the nightly chores. One boy might stay to help Mother "do the dishes"; the other two older boys would respond to Father's call, "Well, boys, those cows and horses are looking for us down there." No arguing. We proceeded.

Before leaving the house we donned warm coats, ear-lapper caps, mittens, and heavy rubber arctics worn over knitted woolen leggings. Lighting the two kerosene lanterns and leaving by way of the south porch, we gathered up milking pails and the strainer. The forty-quart
milk cans had been left near the cow barn where they had been washed that morning after being brought back from the creamery at North Orwell.

First to the horse barn which would not require so much time. Upon opening the heavy, sliding door, the horses began to whinny and stamp in their stalls. In this barn we had a "drove well." One boy went to the pitcher pump and began pumping pails of water for the horses. Usually, the pump needed priming, and sometimes when very cold we brought down a milk pail of hot water from the kitchen stove reservoir to thaw out the pump and prime it at the same time.

Another lad would climb the built-in ladder and throw down hay into the chutes terminating in each horse’s manger; and then he would throw down a pile of bright oat straw on the open floor for bedding each horse after Father had cleaned out the stables for the last time that day. After we had watered each horse, bedded him down knee-deep in clean straw, and given him his allowance of crisp, sweet-smelling hay, Father allotted each animal his dessert—namely, a wooden measure of ground feed or oats. In their eagerness, the four horses expressed their approval all at the same time. It might be a low whinny, a kick or paw at the stall, followed by a saucy switch of the tail.

We left the munching horses and started for the dairy barn. On the way we picked up a couple of the large, heavy milk cans to carry into the stable where we would do the milking. The rattle of the handles and covers to those big cans caught the ear of the cattle who began their various pitched "moos" in expectation of their supper. Usually, we wintered twelve to fourteen head of milch cows, four or five heifers, and about four heifer calves to grow into dairy cows.

The basement of the cow barn had two rows of twelve stanchions each, facing each other. One long manger stood in front of each row of stanchions. Between the two rows was a good-sized work space. This open area contained a large, covered pine box used to keep cow feed in, such as meal, bran, etc. Likewise, into this open space we threw hay down chutes leading from the hay mows on the floor above.

Upon entering the barn, one boy with lantern went upstairs and climbed up into the big hay mow to loosen packed-down hay. He then threw the hay down two chutes into this middle rectangular
area. Meanwhile, Father and the other boy proceeded to feed the cows their grain. One of us swept out the mangers while Father portioned out feed to the different cows. The heavy milkers got generous allowances, but the "dry" cows received very little. It used to disturb my sense of justice to observe such discrimination. If I were holding the lantern, Father would often say, "Hugh, I can't see. If you hold it so you can see, then I can see."

By this time the hay had been thrown down and the cattle had had their grain. The three of us then began the most unpopular chore on the farm—milking. By hand, of course—the only way, the hard, slow way. The two lanterns, hanging on big nails in a beam back of the cows, cast a gloom over that unwhitewashed, dark-brown, cobwebbed stable. Then, it was often too cold for comfort, sitting on an old three-legged milking stool. Except for hands and forearms, the job proved too inactive to maintain a good bodily circulation.

As a diversion, on the sly, we boys often milked a good swift stream into the mouths of hungry cats, hanging about waiting for the froth to be poured later from the strainer into the old sandstone "cat's dish." This entertainment gave lots of busy-work to the various pussies as they licked themselves clean from the milk that failed to enter their open mouths. However, they liked it, and we enjoyed watching them on the receiving end being made happy. Besides this feeding by jet propulsion, they later received their legal allowance of froth.

Usually, we had some milch cows on the south side of the basement with the heifers. It often fell to my lot to milk the heifers. For several reasons I disliked that assignment. Their teats were too small and short to grasp easily. Their small udder hung so high it necessitated a long reach to encompass the teat. Being young, they would not stand as well as the older cows. As yet they were not well "broke to milk." The only compensation rested in the fact they gave less milk so that it did not take so long.

With the unpleasant milking chore accomplished, we turned to an enjoyable task—feeding hay to the stock. In this dry forage all animals fared equally, except the calves, who ate less. But we jammed full the mangers of the cows and the heifers. With two lanterns suspended, one in each end of the middle area, it did not take long for three of us to get the dry, rattling, dusty hay to the
hungry stock. To show their satisfaction, they threw their heads from one side to the other; their mouths held much more than they could swallow at one intake; some thrust their noses to the bottom of the manger and then came up chewing ravenously.

I enjoyed all this. We watched them eat for a time and discussed the relative value of the different cows, when they would freshen, which heifer calves we should raise, etc. Between the two rows of stanchioned animals it was relatively warm following the exercise of feeding them. We experienced a sense of well-being in seeing that the stock was well housed and well fed and the day's work had ended.

In a few minutes we sat before a crackling wood fire in the house, munching a dish of popcorn or eating a Northern Spy apple gathered in October from our west hill orchard.

Like January, February, the snow month, invited the farmer to his woods. Snow covered his fields, but that same covering in the woods afforded an excellent time to get some logs out. Nearly every year the farmer had occasion to use some lumber for replacements or for making additions to his buildings. Sometimes he even wanted to erect a new building or to repair some farm equipment.

Accordingly, Father selected a few large, mature trees to cut down for mill logs. He chose those with long, straight trunks, without many branches. For general building purposes the hemlock worked in best. For flooring or ceiling, the hard or sugar maple served well. If he needed a new tongue to a lumber wagon, whippletrees, or sled runners, ash proved strong and durable.

The procedure in the woods patterned that of getting out firewood. Not much trimming was necessary, however, as most of the limbs grew only in the tops. With a crosscut saw the main log was sawed into 12- or 16-foot lengths. With the aid of cant hooks these logs were loaded on a pair of bobsleds and then hauled to Grimley's sawmill at North Orwell.

At the mill, the various logs were sawed into lumber according to its intended use. Some lumber to be matched or planed went to Wilmot's mill in Rome to be dressed, as Grimley's did not have planing equipment.

Before the snow left the ground, Father drew home most of the lumber and stored it in a dry place to season. It saved time and money to have a stock of lumber to go to as needs came up.
Still another wood job was getting out fence posts for making or repairing fences in the spring. Two or three chestnut trees past their prime in maturity were selected. Often such trees grew in groves or were scattered in the open pastures. At that time no native tree served better for a durable post than the chestnut. Since then the chestnut blight has made it necessary to use other trees, such as the locust, for fence posts.

After cutting the trees down, a couple of men sawed the trunks and larger limbs into fence-post lengths. Then, with axes and wedges, they split the logs into fence-post size. Usually, they peeled off the rough, coarse bark and then sharpened the small end to a point for ease in driving the post into the ground. Thereupon, they stacked the finished posts into orderly piles for seasoning.

March

The first spring-like break after a long winter marked the beginning of the maple-sugar season. Most farmers had a "sugar bush," or at least enough trees about the house to furnish the family with maple syrup for the ensuing year. Ours was the land of the hard maple, being in the maple-sugar latitude running westward from Vermont into northern Ohio. Just as all folks familiarly recognized a robin, so they knew the sugar maple as a beautiful shade tree, as durable hardwood lumber, as warmth-giving firewood, and as the source of delectable syrup and sugar.

About a quarter of a mile above our house on the east hill, which had a slight southwestern slope, stood our "sugar bush." About one hundred mature maples with other hardwoods, such as beech and birch, made up a five-acre piece of woodland. On account of its warm, south-sloping terrain, and because of other woods to the northwest acting as a windbreak, sap began to run rather early. Accordingly, during the late winter Father and our hired man checked over the sugar-making equipment. The big open evaporating pan had to be leak-proof, and there had to be a sufficient number of leak-proof tin sap pails or buckets available. Usually, a bar of solder and a soldering iron before a hot wood-burning kitchen stove would care for such necessary mending. There had to be enough spiles to be driven into the trees to direct the sweet liquid into the sap pails.
hung upon the spiles. Some of our earliest spiles were whittled or carved out of sumac or some other soft wood. They were gradually supplemented with the manufactured galvanized metal spile. However, even after the metal ones were introduced, the wooden ones sometimes made good a shortage of the more modern kind.

