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Review of *American Farm Tools: From Hand-Power to Steam-Power* By R. Douglas Hurt

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American Farm Tools: From Hand-Power to Steam-Power. By R. Douglas Hurt. Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1982. Photographs, illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. 122 pp. \$9.95.

R. Douglas Hurt deals with the invention and development of American farm implements and machinery with a special emphasis on the nineteenth century. The material is organized around the functions of various agricultural machines used in the major grain-growing states. Ten chapters focus on the improvements made in plows, grain drills, corn planters, cultivators, reapers, binders, headers, corn binders, corn shellers, threshing machines, combined harvesters, mowing machines, hay stackers, feed mills, and steam traction engines.

The author decided to describe certain lines of farm equipment without trying to catalogue all agricultural tools, implements, and machines. Therefore the reader will not find descriptions of

such items as cotton gins, saw mills, blacksmith tools, windmills, irrigation pumps, wagons, buggies, washing machines, and hardware materials. Also, during the period 1892 to 1914, no mention is made of the manufacture of the internal combustion engine and its uses in stationary gas engines, the early tractors, automobiles, trucks, and electric light plants.

The judicious use of 219 photographs and illustrations gives a visual presentation of the evolution of rural technology. The verbal descriptions of mechanical and technical matters can be readily understood by the general reader. The book includes a good bibliography and a helpful appendix to aid the reader in understanding the importance of metallurgy as an important factor in the manufacture of farm machinery. Better farm machinery had to wait until the making of steel had been perfected.

Some readers would welcome more analysis and interpretation of rural technology. For example, virtually all historians mention that our colonial forefathers used the wooden plow, the sickle, and the flail to grow crops, the same tools used thousands of years earlier in Biblical times. Why was this progress so slow? Why were no new machines invented in colonial America in the 170 years prior to the Revolutionary War? Why did it take two hundred years of experimentation before the first successful track-type Caterpillar engines were built in 1904? Combines were widely used in the Pacific Coast states in the 1880s, yet they were not adopted in the Midwest until the late 1920s, a lag of forty years. Perhaps historians should give more attention to the factors that deter progress and to the obstacles that prevent the adoption of new ideas, to try to explain the inability of people to adopt new methods.

Nevertheless, the narrative is informative and well written. *American Farm Tools* is a fine addition to the historical record.

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