

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

HORSE COMBINES IN THE PALOUSE COUNTRY

Number 225

Farming settlements in the Palouse country came a decade or so after the founding of Walla Walla and Lewiston to the south in the Snake River country. Early farming, even around Walla Walla, was confined to river and stream valley lands, but not long after 1860, farmers around Walla Walla noticed that the hills there could be farmed also. Shortly after 1870, farmers began to penetrate into the hills of the Palouse country, which they found to be wonderfully adapted for the production of wheat. From a fairly slow start before 1880, settlement began to spread—especially with the coming of railway service which made the lands more accessible, and markets for the wheat production more available.

By happy coincidence, perfection of horse-drawn combines in California was accomplished by 1880, and by around 1888 or 1889, an adaptation of the California horse-drawn combine to allow its use on hills was available. Within ten years—certainly by around 1898—almost all the worthwhile farmlands of the Palouse country were pretty much taken up. Grain production increased enormously as the lands came under cultivation, and down to about 1920, when horse power was replaced by mechanical power on these combines, the horse-drawn combines were an outstanding feature of the Palouse country.