It generally took the greater part of two days to tap the trees. The pails, the spiles, bits and braces for boring, were drawn through the snowy woods on a two-horse sled. Some of the larger trees had two, three, or even four sap buckets hung upon their rough, gray trunks.

In good sap weather we emptied the sap buckets on the next day after tapping. We used the same low sled in making the trip through the woods for gathering the sap. The men poured the sweet liquid into forty-quart milk cans previously loaded into the box of the sled. Whenever the horse-drawn load came near the sugar camp they emptied the sap into a wooden hogshead mounted upon two short thick logs to give elevation. From the bottom of this large container a small pipe led into the evaporating pan. Thus, the sap fed slowly and automatically into the pan by gravity.

Previously, a three-by-eight-foot evaporating pan had been placed over the stone arch in which a good fire was kept burning till late at night. Some days before, we had laid in a partial supply of long-length firewood under the shed. Some of this fuel was dry dead limbs of trees, or it might be green saplings cut up into proper lengths. The first burned rapidly, but the latter afforded more heat. Besides keeping the wood dry, the roof of the shed served as a protection for the boiling sap against stormy weather or strong winds blowing twigs into the liquid.

It took one person's full time to keep a big fire in the arch under the pan and to skim off the undesirable accumulation on the surface of the steaming sap. Generally, Father delegated this job to me.

The sap ran best on a sunny clear day following a freezing night with the wind in the north or northwest. A warm south wind checked the sap flow and sometimes, if there was a long warm spell with south winds, it became necessary to retap the entire "bush."

Gathering the liquid and boiling it down might be described as fun-work. There was a certain fascination connected with the processing that took hold of one. You just felt cheerful and sociable even though some of the work was rather strenuous.
There was a period in the long day which became tedious. That was from the late evening when the syrup had not become sufficiently heavy or thick until near midnight. When that time finally came, we poured the delicious syrup into milk pails and carried it by hand, with the light of a kerosene lantern, down a rough, circuitous path to the house. Only very brief preliminaries were necessary before everyone was snug in bed and in deep sleep.

Three or four good runs of sap constituted a good season, each run averaging three to five days. The whole period might cover three weeks—generally in March.

Near the close of the maple-sugar season, our church sponsored a sugar social. Syrup would be bought from some of the larger producers and further “boiled down” at the Union Hall.

The party got under way by seven-thirty. The older folks “visited,” while the young people played games, largely of an osculatory nature. We young folk enjoyed a rather boisterous time while the smaller “fry” spent their energy in just running and chasing about the hall.

By nine o’clock the ladies began to serve the thick hot syrup, which with a little stirring soon turned into delicious soft sugar. Oyster crackers and pickles were served on such occasions along with a glass of water. Like the ice-cream socials, the charge was ten cents a “dish.” The helpings were generous at that. Those were the days when money was dear, oh, how dear! As might be surmised, the young swains embraced the opportunity to take their partners “to the table.” Some preferred to stir the hot syrup slowly to realize fine-grained sugar; others stirred rapidly and got coarse sugar. On account of its richness, few could eat more than one serving. Following refreshments, the older ones resumed “visiting” and the young set their games—most of them of a marching and singing variety.

Some farmers’ “sugar bushes” contained several hundred trees. They sold many gallons of syrup, as well as sugar by the pound molded in tin containers. In those days one gallon sold for about $1.00. The early “runs” tasted better and possessed a lighter, clearer color; that which came later looked darker and had an inferior flavor on account of the swelling of the buds on the tree. Quality and prices varied somewhat according to the time the sap was tapped.

Making maple syrup and sugar supplemented the farmer’s meager income at a time of the year when he had some extra time to make a
little extra money. He enjoyed the work in the well-lighted open woods by day, the campfire by night, as well as the delicious returns from this first crop of the season.

**April**

As soon as the frost came out of the ground, fixing fences got under way. The soft ground afforded an excellent time to drive the chestnut fence post back into the ground. Sometimes we wanted to fence off a field which required new posts and three or four strands of barbed wire; more often we repaired old fences by replacing poor posts or rusted barbed wire, and by tightening slack wires.

It required two men to make an efficient set-up; a pair of horses hitched to a farm wagon to haul along posts was needed, and wire, and possibly some boards for a gate, as well as the working equipment. The work required the following tools: a post maul, hammers, a wire stretcher, a staple puller, an axe, a saw, nails, staples, and a nail keg to stand upon when driving the posts.

With our usual hard winters, the frost heaved up and loosened practically every post, and they all had to be driven down firmly into the ground. It required several days in the spring to make the rounds of fences.

Another early and disagreeable spring job was drawing out the manure made by the cows and horses during the winter. Often, weeks would pass when it was not practicable to get any manure drawn out to the fields. Accordingly, when the weather opened up it took many days to remove the manure piles outside the stables to the tillable land. Pitching this fertilizer by dung forks onto a sled or low wagon was a simple task, but a tiring and unpleasant one. Then followed the long, slow haul to the distant fields where again it had to be lifted by forks and scattered over the ground.

More important still was the spring plowing. Farseeing farmers would get as much of this plowing done in the fall as possible, but sometimes it might be too wet, or would freeze up too early to get much done. As a result a great deal of the plowing held over till April or May.

It was especially important to have the oat ground plowed early, for the sooner the oats got in, the better the crop. For the first two
weeks oats thrive best in cool, damp weather. It was desirable, too, to get the sod for corn ground turned under long ahead to give the sod a chance to decompose.

In those days of the nineties a man and a pair of horses could not plow much more than an acre a day. Not even sulky plows had shown up then. The plowman walked, following a team of slow-walking horses. If the field was flat, which was not often the case, he used a flat-land single plowshare and plowed around the field. If the field was hilly, it necessitated a double plowshare, enabling the plowman to roll the furrow down the hill as he worked back and forth across the field.

In the spring we plowed those fields that might have been too wet the preceding fall. Or perhaps it was a corn-stubble field from which the corn had not been taken off early enough in the fall to get it plowed.

Sometimes, much frost in the ground or frequent rains made spring plowing late. The month of April is usually early enough, but May is late for sowing oats. Generally, the ground in the fall is more suitable for plowing, unless it follows a long spell of drought. A season like that makes it difficult to get the plow deep enough into the ground to turn over a good furrow.

May

Just as soon as the ground dried out enough not to be sticky or muddy we planted our first major crop—oats. Since we fed oats to both cows and horses, we sowed around twelve to fifteen acres. Oats made the ideal crop by which to seed down the field with timothy and clover to insure a good crop of hay the following year.

As school closed in early April, I was free to help put in the oats. The oat ground had been plowed the previous fall. I did a large part of dragging (harrowing) the ground in preparing the soil, with a two- or three-horse team. Following this soil preparation, a couple of us spent a day or so in drawing off big stones that had “worked up” to the surface.

At this point, Father took over with a two-horse team and sowed the oats and grass seed with an eleven-hose drill. I often followed him
with the other team and smoothed down the ground with a roller or a slicker. During the first year or so in the nineties, Father sowed the oats by hand, or broadcast. That necessitated a follow-up of harrowing the seed under.

With favorable weather, the oat field would begin to green up in a week's time. A light frost or two might slow it up, but it never seemed to do any harm. Oats are a hardy, cool-temperature crop.

With the oats in the ground, corn planting pressed hard after. We tried to plant by the tenth of May; usually, it ran later. The corn acreage was less than oats—three or four acres. We had no silo during those years, so we grew the crop primarily for the mature ear as a grain crop. The western dent corn had not been developed. Instead, we planted a flint variety—smooth kernels and a smaller ear. When ground, it made excellent corn meal, good for man or beast.

