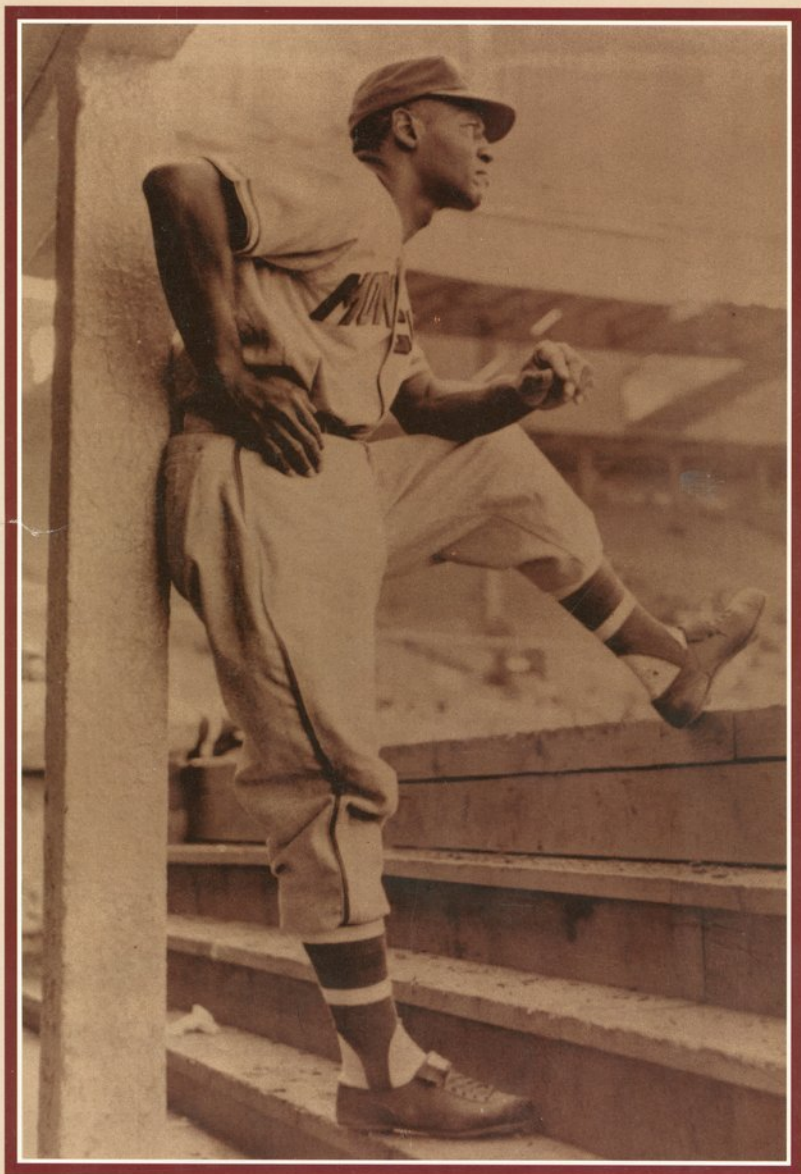
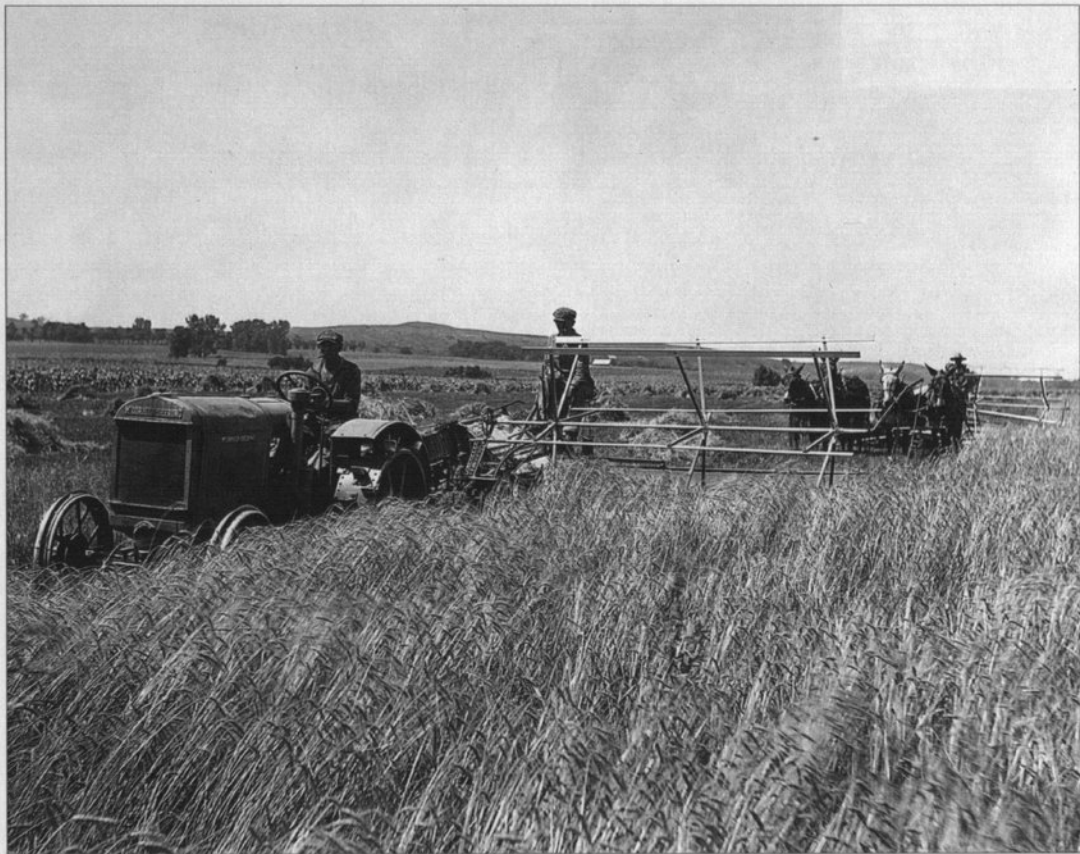


