



# Haymakers: A Chronicle Of Five Farm Families (Minnesota)

*Steven R. Hoffbeck*

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Making hay has always been hard work, just about the hardest work on a farm. In *The Haymakers*, Steven R. Hoffbeck chronicles the story of five different farm families in five different eras over a span of 150 years. A history of farming in microcosm, Hoffbeck relates how the work of cultivating hay has changed over the last century and a half—a story not just about grass, alfalfa, and clover, but also about sweat and fears, toil and loss.

One of the unique aspects of the book is that the fifth family that Hoffbeck chronicles is his own. Born into a farming family in southwestern Minnesota, Hoffbeck grew up working alongside his father and brothers and remembers, with rich detail, the sweat and toil of laboring on the farm. Throughout the book there is an undercurrent of danger and loss—as farmers struggled to tend their land under difficult circumstances, and as that work became more mechanized and consequently more dangerous. In the most heartfelt sections of the book, Hoffbeck writes of losing both his father and his oldest brother in separate farming accidents. As he writes, "wound around my memories of summers haying with my dad and my brothers are deeper threads of mourning. Danger, both natural and mechanical, is woven into the fabric of farmwork." He also writes about his own feelings of guilt about leaving the family farm for a career as a teacher and historian.

Hoffbeck also seeks to document and preserve the commonplace methods of haymaking, information about haying that might otherwise be lost to posterity. He describes the tools and the methods of haymaking as well as the relentless demands of the farm. Using diaries, agricultural guidebooks and personal interviews, the folkways of cutting, raking, and harvesting hay have been recorded in these chapters. Both a chronicle of the daily rhythms of farm work and a moving elegy for a vanishing way of life, the book is not so much about agricultural history as it is about family history, personal history—how farm families survive, even persevere.

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