The corn ground always seemed to require more dragging than the oats. This ground had settled more and seemed harder; then, being later in the season, grass and weeds had more of a start in the turned-over furrows. When the soil had been made thoroughly loose and pulverized, the planting began.

For a year or two, before we bought a grain drill, a man worked off the ground with a three-legged wooden marker drawn by one horse. The rows averaged about three feet apart. Following the marking, a man or two planted the corn by a hand-operated corn planter, thrusting the end of the planter down into the soil, where four or five kernels were deposited in a "hill." This proved to be a slow, laborious process. But with the coming of the grain drill, already used in planting oats, corn planting became much simpler. Father closed all the drill hoses except the two outside ones and the middle one. Corn was fed down through those three hoses into the ground in a continuous row of seeds. Sometimes we rolled the corn ground to smooth off the surface and further break up any hard lumps of soil. In a week or ten days the corn began to come through if we had warm, moist weather.

Besides trying to get the corn planted by the tenth of May, we planned, also, to turn the cows out to pasture by that same date. With the extra work required in planting the crops, it lessened the load greatly to get the stock foraging for themselves. It meant we no longer had to feed them their hay twice a day, nor did we have the
hard, unpopular job of cleaning stables and bedding them down with straw.

So, on the first day that they were turned out after the morning milking, they grazed for the entire day over the hill pastures. Toward evening some of us went and drove them down to the barn. After feeding them their grain and milking them we turned them out for the night. In the morning we again rounded them up back into the barn for feeding and milking.

With oats and corn planting accomplished, we digressed from the big fields to plant the vegetable garden. The first good opportunity generally came in the latter part of May. By that time, the ground had dried out and warmed up enough to encourage small garden seeds to germinate.

After plowing the garden with a flat-land plow, it was most thoroughly dragged. We followed this by marking out the rows with an old-fashioned one-horse wooden marker. The plowing, dragging, and marking consumed all the morning.

In the afternoon we started to plant the seeds, largely under Mother’s direction. She helped to decide what to plant, how much, and where. John and I did the largest part of the hoe and rake work, Mother helped drop seeds. Nearly everything went into the soil the same day—no space being left for a second or third planting of corn or beans or anything else. Of course, we left a row or two for putting in tomato and pepper plants a week or so later. For them, we had to wait till all frost hazards were past.

We had planted our early potato garden south of the house a few weeks earlier. For years we planted the “Early Rose” variety of potatoes, because they invariably produced well and matured in such a short time. Father used to say he wanted new peas and new potatoes by the Fourth of July. Generally, they came later than that. If we dug any that early they were small, not full grown. Usually, we planted peas in this garden and a couple of rows of popcorn.

As my memory recalls, nothing in gardening proved more unpleasant than “bugging” the potatoes several times through the growing season. Every year the Colorado Beetle came early, and it required both John and Irving to help me brush the bugs with a stick or paddle into tin pails. We found this method more effective than spraying. When we had finished this ordeal of getting the bugs
into our pails, we enjoyed immense satisfaction in pouring boiling water upon the crawling, greasy-looking bugs which had fed so ravenously upon our potato plants.

_June_

By middle June we aimed to have our late potatoes planted. We tried to select dry, shaly, upland fields which grew a smoother, more mealy potato. The preparation of the ground was similar to corn planting, especially in the earliest nineties, when we used a horse-drawn wooden marker for making rows for both crops.

In those days, the most popular late potato was the “Burbank” variety. It was a long, large, smooth white tuber. For planting, we used small potatoes as seed, as well as some larger ones cut into sections. We carried the potatoes in a tin pail on the arm and dropped the seed about eighteen inches apart in a fairly deep row. Men followed with hoes to cover the dropped potatoes. In the later nineties, we covered with a two-horse hiller. That covered much faster, deeper, and more easily.

Planting potatoes was like that of corn and oats in that it was first necessary to draw off many of the larger stones which had worked up out of the soil. Sometimes we loaded the stone on a wagon and sometimes on a low “stoneboat” which the horses dragged along over the ground—the easiest way to handle big stones. We unloaded them along fences or hedges, and sometimes into a gully.

We usually planted about four acres, but one year we thought we would plant enough to put us out of debt. Accordingly, we planted eight acres and raised over one thousand bushels of marketable potatoes. Fate was against us. That year potatoes brought only ten cents a bushel for the few bushels we were able to sell. That winter we fed as many as we could to the cows and horses, and also to the hogs.

The long, growing days of June demanded every waking hour of a farmer’s time. As soon as he had planted his late potatoes, the corn needed its first cultivation, and grass in the hay fields had grown so lush that the time had come to make hay. Then, too, this was the month when the cows gave their most milk and that meant that the twice-a-day chore of milking required more time and labor.
We planned to mow the poorest grass first—that which had mostly daisies and weeds in it. Such growth, if cut lush and green, made fair hay, but if left late it became dry and woody with little food value in it.

In the early nineties, we always had a hired man to help through haying, but in the late nineties we three older boys carried on with Father. In the early years Father did the mowing with a Champion five-foot side-cutter-bar machine. Later, I did a great deal of the mowing. I enjoyed the mowing, as well as all else that went with haymaking. It was a pleasure to cut the grass, cure the sweet-smelling hay, and take it to the barn for storage. When the crop had been taken off, the fields reminded me of large smoothly mowed lawns.

After the mowed grass had dried, we raked it up into windrows with a one-horse steel rake. The driver sat upon a metal seat and operated the rake by lifting or lowering a hand lever connected to the shaft holding the teeth of the rake. The windrows were ready then to be bunched up into small haycocks to be thrown upon the hay rigging of the wagon when it came along.

Generally, two boys bunched or cocked up the hay into small conical piles. Father drove the horses and also loaded the hay pitched
up to him by one or two workers. He placed each bunch of hay in such a way that he kept his load level and evenly balanced. I don’t believe he ever had a load of hay tip over. If the field was sloping, he could judge just how much to have the upper side project out over the edge of the rigging to maintain a balanced load. Sometimes, if we had plenty of help, one of us got up on the load and helped him, especially if we wanted to hurry to get ahead of a thunderstorm.

Most of our fields were so steep that when taking the load from the field to the barn, it was necessary to lock one or both of the rear wheels of the wagon with a heavy log chain. That afforded a sufficient brake to keep the load from crowding the horses too much. It was a boy’s job to lock the wheels at the top of the hill and then unlock them at the foot.

Mother often brought a refreshing respite to us when we came to the barn with a mid-afternoon load. We could see her emerging from the house with a big pitcher of cold lemonade and drinking glasses. She would generally inquire how many more loads today? And what time do you want supper? She wanted her schedule to match up with the out-of-doors timetable.

In the early nineties, we had no big hayfork or pulleys to unload the hay into the mows of the barn. A man had to pitch it by hand from the load over to those in the bay where it was “mowed” (stowed) away. Later in the decade, we used a large hayfork and pulleys to unload. This was a much easier and quicker operation.

Haying required several weeks, especially if it was a wet season. It generally ran well into July, for during the haying period we had to stop at times to cultivate corn and potatoes. Besides, it was necessary to take time out to sow a crop of buckwheat. Then, and now, hay was the leading crop in Bradford County; it claimed considerable time to harvest the crop.

No one in our community grew tame strawberries. But every farm produced wild ones. How wonderfully good they were! What the berry lacked in size, it more than made up in its delicious flavor.

Some weeks before, we had enjoyed wild dandelion greens with fresh horse-radish as an appetizer, but strawberries represented “the first fruits of the season.” Accordingly, with a spare forenoon in mid-June, two of us brothers took our pails on a warm, sunny morning and started for the strawberry patch up in the big meadow.
at the foot of the hill near Onie’s woods. On our journey up and back we scared up out of the tall grass several meadow larks and bobolinks. We enjoyed their songs all the morning, especially the rapturous, gurgling music of the bobolink.