KANSAS HISTORY

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Wheat harvest, McCormick-Deering tractor pulling a binder, Voet farm, Marshall County, July 6, 1927. (Note the team of mules doing the same job in the background.)

During most of the twentieth century, a predominant trend in American agriculture has been toward fewer but larger farms. Kansas reached its peak about 1910 when it had 178,000 farms averaging 288 acres each; by mid-century the number had dropped to 135,000, averaging 374 acres. This trend accelerated during the last half of the century so that by the mid-1990s Kansas had 65,000 farms averaging 730 acres each.

This change in the nature and number of Kansas farms, for better and worse, resulted in large part from the application of new technologies. During the 1920s this often meant the use of farm tractors such as the McCormick-Deering model depicted above. When the first "tractor census" was taken in 1915, it enumerated 2,493 tractors in the state of Kansas; within a decade there were more than 26,000, and by 1927 the state contained over 38,000 tractors of various makes and models. The number topped 100,000 in the immediate post-World War II period.

With these new machines, farmers such as the Voets of Marshall County began to replace their horses and mules and make Kansas the nation's leading wheat producer. Corn actually remained "king" on the Voet's farm and throughout their county, but statewide wheat was number one. Indeed, Kansas gained its identity as "The Wheat State" during the decade that followed the First World War: 153 million bushels were produced in 1919 and

the state failed to lead the country in only three of the next ten years. One of those years happened to be 1927, when Kansas production fell below 115 million bushels, and North Dakota's 130 million was top in the nation.

Without the power provided by gasoline tractors and engines, observed the author of an article in the Kansas State Board of Agriculture Twenty-Fifth Biennial Report, "Kansas agriculture . . . would be in a sad condition." Farmers by mid-decade were using "more power per farm worker than farmers of any other state but four, while the value of crops produced per man puts Kansas in fifth place. . . . Kansas farmers, with ten and one-half horsepower per worker, produced \$1,570 worth of crops per man; . . . the Dakotas with fourteen horsepower, almost \$1,800. . . . There is evident a very close connection between value of crop production, machinery used, and power available." This particular writer made a case for the elimination of "superfluous horseflesh" and the cost effectiveness of the farm tractor. "So long as Kansas grows the great wheat crops of recent years," he predicted, "the power will inevitably point to fewer horses and more tractors and labor-saving machinery as the economical solution to profitable wheat growing."

This is the second in a four-part series of photographs appearing on the inside front cover of Kansas History during 1997 and highlighting twentieth-century change in harvesting technology.

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Cover: John "Buck" O'Neil, who began playing in the Negro National League in the 1930s. An article on interracial baseball in 1920-1935 is the subject of this issue's "Jim Crow Strikes Out." Back Cover: A 1996 photo by John Charlton of the memorial erected in 1867 at Fort Wallace. A similar photo appears in Alexander Gardner's 1867 photographic series, which is the subject of the article beginning on page 116.

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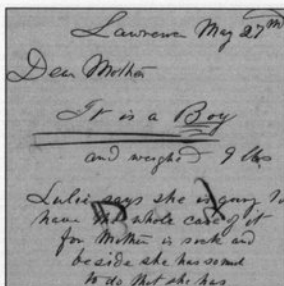
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