

From the Archives

Farmer in the Barley

ON THIS WARM HARVEST DAY, if you were the farmer, you'd be pausing for a picture. You'd hold the reins just tight enough to keep the horses still but not so tight as to agitate them. You'd leave the long whip in its place like a slender flagpole to your right. For a moment, you'd try to enjoy the smells of barley and of horse sweat on leather. You'd take a moment away from the talkative machine—the chukka-chukka swipe-swipe of the sickle, the smooth greased sounds of the reel in its paddle-boat paddling of the barley onto the sickle, the sharp thunk of the knives on the header as they force the twine through a measured bundle with the simultaneous snap of the knotter. You might take a

moment to check the condition of the moving slatted canvas that feeds the barley up. You might be wondering what's taking the photographer so long—and whether he brought some extra water.

If you were the photographer, in the foreground of sound you'd hear the light, almost papery, whispers of ripe barley. If you were old, you might be contrasting these wispy barley sounds with your memory of the louder whistling of wind in the white pine forest that stood here only a few decades ago.

The barley comes alive in this light, but the beautiful barley is not the real subject. The real subject—the horses, binder, and farmer—you

will set like a bouquet on the bright tabletop of barley. This moment can't last forever. The wind has died down, letting the barley hold its position. There isn't much time. Already one of the horses is getting impatient and turning its head toward the camera. There. You've got it. If the horse's head isn't blurred from movement, it should be perfect. But who will ever want to look at a picture of a team of horses pulling a binder through a barley field? You hope the farmer will get more for his crop than you're likely to get for this photograph.

—Jim Heynen

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"Field of barley growing on land that was once heavily timbered with white pine, near Aiken" (ca. 1910) by Harry Darius Ayer. (MNHS COLLECTIONS)



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