The tall heads of grass and weeds somewhat buried the lowly strawberry plants down in the thick undergrowth. But, there they were, several round, red berries clinging to a stem. We sampled them; they proved to be even better than we remembered from last year.

Within a couple of hours, we had picked all that were ripe. We started for the house with a few quarts. After we “picked them over” and “hulled” them, their bulk had shrunken to half—but it was solid, red, juicy fruit.

For supper that night Mother made one of her famous large strawberry shortcakes. Eaten with sugar and cream, it was almost a meal in itself. The berries she did not use in her dessert she made into strawberry jam or canned in pint jars.

July

In the nineties, buckwheat rated next to potatoes as one of the main money crops. We planned to plow under sod ground in May or June and have the field fitted and planted by the Fourth of July. Prior to planting we plowed under the sod of a former hayfield where the timothy and clover had largely “run out” and weeds had crowded in. As usual, a two-horse team pulled a side-hill plow having two plowshares like we used in spring plowing.

Following the plowing, a two- or three-horse team harrowed the soil until it seemed well pulverized. Usually, some large stones had been turned up and were drawn away to some out-of-the-way place, such as a gully or fence hedge. The farmer planted the buckwheat with a two-horse grain drill, such as he used for oats or corn earlier in the season.

Buckwheat grows and matures very fast. In two or three days it will sprout and come up if the ground is moist. In sixty days it becomes ripe and ready to cut with a reaper or binder. We set up the small bundles in shocks to dry out for several days and later pitched them upon a wagon and drew the load into the barn or to an out-of-
doors threshing machine set up in the field. Father has said that he has planted buckwheat, had it mature, threshed, and sold, and had the money in his pocket, all in two months.

A white blossoming buckwheat field makes a beautiful sight in late July. The grain is in the blossom stage and its sweet odor attracts honeybees by the tens of thousands. The bees make a dark colored honey which is somewhat less delicate in taste than the clover honey. However, many people prefer it.

![Buckwheat in Blossom](image)

Most farmers used plenty of commercial fertilizer on their buckwheat fields to insure a good crop yield, around thirty bushels per acre. They applied the fertilizer by means of the grain drill at the same time the seed buckwheat was covered by eleven-hose planters.

Farmers fed buckwheat to their poultry and ground some of it for cow feed. More, however, was sold for cash. Much of that was processed into pancake flour for human consumption. Relatively much less is used on the table now, for most is ground and mixed with other grain for stock feed.

“Cultivating” implied a large order. It constituted a major activity during the summer months. It meant working in the corn and potato fields, as well as in the gardens, and had two objectives—to keep the soil loose and to destroy weeds.

The equipment consisted of a horse-drawn “walking” cultivator which usually had five teeth for digging into the soil. Most culti-
vators had a hand lever which could widen or narrow the strip that it worked according to the distance between the two rows. The workman while guiding the cultivator and holding it firm could at the same time drive his horse by the reins tied about his waist. A twist of the body would indicate to the horse which direction he should go.

Horses varied greatly. Some were most susceptible to every wish of the driver. They would walk in the middle of the row or on one side close to the row and stay there until directed to change. Such horses generally had the intelligence also to avoid stepping on a hill of potatoes or breaking down a stalk of corn when turning around at the end of a row. They would sense the least indication of a pull on a rein and keep a steady gait all day in the field. Such a horse won sincere affection from his driver.

Another horse would wear a man down. He would prove dumb or heedless of his master's wishes. He would not see a row to follow, and needed constant reining. He would travel too fast and would continually break down or walk on the crop being nurtured. Such a horse exhausted a man's patience besides tiring him out mentally and physically.

July was the month for wild red raspberries. The first and largest raspberries grew in fallows from which the trees had been cut off a few years before. But we had no such place near us. We usually picked our raspberries in the fence hedges surrounding pastures and hayfields.

The bushes grew among stones which had been drawn off the fields and thrown along the fences. Then, too, they were crowded in among weeds, such as goldenrod, and shrubs, like the chokecherry. Thus, they were hard to reach and to pick.

They did not have sharp thorns like the blackberry, but they were so soft it took a long time to fill even a small pail. They never proved popular to pick. They were so scattered around the fences that it took a long time to make the trip. Yet we always felt we should have some red raspberries.

As usual, Mother had ways of using the hard-earned fruit. She made such delicious pies! Some of the family thought they equaled her strawberry shortcake. You hardly wanted them any better than they were. Any berries left over from the picking went into small jars
as raspberry jam. In winter, some of that jam made good sandwich spreads for our school lunches.

**August**

Oat harvest followed hard after we finished the haying. The harvest generally got in full swing about the tenth of August. By that time the oats looked ripe and yellow, and usually we had little rain to bother about. In August, the weather is dry and hot—good harvesting weather.

We had passed the time for cradling oats, except that one man "cradled around the piece" by hand so that no oats would be missed because the drop-reaper could not cut so near the fences or hedges.

Through the nineties we had no combination reaper and binder, but used instead a drop-reaper. A pair of horses pulled this machine about the field cutting a swath about five and a half feet wide. The turning of a set of revolving rakes pushed the cut-off oats from the table of the machine to the ground in small flat piles called "gavels." These regularly and evenly placed gavels were allowed to lie there and dry out for a couple of days. The oats might be pretty dry, but some green weeds, such as ragweed, required time to dry out thoroughly.

About the third day after reaping the oats, three of us started for the oat field. On our lumber wagon a four-sided rack, or fence, of some four feet in height had been placed. This enclosure tended to keep the loose oats from falling off the load. One man remained on the wagon and drove the horses and pushed the oats about to keep the load level. Two other men, or boys, threw the loose oats upon the wagon with large wooden forks, known as "barley" forks. Each man on his side threw on oats from an area about three swaths wide, besides the swath directly in front of the team, which fell to the lot of whoever got there first.

After a load had been collected, all hands went to the barn to unload. For the first year or two, unloading was most slow because it was pitched by hand; but within a couple of years we had a hay-fork and pulleys which saved more than half the time, to say nothing of manpower.

Two men, or boys, on the mow pushed or pitched the oats about to keep the mow level. The oats generally were unloaded on top of
the hay which had been placed in the bottom of the bay but a few weeks earlier. By late September, the oats were ready for the threshing outfit when it came along.

In our northern-tier counties, nature did an ideal job in spacing her three wild berry crops. Beginning with the strawberries in June, the red berries in July, she yielded her biggest crop in August with the blackberry. The blackberry crop meant twice as much to us as the others. There were so many of them and they were so large and firm. It was a delight to pick them, and they were easy to “look over” for cooking and canning. I'll admit their taste was inferior to the others, but nevertheless they were plenty good.

This crop lasted for the entire month of August, ripening first in open pastures, next in shady places, and, lastly, in second-growth fallows where they grew to be the largest and juiciest of them all. How fast these last would fill up a pail, even though they grew on large tall bushes covered with long sharp thorns! As a matter of fact, we three older boys picked most of ours in the pastures. Patches of them grew here and there all over the hill and especially at the foot of the hill where I presume the soil was richest.

Cousin Effie used to join us boys on a regular berry pick. We usually spent from two to three hours on the west hill, “working” from the foot of the hill over to the cold spring lot and thence southwest up to an excellent patch between the orchard and the woods. In the course of the morning we might carry home from twenty to twenty-five quarts of shiny blackberries. We used to wear ourselves down in rushing to an especially loaded bush, each one exclaiming, “This is my bush. I saw it first.”

Often when we went for the cows, toward evening, we carried pails with us and picked on the way up the hill. On the way back with the cows, we tried not to by-pass an especially fine bush which “wanted picking.” With these evening jaunts I associate the field and vesper sparrows singing on the ground or flitting in low bushes. Then, one cannot forget the whistling woodchuck sitting bravely on the mound of dirt above his hole. A move toward Johnny Chuck or a stone cast in his direction caused his instantaneous disappearance into that hole of safety.

