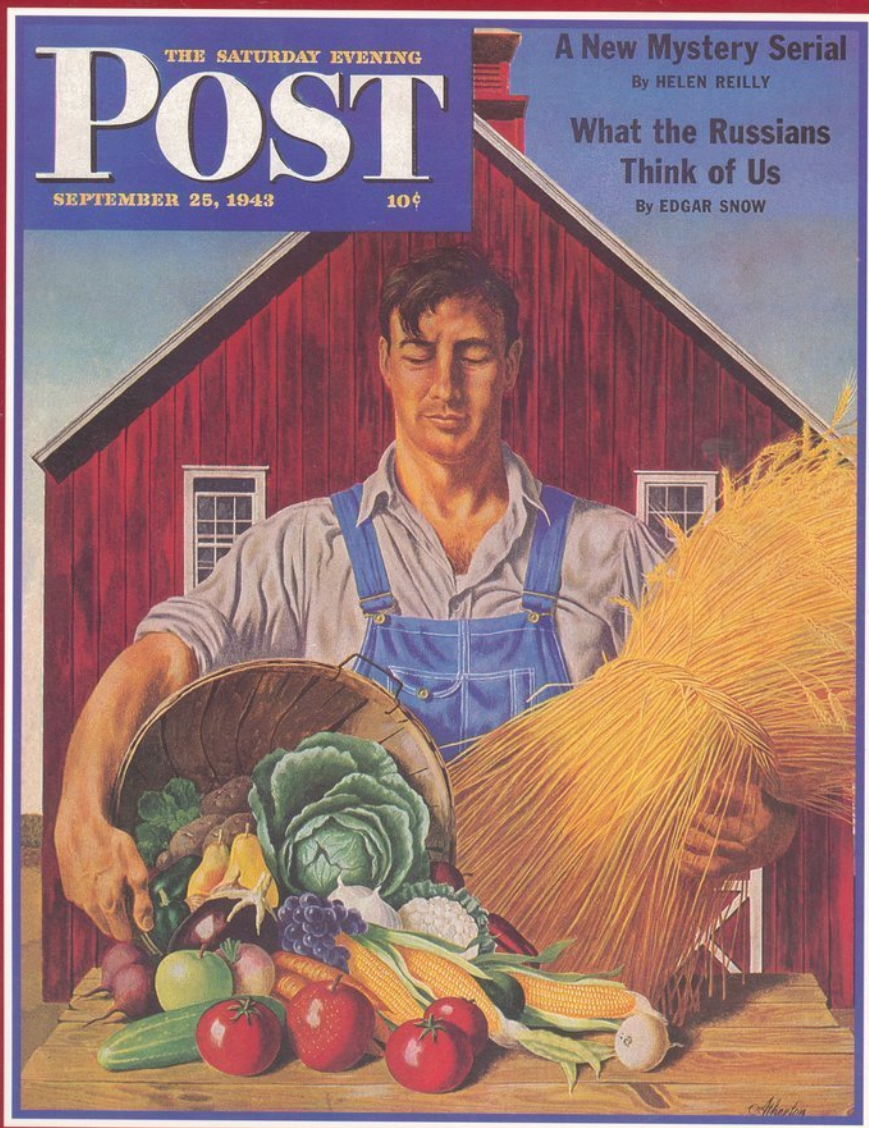
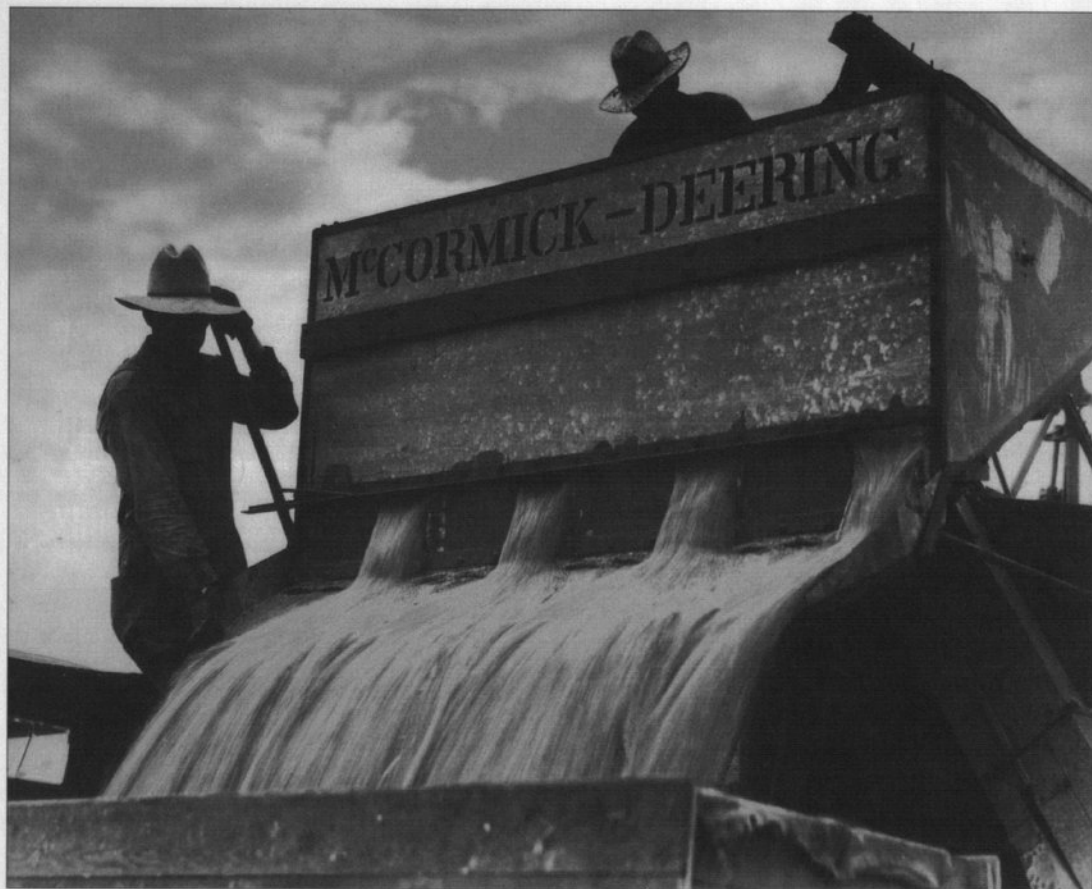


