

# ORBOST HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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## NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER, 2006

### MAIZE GROWING ON THE SNOWY RIVER

[SUPPLIED BY - THE LATE MR JIM LYNN, ORBOST]

Maize, or corn as it is called in America and New South Wales, has been grown on the Orbost flats for at least 70 years. When early

such as hops, hemp and maize, the latter grew particularly well and became the main crop of district.



**Maize Crop on Mr Ah Chow's Farm 1927**

settlers began to arrive on the Snowy River somewhere in the 1880s, the land was mostly swamps and heavily timbered jungle on the river frontages. The swamps were drained, bit by bit, by stout hearted men with short handled shovels and working in mud and water. The frontages were cleared by axe and shovel and fire. Several kinds of crops were experimented with

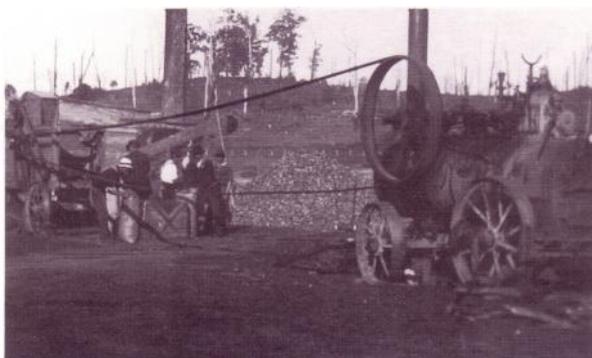
The problem then was to thresh and deliver the product to the market. A small single cob machine was brought here and one man turned the handle, while the boy or Mum fed the cobs singly into the machine. A good day's work would thresh about 50 bushels or about 12 bags (4 bushels). The task then was to cart the



**A Season's Results 1937**

maize to market. For a few years this was done by horses and dray carrying about 60 bushels to Mossiface, where it was loaded onto river boats to Lakes Entrance, and then by ocean boats to Melbourne.

Later, when production rose, paddle steamers with two or three barges in tow, carried about 150 to 300 bags each down the Snowy River to near Marlo, where it was transhipped to ocean steamers for Melbourne. This transport was



**Steam Powered Maize Thresher**

uncertain owing to the bar at the mouth of the river sometimes becoming sanded up and delays of many weeks occurred. After all expenses were paid there was little left for the producer. One farmer received a cheque and £9 for 90 bags of maize. This method of



**The 'Curlip' Towing Barges with Maize**

transport came to an end when the bar closed up altogether for shipping, and some of the boats were wrecked about 1910.

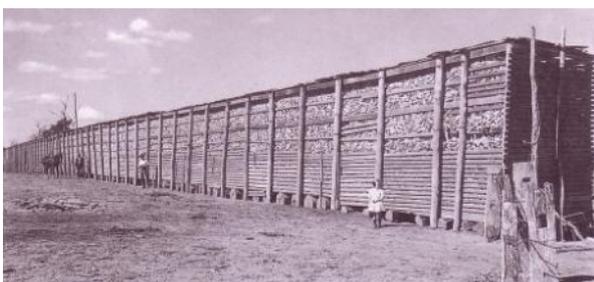
Then, all before then, the farmers tried another way to transport and sell their maize. This was by buying and breeding pigs which were turned into the paddocks of the ripening crops. The pigs thrived on the plentiful supply of food, and



**Orbost Flats - Maize, Pigs and Pumpkins**

when they were fit for market, they were driven on foot to the railhead at Bairnsdale. This journey took five days, and it took the full week to do the return trip.

This method of disposing of the maize was quite profitable and Orbost started to progress. As more land was drained and cleared more maize was grown, also beans and pumpkins for stockfeed, and grass pastures for cattle. For a



**Huge Maize Crib on Irvine's Farm**

few years prior to the First World War and the construction of the railway line from Bairnsdale to Orbost, a lot of maize was carted by horse and bullock teams to Lakes Entrance for transhipment to the Melbourne market. The price obtained was low most of the time, ranging from about 2/- [two shillings] per bushel and if a price of 5/- [five shillings] was obtained it was regarded as extraordinary.

When the railway was constructed to Orbost, somewhere about 1917 or 18, the transport problem seemed to be over, and the train was a huge asset to Orbost. But with the cost of more



**Maize Train at Orbost Station**

labour-saving and up-to-date machinery, the price of maize did not rise very much and remained at about 3/- [three shillings] per bushel for a long time.

It was in 1936 that the farmers got together and persuaded the Victorian Government to legislate to form a Maize Board. The result was that the Board was successful in steadily raising the



**Maize Elevator designed and built by Percy Watt**

price to the satisfaction of the grower, and the Board is still in operation.

The production of maize is not nearly as high as a few years back, when the peak reached about 360,000 bushels. High costs of production caused the decline, and dairying and fat cattle grazing have taken the place of cultivation. Maize products are the chief buyers and manufacturers of maize and such products as starch, glucose, penicillin, maizena, cornflakes, maize oil, and dozens of other products are manufactured in Victoria.