In spite of Mother’s busy days, she welcomed the rounded pails of berries we took to her. She served them raw as “sauce” with cookies
or cake; she made them into big fat juicy pies (Father's favorite pie); she made jelly or jam with them; but most of all she canned them in one-quart and two-quart glass jars. In one season she may have had fifty or sixty quarts of canned blackberries. In the cold months she again served them as sauce or else made them into pies. Probably no fruit, excepting apples, made up such a large part of our annual diet.

_Sep
tember_

For buckwheat we had no synonymous term with "oat harvest"; we merely spoke of "cutting buckwheat" and then later, "drawing in the buckwheat." However, in connection with "oat harvest" we used these two terms also—"cutting the oats" and "drawing in oats."

Buckwheat sown in early July was generally "filled out" and ripe enough to cut by mid-September, before the first killing frosts. The procedure for harvesting this crop was identical in the first part with oat harvest. We cut the buckwheat partially with a hand cradle, but mainly with a drop-reaper. But instead of letting it lie in gavels on the ground, we used wooden hand rakes to rake the gavels into bundles and tied the bundles with a hand-made buckwheat binding band. Then we stood the small bound bundle firmly on the ground with the grain end on top. As the buckwheat straw was still partially green with juices in it, we left the crop out for a couple of weeks to dry thoroughly. The grain, unless completely dry, sprouts very easily, which damages the seed.

After about a fortnight we drew the bundles in with an oat rack on the lumber wagon or on a hay rigging, as the bundles could be more easily loaded than loose oats. In handling buckwheat everyone used ordinary hayforks instead of barley forks. That applied to the man on the wagon as well as those who pitched on. We unloaded the bundles by hand. Sometimes two men pitched off the load up into the big mow. One man mowed it away.

Like the oat crop, the buckwheat was ready to be "thrashed" when the "thrashing" outfit came into the neighborhood in the early fall.

Threshing oats and buckwheat was looked upon as one of the most disagreeable jobs in the course of a farmer's year. It meant steady,
heavy work under pressure; lots of noise and dust and dirt mixed in with copious perspiration. Black smut from the oats, together with the dry pollen of ragweed, pigweed, and other weeds, smarted one’s skin, his throat, eyes, and nose. In fact, he emerged from the threshing floor as black as a coal miner.

To make a crew, neighboring farmers had to help out one another. It often required eight or ten men. To use a common expression, it meant “changing work” with John or Bill. Then your turn came to help those who helped you.

For years Tom Shelton and John Hanofin did our threshing. They used three horses on a treadmill for power. The thresher itself was an old-fashioned Pittsburgh Westinghouse. It provided no way of blowing the dust of the barn away from the workers.

Tom Shelton usually fed the grain into the feeder. He worked hard and fast and wanted others to speed up. Above the din and rumble of the thresher and the steady “clop, clop” of the horses’ hoofs on the treadmill, one could hear Tom yell out to the men on the mow throwing grain to him, “Hurry up with them oats up there. Better get a stir on.” It gave encouragement in the reverse as every man was already doing his level best. But any moment there occurred a slight slackening of speed, this Irishman’s high-pitched voice rang out angrily, “You better get going. I want some more of that buckwheat down here.”

When the crew stopped for the noon-hour meal, it required some time to wash up enough to enjoy the dinner, for which they all were ravenously hungry. Mother generally had a woman or two to help her prepare and serve ten or twelve men. Aunt Vill Alger was on hand to help. We older boys stayed home from school to help at the barn.

The meal itself was a hearty one and lots of it; always pork and baked beans and beef to furnish proteins for energy. Desserts included pie and cookies.

Sometimes oats were threshed at an earlier date and later the buckwheat; other times, the two crops were done as one job. I can recall what a relief it was for my parents to say, “Well, thrashing is over for this year.”

In the nineties, cutting corn meant cutting eared corn which would be husked by hand. We planted a variety called flint, usually a yellow kernel, but sometimes white or even red ears. This flint corn
was very hard in texture and very smooth on its outer surface. The stalk was much shorter and smaller than the present dent varieties planted primarily to fill silos using both the fodder and the ear ground up for ensilage.

Then, as now, we planned to cut the corn before the 20th of September, before the frost might kill the plant. We cut the stalk with a hand corn knife about one foot long. The wooden handle was about the same length. The cut stalks we stood up in the form of a large “shock” of tepee shape; probably twenty-five or thirty stalks in a shock. The corn stalks in the shocks were bound together near the top and also about midway down from the top. For the top we used weeds, generally barn grass, as a binder. For the midway binder we twisted corn stalks themselves into a binding cord.

We left the shocks standing until late October or early November, when other farm work was well along. We loaded the shocks “onto” the hay rigging and drew them to one of the barns where we unloaded them upon the open barn floor. That made a handy place for us boys to husk out the ears after school and on Saturdays.

The corn was taken to the gristmill at Rome and ground into corn-meal to feed the stock, while the stalks were fed, without cutting, to the cows as roughage or fodder.

Some of the corn we used for human consumption, particularly the white flint variety. This corn seemed to possess a more delicate taste and cooked up better. One dish we called “hulled corn.” The hulls on the corn were removed by wood-ash lye. The corn was then well cooked and eaten with whole cow’s milk. It made a good supper dish. Another dish was called “samp.” It, too, had the hulls removed and then the kernels were broken up into coarse bits, something like hominy grits. After a thorough cooking, it made a good lunch eaten with milk. We generally spoke of it as “samp and milk.”

As a crop, corn means much more to the local farmer’s economy today than it did in the nineties. The present dent varieties of corn mature so much earlier that frosts seldom harm the crop. Besides, the dent corn yields so much larger ears as a grain and the stalk affords so much in the form of ensilage forage that an acre of corn today yields twice the amount the flint varieties ever produced.

As might be expected in a purely farming region, agricultural fairs attracted much interest. This was quite true not only in our northern Pennsylvania counties, but in the near-by southern counties of up-
state New York. People on both sides of the state line visited fairs on either side. Naturally, our own Bradford County Fair meant most to us. It was nearest. We took it for granted that we should attend our fair at least one day annually.

“What day are you going to the Fair?” Most folks would reply in a matter-of-fact way: “Thursday.” That was the big day! For on Friday afternoon exhibitors began to remove their displays. Thus, Thursday was the week’s climax, the County Fair having begun on Monday, the last week in September.

For weeks, anticipation of the great day had been uppermost in the minds of us three older brothers. Rumors had floated up our way of the special attractions, such as a Japanese troupe of acrobatic performers. Our parents, too, prepared, but in a more immediate and material way. The day preceding, Mother did extra baking and cooking for the next day’s lunch. She likewise got our clothes all ready for the family outing. Under Father’s supervision we had greased the axles of the platform wagon, oiled the light harnesses, put oats into a bag for the two horses and perhaps a little hay stuffed into a sack for them. They must be dealt with considerately, for they were our sole means of transportation.

The morning had finally arrived, cool and foggy. We had risen at four o’clock and found it difficult in the darkness to round up the dairy herd. But, in time, we had hustled them into the cow barn and milked in the old, slow, hard way—by hand. A hasty breakfast followed and by six o’clock we were jogging our way down the valley road whose deep dust lay damp with dew, but later a drying sun caused dust fog to envelop everything. More and more wagons traveled the road, some racing. The nearer we approached the fairgrounds, the dustier it became. Alas, for our clean best clothes!

In the lives of us boys three days stood out: the Sunday School picnic, the County Fair, and Christmas. The County Fair in a way was the most impressive. It was farthest away—all of thirteen dirt-road miles, and the road led us right over the Lehigh Valley Railroad tracks where we were quite likely to see a train. The half-dread thrill that crept through us when a train passed cannot be imagined; it just had to be felt. It was an opener to the Fair itself, which was a scant half-mile beyond. We then drove through a mysteriously dark grove of pines to the ticket booth, paid 10 or 25 cents for our admis-
sions according to ages, and then drove in. We had really arrived at the somewhat awesome spot.

