

IMAGES

***THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



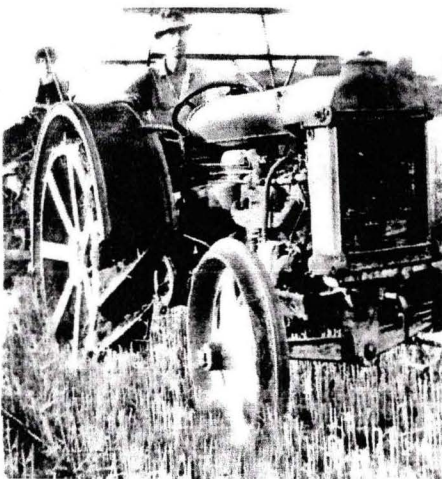
**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

The Tractor – An Icon of Agriculture

In earlier times Indian Hill was largely an agricultural community, where farmers made a living from the produce of their land. The tractor was introduced to local farms in the early 1900s and had a huge impact on rural life in the Village and across the nation.

Until 1900, aside from their own labor, farmers had only two sources of power – draft animals and steam engines. Horses, mules, and oxen, often harnessed in teams, were commonly used for plowing, planting, cultivating, and hauling crops. Steam engine machines and gasoline powered engines first appeared in the late 1800s, and between 1889-1901 thirteen companies were producing gasoline traction engines, later called tractors. They were large, cumbersome, and expensive. They had an internal combustion engine (which drove the wheels forward) mounted on wheels, with a seat for the driver and a hitch for pulling implements. The tractor was nicknamed *the steel mule* and advertisements promised that the vehicle could do the work of 2 or 3 horses. Farmers were reluctant to purchase them because they had to buy gasoline for power, but the machines began to catch on when they became smaller and more affordable.

The first mass produced tractor, the Fordson, was introduced in 1917, and by 1923 had captured 77% of the U.S. market. This was the first tractor used on the Grob farm at 7405 Given Road. Originally made in Michigan, Fordsons were also produced in England, Ireland, and Russia. Gray with red trim, they were known for the particular growl of their engine. Neighbors from a mile away could tell if one was in use. They had to be hand cranked to get started.



THE GROB MEN AT WORK

After World War I, there were 186 companies producing tractors nationally, but by 1930, there were only 37. Only those who kept the price low and the machine practical endured. Other than Fordson/Ford, popular manufacturers included Massey, White, International Harvester, Case, John Deere, Allis Chalmers, and Minneapolis Moline. Over the decades improvements were incorporated into newer models. The power take off (c. 1922) allowed attachments to be driven by the tractor engine. Smaller front wheels, less vehicular weight, and a higher ground clearance made it easier to cultivate row crops. Power lifts (1927) helped the farmer raise each implement from the tractor seat. Adjustable front wheels provided more flexibility. Sealed running gear and better lubrication systems kept the vehicles cleaner, reducing clogs and breakdowns. In 1939, the three point hitch assisted plows by leveling the implement on the ground. Early tractors had steel wheels, which later were changed to solid rubber, and then air filled rubber tires.

Like other 20th century farmers, the Grob men chose tractors that were appropriate to the task and terrain. They planted crops on their 90 acre farm, and were hired for projects at other places. Their clients lived from Indian Hill Road to Camp Dennison, and included the Chatfield, Drewry, Rheinstrom, Goodman, Dugan, and Bonnell families. A tractor dealer from the city stored some of his trade-ins at the Grob Farm, and the Grob men were skilled mechanics, adept at repairing and rejuvenating tractors.

Tractors transformed American agriculture. Adaptations continue to be made to modern day 21st century machines, but the classics still perform well. On his historic farmland where about 25 tractors are located, Bill Grob recently said, "Old tractors are like old friends."

Thanks to Bill Grob for assistance with this article.