

Clinton Schooling in the 1950's *From Chores to Work*

by Jeff Burns



Clinton Stories: Reminiscences

Growing up in a rural town like Clinton in the 1950's and 60's, we were not exposed to many different career opportunities that someone from a more urban area would be. Our knowledge of careers came from our parents' work and the work of parents of our friends. However, one thing we all developed was a strong work ethic. I believe this was part of the culture at the time...if you were to be considered a worthy citizen you had to work. This was instilled in us at a young age by having chores to do. Depending on the individual family, the chores would differ. In my family we had wood to split and carry in, ashes to be removed, chickens to feed, eggs to be collected, garden to be spaded by hand, garden to be weeded, lawn to be mowed by hand (no gasoline powered mower), driveway and paths to be shoveled in the winter and other things that came up during the day as a situation may dictate. These chores were like training for us for when we decided to enter the work world. I will attempt to illustrate the type of work available during that time from a male perspective. I know that the girls and young women worked during this time in the house and away from the house. Some of the work was the same as that for boys and young men and some was much different and I really can't speak to that since I have no first hand knowledge.

Since we were an agricultural community, most of the work available was on

a farm. There were other jobs available. For example, the local general store hired someone to stock shelves a couple of afternoons a week. One of my friends who did this ended up being the manager of the Grand Union in Pleasant Valley, so skills learned in the general store served him well. Before I began working on a farm, I cut grass, \$1 for a lawn; weeded asparagus, 25 cents per hour and shoveled a lot of snow. I don't think my experiences were any different than other boys/young men at that time, I probably started younger than most but the experiences were alike. I started mowing lawns, weeding gardens and shoveling snow when I was 8. My father worked a second job on a local farm nights and weekends and I started helping him and receiving pay from the farm owner at age 9. Since I was young I was not allowed to drive a tractor so most of the work involved the "grunt work" which I really enjoyed. At the age of 11 I struck out on my own and got a job on another farm for \$5 a day and the "noon meal". To appreciate what this meant to a young man gives you an understanding of the culture. If you worked and earned money you were raised a level in the eyes of your peers and if you were a hard worker and adults noticed, you were raised to a higher level. Today it would be like a 7th grader making and starting on the high school varsity basketball team. On this new job I was not allowed to drive a tractor either, but I could drive a team of horses. I

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was taught how to handle a team (an old team) and put on a cultivator to cultivate corn for about 6 hours a day. I also helped clean the barn, feed the cows, calves, chickens and the pigs. As we progressed through the year I worked in all the seasonal work: cutting and thrashing of oats, haying, and the harvesting of corn. In the first few years of working on this farm, most of the work was done using techniques that were about 25 years behind the times, which meant a great deal of hand work. I continued to work on the farm through high school and college and for 10 years after I finished college. During that time the farm operation was modernized and milk production increased. However, the first few years are the ones I remember most fondly when things were simpler and the work was harder.

(This is another chapter about life in Clinton years ago, by Jeff who was born and raised in town.)

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