After finding a place where we could tie our horses and leave the wagon, we began our rounds of the Fair. Father wanted first to see the stock—the horses, cattle, sheep and hogs. Next in order came the poultry, my own particular interest at that time. (A few years later I entered some poultry and realized premiums. How bright the red or blue ribbons looked on my exhibits!) Then we inspected the agricultural displays of grain, fruits, and vegetables set up by the county granges; it was advertised as an agricultural fair, you know.

By this time the noon hour had arrived. We had eaten a very early and hurried breakfast so we were more than hungry. On our way to the wagon we invariably met old friends of my parents who wanted to visit. They talked so slowly and had so much to discuss, it made us boys impatient. We were interested in eating immediately and wasting no time, for after the meal we had a full, crowded schedule to follow up—the varied alluring sounds and sights stimulated a great urge to miss nothing. The family finally reached the two-seated open wagon where our lunch was packed in baskets or tin containers. Our beverage was always cold tea, with no trimmings whatever. It was sealed in two-quart fruit jars or in earthen jugs. The picnic lunch was thoroughly relished and soon disposed of.

The cold "dinner" over, the family fanned out in various directions, for by this time we youngsters felt more certain of ourselves. However, we had agreed that all should meet at the wagon not later than four o'clock, mindful as we were of that three-hour drive home on a dusty road lined with all sorts of horse-drawn vehicles, and that later a large dairy must be milked by lantern light.

We boys must first get some salt-water taffy candy, then do the merry-go-round while our parents would go through the hardware, handiwork, and flower buildings. One amusing observation in connection with the merry-go-round still sticks in my mind. When going to this attraction of weird music and undulatory motion we spied to our astonishment a recently bereaved neighbor widow riding gaily on one of the dappled-gray horses. She was unattended and I can still visualize her black crepe veil floating far in the rear as she joyfully galloped along. A satisfied and happy expression conveyed the idea that this was her first experience of this nature, due, no doubt, to her
late, overthrifty husband who had frowned upon such frivolous indulgence.

By this time, the special attractions would be shown on a platform in front of the big grandstand, accompanied by a band of music. The grandstand was not intended for such as we. It cost 25 cents to get a seat and that was even more than some of our admission tickets. No, we stood below, as near as possible, along the race track and heard and saw what we could from this low disadvantageous point. The jumping, climbing, and tightrope walking thrilled us. The pretty Japanese girls fascinated us merely to look at them, to say nothing of their skills of dexterity.

By two-thirty the horse racing began. Again those moneyed aristocrats on the grandstand were favored in being able to observe. For these events we fared better, as we could move about and see the attractive jockeys and their spirited, excited horses right well. Meanwhile, we had met some of our own friends and wandered around with them, likely to the midway to see the fat woman, the snake charmers, and the dancing girls as they inveigled curious people into their mysterious tents. Such sideshows cost ten cents and it was all they were worth.

The time was nearing our zero hour for returning home. We were tired and had seen so many unusual things in one day that we were not altogether reluctant to leave the crowds, the noises, the smells, and the glamour of a genuine country fair.

October

"It's time to gather the apples." That is the way we said it in early October. It had to be done on Saturdays when we three older boys were not in school, or during Teachers' Institute week. Very seldom did Father keep us out of school on account of farm work. Generally, we brothers thought Father was right in this nearly ironclad rule, but I am sure we would not have objected to staying out during apple-picking time. Gathering apples was more fun than work.

The first Saturday of October usually began with a light frost in the Orwell valley where we lived. Here and there little patches of fog lay in certain low pockets, but they soon lifted in the form of light, fleecy clouds to disappear later over the horizon. A brilliant sun had
begun its ride across the clear, blue eastern sky. The autumn tang in the air fairly drove one to activity. Who would not enjoy picking such luscious fruit, from the rich, golden brown Russets, the delicately tinted Maiden Blush to the deep reds of the Baldwins, with colorful Northern Spies and Kings thrown in?

The apple-picking party generally consisted of Father, the hired man, two of my brothers, and myself. The day’s work necessitated considerable preparation. The horses had to be harnessed and hitched to the double-boxed lumber wagon which carried empty potato crates. A whole family of ladders was loaded in—a long one, short ones, and a step ladder—as well as numerous pails, strong hooks for hanging the pails on branches or on the rungs of the ladder we stood upon, and ropes for lowering the pails of apples to someone on the ground.

The orchard was located on a southeast slope near the crest of the west hill about a mile away. Inasmuch as we would be gone for the entire day, we put feed into a grain sack for the two horses. Also, Mother packed a lunch in a big wicker basket for us pickers. For a beverage, we took glass jars of cold tea, as well as a jug of water.

In due time, the outfit was off, slowly lumbering over the rough fields toward the long, steep hill and thence up to the old orchard. When we reached the foot of the big hill, we boys left the men, team,
and wagon. We preferred to walk by ourselves up the glen through a woods, arriving about the same time as the others. We found the grade easier to take; besides, chances were good for seeing a squirrel, or scaring up a rabbit or a ruffed grouse, to say nothing of the pleasure of being in the woods and watching the water tumbling over the mossy rocks in the brook.

The morning was cool, with dew still glistening on the leaves of the trees in the orchard. A set-up was under way in short order; as a rule, all worked on one tree at a time. Not many minutes were required to fill a bushel crate with the big, fair apples. (At that time no one sprayed fruit trees, nor was there much need.) We picked until noon and then carefully loaded the filled crates into the wagon. After feeding the horses, we refreshed ourselves with Mother's provisions.

With no nooning other than eating we resumed our work. The best climbers worked from the top, while others gathered the fruit from the lower limbs and branches. (Many of the trees were tall; trimming trees low had not yet come into practice.) We always kept each variety of apples separate from the others. One person worked near the ground so he could empty the filled pails into crates as they were lowered by means of ropes guided by the pickers above.

Upsetting a pail of apples when in the act of lowering it to the ground was not an uncommon experience. How humiliated one felt when a heaped-up load of the choicest from the top of the tree came crashing down through the branches to the ground with a thump! Hard on the tinware, and the fruit fell in value to windfalls in a trice. The picker's morale likewise slumped at the same time. Only slightly less chagrined was the high climber when an unsuspected protruding branch overturned the bucket of fruit. Surprise and chagrin both registered on a disgusted face. The big, smooth apples fell as so many units rolling down to the bottom of the sloping orchard. In fact, because of such mishaps it was our custom at the end of the day to go to the lower side of the orchard and salvage such fruit, as well as the usual droppings from the trees.

Such damaged apples we put into crates by themselves. Some of the best might be used for eating and cooking in the early fall; the poorer ones supplemented the apples we shook from our large tree whose fruit was good only for cider. That tree always bore bounti-
fully. Its yield, with the rejects or windfalls, would make two barrels of cider.

By five o’clock we were tired enough to stop picking. Accordingly, we loaded the filled crates into the box of the lumber wagon. We left the ladders for the following Saturday’s wind-up. All hands then started down the hill, except two boys who would round up the cows somewhere on the hill, driving them down to the barn.

When arriving at the house, we drove up in front of the hatchway (cellar door) to unload. Most of the apples were emptied into long bins, while some we left in the crates set on boards across one side of the dirt cellar bottom. (No cellar had a cement floor in our neighborhood.) Some of these apples we sold, or gave to neighbors.

Although we realized very little monetary income from the orchard, there was considerable compensation. We shared with friends and neighbors and sensed a satisfaction in knowing we had stored so much delicious fruit for family use during the long winter ahead.