KANSAS HISTORY

A Journal
of the
Central Plains

Volume 20, Number 4
Winter 1997-1998





Vast yields pour from a Kansas wheat farmer's combine, ca. 1940s.

The abundant production of agricultural commodities has been the primary objective of Kansas farmers since the first sod was turned nearly 150 years ago. But, as Michael J. Grant reminds us in this issue, the perception that bountiful harvests mean prosperity for the farmer is often just that: the perception, not the reality. Farmers certainly attained their objective during the years after the Great Depression, but they have continually searched for methods—some of which have involved the federal government—that would ensure them a “fair” return on the fruits of their labors.

As farmers adjusted to a new and more activist government role in the farm economy, they continued to adapt to an ever changing industry. Before World War II technology generally meant machinery or mechanization; during and immediately after, it took the form of increased application of chemicals and more widespread use of hybrid seeds. Both increased the productivity of Kansas farms by greatly improving per acre yield, while mechanization has made farmers themselves more “productive.”

The change wrought by this technological transformation was immense. With regard to wheat production, farmers, who rose to

the wartime challenge and made Kansas an integral part of the “granary of democracy,” set new records. For only the second time in the state’s history wheat production topped 200 million bushels in 1942, and that mark was surpassed in 1945 and again in 1946. In the latter year wheat sold for \$1.83 per bushel, and its total farm value was \$396,685,000, making it by far the most valuable crop in the state’s history to that date.

Nevertheless, farm income, which rose dramatically during the war, still lagged well behind that of the nonfarm sector. Throughout the United States, agricultural workers received on average \$1,735 in 1950, while the average annual income for industrial workers was \$2,900. This disparity persisted through the 1950s and beyond, and the farm sector continued to wrestle with an abundance dilemma, which one historian of the 1930s ironically titled “The Dread of Plenty.”

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

KANSAS HISTORY

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Cover: Farm production on the home front was featured on the cover of this September 1943 issue of the Saturday Evening Post. Wartime farm programs are the subject of "Food Will Win the War and Write the Peace," beginning on page 242. Back Cover: Notice of a temperance meeting in Topeka. An article on the 1874 temperance crusade begins on page 214.

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Kansas History (USPS 290 620) is published quarterly by the Kansas State Historical Society, Inc., 6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka, Kansas, 66615-1099. It is distributed without charge to members of the Kansas State Historical Society. Membership dues are: student \$15; individual \$25, family \$35; organization \$25; life \$1,000. Single issues, when available, are \$6. Periodicals postage paid at Topeka, Kansas, and additional mailing office. Postmaster: Send address changes to *Kansas History*, 6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka, Kansas, 66615-1099.

Printed by Allen Press, Inc., Lawrence, Kansas.

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TEMP'RANCE MEETING

Mrs. L. O. ROBINSON,

Who has been conducting the revival services at the Methodist Church, will lecture on Temperance,

FRIDAY EVENING,

at 7:30 o'clock, at the new M. E. Church.

Mrs. Robinson is a pleasant and eloquent speaker.

Let Everybody Attend.