

*Haying loose hay on Coe Creek, continued:*

The hay car, which ran on a track along the inside of the peak of the barn, along with the sling system that accompanied it, made unloading loose hay much easier. The slings, rope and wooden crosspiece contraptions, came in pairs. The bottom pair, snapped together in the middle, lay on the floor of the hay rack. The other ends, with rings through the ropes, hung out through the front and back standards of the rack. The hay loader pushed hay up out of the windrow onto the hay wagon. The pitchfork man spread the hay evenly over the load, stepping it down firmly. When he judged that the sling load was heavy enough, a third or a fourth of the load, depending on the number of sling pairs used, he hollered the tractor driver to stop or *whoaed* his team. Then, he took the second set of slings from the front of the wagon where they hung, laid them out like the first, and called for the wagon to move forward again.

When all the slings were filled, the hay makers took the wagon back to the barn floor between the mows. The hay car was locked above in the peak. A rope and pulley system hung down to within a few feet of the top of the load. The heavy hay rope, through a series of pulleys, ended on the floor by the barn door. Whoever rode the load into the barn hooked one of the hanging pulleys to each end of the top set of slings. Then, he climbed up to the scaffold or beam by the mow to prepare to stop the sling load of hay when it reached the proper height. His job was done for the moment.

Meanwhile, down below, someone hooked the hay rope behind a team, a tractor, or an old “doodlebug” car. The driver eased away from the barn door, pulling the rope which eventually drew the two ends of the slings together and lifted a huge bundle of hay roofward.

Up above, the hay boss waited until the sling load of hay had cleared the beams and whatever hay was above that level in the mow. Then, he jerked a rope that caused the hay car to leave its locked position and slide over above the mow. At this point, he walked out on the beam, or in the hay mow if the hay were high enough, and attached a long, light rope to the short *trip rope* hanging from the middle of the slings. If he were careful and did not jerk on the rope, he could swing that big bundle of hay back in forth to position it anywhere over the mow. When it was in the proper place, he jerked the trip rope hard, releasing the catch between the two parts of the slings. The hay fell into the mow. A careful and experienced worker could drop that load of hay quite precisely where he wished in the mow.

Meanwhile, the tractor or team that had pulled up the load had backed up, straddling the hay rope, to the barn door. Someone stood there and pulled the rope back up and through the floor pulley. Now, with plenty of slack rope, someone could pull back the slings, again locking the hay car in the middle of the barn. He pulled down the slings, removed the long rope, threw it back up onto the scaffold, and hung the slings back on the wagon standard. Then, he hooked up the second set of slings.

The crew repeated this procedure until the wagon was empty. There was some moving of hay with pitchforks—called mowing away—filling the corners of

the mow. But, with careful swinging of each sling load of hay, this work was kept to a minimum. This haying technique saved both labor and time.

The first job a youngster had in haying this way was pulling back the hay rope. It was not hard, but it was necessary. A child soon developed a routine for this, and the pulley sang as he or she drew on the rope. The goal was to pull faster than the tractor backed up, thus tightening the rope hooked to the drawbar. It was work made into play. An older youngster usually pulled the hay up, and he was under strict orders to back up slowly and carefully. Nobody wanted a girl or boy tipping a tractor off the raised incline to the barn.

Sometimes, in neglect of duty, the rope puller disappeared, usually to play with a barn cat or to look for a hen's nest in the grass. When the haying boss tried to pull back the slings high up in the barn, he was not at all pleased that there was no slack rope below at his disposal. Most children soon learned that their responsibility was first to the rope. They developed a sincere pride in doing a real job during haying.

*More next week.*