As a sequel to our big day picking apples for the winter, the following Saturday found some of us in the orchard again. This time we came for another purpose. We wanted apples for cider. Two large, healthy trees on the southeast corner of the orchard bore great quantities of apples, but they lacked a sufficiently good flavor for eating or cooking. Both trees bore juicy fruit and when mixed at the cider mill a very good-tasting brand of drink was produced.

Accordingly, we gathered these apples in the morning and in the afternoon took them to Wilmot’s cider mill in Rome to be pressed into cider. We generally obtained two or three barrels. We drank it as long as it was not too hard, gave some of it to neighbors, and the remainder we left in the barrels to “work” and turn into vinegar used for seasoning and pickling.

Digging potatoes was the last of the harvesting of the crops. This does not apply to the early potatoes planted in the garden. The “Early Rose,” a pink-skinned tuber, was often ripe enough to dig in late July. But “digging the potatoes” meant the field crop of several acres. We planted this crop later—in the latter part of May. Even though they might mature in September, we could delay digging them until late October, as a heavy frost could not harm them
beneath a good covering of soil. The commonest late variety was the “Burbank,” a long white potato.

During the growing season a man or boy cultivated the crop several times with a one-horse hand cultivator. The last time, we used a one-horse or a two-horse hiller that threw a good quantity of dirt over the hill of potatoes to prevent sunburn and to keep weeds under control.

In the 1890’s we usually dug them with a potato hook, throwing them as we dug them into a wooden bushel crate. Later we sorted them for size in the cellar before marketing them. At the end of a day’s digging we loaded the filled crates on a sled or into a wagon box. One man could dig about twenty bushels in a day. A man and two boys might dig fifty bushels in a day. With a team of horses we drew them to the house and stored them in potato bins or merely emptied them in a corner of the cellar on the dirt floor.

I have always felt fortunate in being able to recall the native chestnut tree before the blight killed off every one of those big, noble trees. On our farm we had two chestnut trees that meant very much to our family. They both grew comparatively near the farm buildings, and both bore nuts yearly.

The first one stood in the Cold Spring lot, not more than a few rods northwest from the spring itself. It was a large straight tree trimmed fairly high from the ground, too high to knock off chestnuts easily with a pole; but by throwing stones from above it on the hill, a fellow could get ahead of the frost and scatter some nuts on the closely cropped grass beneath. (A good heavy frost was needed to open up the burrs, each of which contained two or possibly three chestnuts.)

The other favorite chestnut tree stood on the first high terrace of the pasture field south of Onie’s woods. Like Longfellow’s poem, it was “a spreading chestnut”—a huge, rough, short trunk with great, long, low limbs growing from its center in all directions but downward.

This tree bore such large nuts and so many. It was easy to “club them off” with poles, or one could climb the tree and shake the ends of some branches. When going to this tree we usually took a pail to gather two or three quarts at a time. By the family and the neighbors this grand old tree was known as the “old big chestnut.”
Unlike many people, we preferred to eat the chestnuts fresh from the trees. What we did not eat in the fall we dried and ate during the winter. We considered the dried ones only second rate as compared to the chestnuts that came immediately from the burr opened by Jack Frost. We seldom boiled or roasted them, as we preferred them raw.

Within a stone's throw of our house grew three immense butternut trees. They all were located on or near the bank of the gully-run that emerged from the woods east of the house. One of them, with two main trunks, stood by the run just where it emptied into the Wysox Creek above the bridge. This tree bore more nuts than the other two. They were good-sized nuts, generally two or three bushels of them.

I can vividly see the scattered yellow leaves still clinging to the tree in the early October sun, or lazily falling to the ground. Many of the greenish-yellow, fuzzy, sticky nuts still hang by their stems to the branches. Other nuts lie on the ground, partly buried in leaves. The picture is far from complete without the squirrels and chipmunks jumping from branch to branch or hopping along the ground. They are not idle, but, like ourselves, are gathering a winter supply of the rich-tasting nuts. Their storehouse is in the crotch of the tree where the two main trunks join. A woodpecker and a nuthatch are busy as they climb up and down the rough furrowed bark of the tree. But their labor is a year-around hunt for food of a different kind. The insect life they take from the tree better insures some future food for the rest of us.

The second butternut tree stood near the northeast corner of the garden, just inside the woods. This tree was not quite so large. It yielded fewer and smaller nuts, but we prized them highly because of their shape. They grew rounded at each end instead of having a prominent point at one end and a broad oval at the other. The shell was smooth and close fitting. In short, we valued this nut because it cracked so easily; it could be securely and safely held without pounding one's fingers or thumb. We carefully garnered every one of these nuts that we could find.

About eight rods above this tree on the bank near the run and deeper into the woods grew another variety of butternut. It yielded less than the first tree described, but the nut was the same shape.
Its large size made it popular. On account of its bigness one could grasp it easily for cracking; then the “meat” of the nut was half again as large as any other I ever saw. When the meat came out whole, “the shovel” made an admirable decoration on the white frosting of a butternut cake.

Each year we boys gathered several bushels of nuts. Some of them we gave to friends. But most of them we spread out on the floor of “the wood-house chamber” until they became thoroughly dry. Then we stored them in closed receptacles where squirrels and other rodents could not get them.

We used to bring down a pan of the dried nuts, crack them, and eat them by themselves. But they met with greatest favor in cakes which Mother made. She mixed the broken-up nutmeats through the body of her cake before baking. It might be a sheet or layer cake. She topped it off with white icing with whole nuts scattered around on the top. Of all the cakes Mother made, none surpassed her butternut cakes in the estimation of her family.

November

By November we “put the cows in” at night. In other words, when the nights became so cool, we judged they gave more milk by staying in the warm barn. Besides, the pastures furnished very little forage or grass that late in the growing season.

We always greatly disliked to keep the cows in at night. It made so much more disagreeable work cleaning stables. Then, too, it was hard to keep the cows themselves clean. It was a messy, unpleasant mid-season, letting the dairy forage by day but keeping them in during the night and feeding them dry fodder, such as hay or corn stalks.

In the fall, after the crops had been gathered, Father tried to do some plowing—especially in those lots that had just produced a crop of corn, or potatoes, or buckwheat. Such plowed ground worked up better and earlier in the spring for oats and for “seeding down” for timothy and clover after the frost and freezing during the winter.

With the short days of late October into December it was hard to get much done, as there were lots of barn chores in the morning and evening. However, the cool temperatures usually made favorable working weather for the horses and the man following the plow. Any
amount of work done then made a man feel just so much ahead next spring. If the lot should be over back on the west hill he would carry grain for the horses and a cold lunch for himself. Otherwise, he would “turn out” and go to the barn and house for the midday meal.

Fall plowing days could be rather solitary and promoted philosophizing. Bryant, the poet, wrote: “The solitary days have come, the saddest of the year.” They were really rather prosaic and unexciting, except when you scared out a rabbit or a ruffed grouse, or saw and heard a flock of wild geese flying south in their wedge-shaped formation.

Most farmers in our locality followed the tradition of killing their beef cattle as well as their fattened hogs and poultry in November. This custom undoubtedly grew up because this was the first month since April that there was any freezing weather, days that were cold enough to keep meat fresh for a short time at least. Refrigeration had not as yet entered the picture. Then Thanksgiving, a November holiday, always made a particular demand for meats, especially poultry.

Only during the few years that I raised turkeys was the whole family enlisted annually in killing and dressing poultry for a couple of days. In our biggest years we marketed turkeys, ducks, and chickens. Turkeys brought the most, so we began with them.

Soon after breakfast we had the big wash boiler filled with water and on the kitchen stove. We had shut the turkeys in the hen house the night before. The hot water was for scalding the birds when my brothers brought them in. It was their job to catch the fowls and take them to Father, who killed them behind the house. They then tied their legs together and hung them over the clothesline “to bleed out.”

In a short time, Father and the boys brought in a few birds to be scalded. After dipping them in the scalding water we placed them on the floor wrapped up in old blankets to steam. This helped loosen the feathers. Several of us went to work pulling off the feathers.

After we had done several turkeys, Father and Irving got another lot ready to pick. Uncle Ret and Aunt Arvilla came over from their house to see how we were getting along.

Aunt Vill asks: “Do you need any help, Minnie?” “I don’t think it would come amiss, Vill,” replies Mother. John calls out, “You can have my place, Uncle Ret. I can go out to help Irving catch another
"Stay here, John," I called out. "We need you more here than Father and Irving do. Let's get caught up here." Everybody had a fowl and looked somewhat unhappy and said but little. A little later the party warmed up as they could see some progress being made.

Before noon we had the whole works going with quite a system. There were interruptions, to be sure; that was expected. My uncle and aunt had to go over home now and then. They wanted to keep their kitchen wood fire going and then Aunt Vill had to plan some food "to set on" for a lunch for them. The eight in our family filled up our table. Donald was a baby and Ferris less than three. So they needed some care besides what seven-year-old Roger could do.

Mother had to stop and get some food for her family. She planned a simple lunch, one we all liked—mush and milk. Most of us drank hot tea along with homemade molasses cookies and canned blackberries. While some washed and wiped the dishes, others let out the cows to go to the creek for water. One boy led the horses to water and then fed both cows and horses their midday feeding.

The noon hour was a busy one, but it gave each of us a change from plucking feathers. That afternoon we accomplished a lot, but we did not finish before supper. We decided to finish up the unpopular work that evening after we did the chores—feeding all kinds of stock, including the pigs and chickens. Before ten o'clock we had dressed thirty turkeys, ten ducks, and a dozen chickens.

Father placed all the dressed birds on a large table in the cold north pantry to keep over Sunday. On Monday morning we four older boys all went to school as usual. Before going, we helped Father load the dressed poultry into the platform wagon. Previously, we had placed clean oat straw on the floor of the wagon. Then we laid a white sheet over the straw. And finally another sheet covered the dressed poultry for its ride to Nichols, New York. From Nichols a buyer shipped the poultry to New York City on the Delaware, Lackawanna Railroad.

After feeding his team of horses at the hotel stables there, Father ate a good hot dinner in the Bliven Hotel dining room. His meal cost the usual price, 25 cents, beginning with beef soup and ending with a choice of five kinds of pie—mince, apple, apricot, peach, and pumpkin. After buying a few groceries and a bag of corn meal, he
started on his ten-mile trip back home, where he managed to arrive in time for supper.

I never knew just how much the dressed poultry netted. I do recall that turkeys brought relatively more than most anything we marketed at that time. They sold so well we held none of them back for our own enjoyment. We considered a dressed turkey as a luxury.

I regarded poultry raising as one of my hobbies. I enjoyed it. I never received anything for the extra time and work it required. I did not expect any monetary compensation. It made me a bit proud that I could somewhat succeed. Then, I was the oldest son, the nearest in age to my parents, and undoubtedly appreciated quite keenly what we were up against and that as a team we had to join hands in seeing things through.

The term "butchering" ordinarily meant killing and dressing hogs for the family's need during the year. By Thanksgiving time, the weather was generally cold enough to handle fresh meat without its spoiling. Another reason for killing at this time was the need of a good meat supply for the Thanksgiving season.

Our favorite butcher was Uncle John Phillips, who lived about two miles over the east hill from our place. Uncle John was large and strong, and possessed the "know-how" of killing and dressing hogs. We generally killed about three fattened Chester Whites, which would dress about one-hundred and fifty pounds apiece.

Uncle John slaughtered the hogs in their pen by "sticking" them with a big sharp butcher knife. After the killing, he and Father loaded them onto a sled and with a pair of horses drew them up to the place where they had planned to dress them.

The morning of the big "hog-killing" we had brought forth our large iron kettle, suspended it above an outdoor fire, and proceeded to heat the water in it for scalding the slaughtered pigs so that their bristles could be easily scraped off.

After a hog had been scalded sufficiently in the kettle of hot water, it was hung up on a tripod by aid of ropes and pulleys. Thereupon, two men proceeded to scrape the bristles off the body of the slain animal. That having been done, Uncle John opened up the pig lengthwise with a large sharp knife and drew out the entrails, separating the heart, liver, tongue and sweetbreads from the rejected entrails.
As soon as they had dressed the first hog, they removed it from the tripod so that they could handle the next pig in a similar manner. The one that was dressed was carried into the cellar and laid upon a table or on clean boards which served as a platform.

In a day or so, Father cut up the hogs for preserving in different ways. He placed the hams, shoulders, and bacon strips in a pickle, from which they were removed later and smoked. Smoking the meat was a boy's job. We used corncobs to manufacture a smoke that gave a good taste to the meat. It was not difficult work, but it necessitated being near the smokehouse for about two days.

Then Father placed the less desirable side strips in a salt brine to make salt pork. This container might be a pork barrel or a large crock. Spare ribs were hung up in a cool place. These, with the heart, liver, etc., we ate as fast as we could to save them from spoiling. Brother Irving was especially fond of the liver. One day, after we had enjoyed a liver dinner, he spoke up and said, "I wish all of the hog was liver." Generally, we shared some of the perishable meat with neighbors who might "kill" a little later and share with us.

If we killed a fatted cow for beef, we generally waited until late December when it was colder. In this way we obtained fresh meat for the Christmas season. We generally sold a large part of the beef. We did, however, "corn" some of it and made some choice cuts into strips for dried beef. The corned beef made an excellent meal with
boiled cabbage, turnips, and potatoes. The dried beef pieces we sus-
pended from the ceiling over the kitchen stove for drying.
Of all home-cured meats, nothing ever equaled the smoked, cured
hams which my father and mother produced year after year. Those
hams possessed just everything you would want a meat to have for
flavor and texture.

December

Every few weeks Father took a grist to the mill to have it ground
up for cow, horse, or hog feed. If he went on a Saturday I often went
along with him.

After doing the morning chores I helped him put the different
grains into the feed bags which we loaded in the platform wagon or,
if in sleighing weather, in the box on the bobsleds. We took oats,
buckwheat, and corn. At the mill we often bought some form of
wheat, like wheat bran, to mix in with the grains we had grown to be
ground and had mixed in different proportions.

We usually drove to Sypher’s Mill on the north edge of Rome
Boro, three miles from home, about a one-hour trip. When we
reached the mill we saw a good-sized, three-story red building. Before
we reached the platform to unload, Bill, a middle-aged man, ap-
peared in clothes the color of flour from head to foot.

“How are you Bill? I hope you’re running the mill today and
looking for us.” “Oh yes, Fred, we are all ready for you. Abe Com-
stock and his boy left here not ten minutes ago. Let’s unload these
bags and get going.” Father told him what he wanted for feed
mixtures, including one hundred pounds of wheat bran he wanted to
buy to mix in. “I don’t want you to take out any toll, Bill. I’ll pay
for it,” Father adds. “All right, sir, that’s what we’ll do, Fred.”

In a short time the old red mill, with mealy dust and cobwebs
everywhere, began to creak and rumble and shake as though it was
hard to catch its breath and get started. Gradually, momentum got
under way and had the heavy gray millstone moving, crushing and
grinding the grain. All over the building it seemed as though some
hidden power had everything working—wheels turning, belts and
endless chains carrying their precious cups of future grain desserts
for the stock up at Alger’s farm.
While the old grist mill worked away, I investigated the set-up; the heavy machinery and its deep rumble in the semidark basement intrigued me, but made me somewhat cautious about getting too close. I enjoyed myself more when I walked up to the millrace leading from Park's Creek. The swift current of water fascinated me as it struck the breast of the big water wheel and kept it constantly revolving. At that time I knew little about kinetic or potential energy by those names, but I could easily see what part this water had in enabling us to take a ground grist home to our cows, horses, and hogs.