

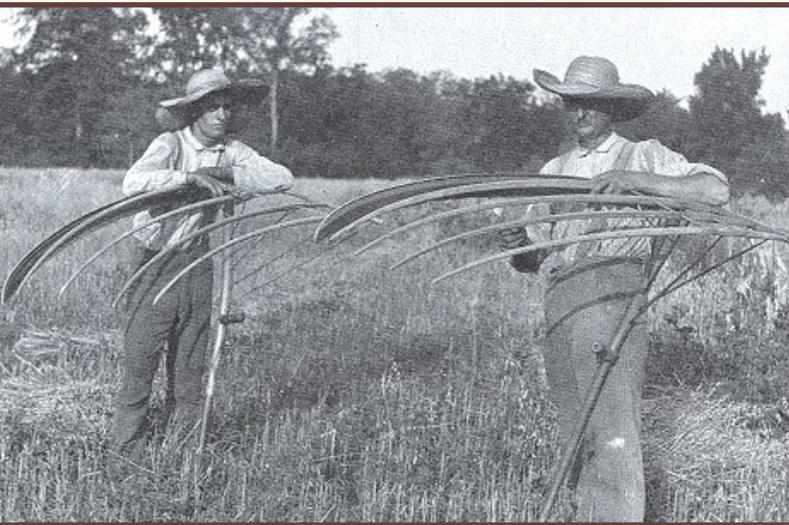
HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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Frontier Life in Ohio

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Two farmers are photographed with a grain cradle, the most efficient cutting tool prior to machinery.

The Frontier. Pioneers. Manifest Destiny. These terms have romanticized frontier life as being adventurous and the settlers as daring and brave. Though they were brave, the frontier life was not romantic; instead, it was extremely challenging, grueling, and dangerous.

"Pioneer Ohio" refers to the period following the War of 1812 and ending about mid-century. During this time, people flooded into the state and settled in new areas. In 1820, Ohio's 581,000 people were in large part migrants from eastern and southern states or immigrants from overseas. By 1850, about two-thirds of Ohio's nearly 2 million people had been born within the state. Persons under ten years of age constituted over 30% of the population of the state, and those under forty almost 84%. By the end of the period, Ohio had reached a new maturity in its material and social development.

The overwhelming majority of Ohioans lived on farms

or in farm villages during the pioneer period. These farmers grew grain, concentrating usually on corn and wheat. In 1839, Ohio ranked first among the states in wheat production. A decade later, it was in second place for the production of wheat, but had become first in corn production. In addition to grains and livestock, the average farmer also planted fruit trees, grape vines, and vegetable gardens. By 1840, farmers along Lake Erie already knew their location was advantageous for growing fruit. Ohio farmers also produced great quantities of butter and cheese. In 1849, Ohio ranked first among the states in the production of wool.

There were many technological improvements during the frontier period, including in the farming industry. In the 1820s, the primitive wooden plow with an iron point prepared the ground for planting. Done by hand, the planting and the hoeing of the corn was the work of the boys and sometimes of the girls. By 1825, the cradle had replaced the sickle for harvesting, enabling a man to cut three or four acres of grain a day rather a single acre. The cast iron plow, manufactured in Canton, had largely displaced the bull plow by 1840. During the 1850s, steel plows appeared in some sections of the state, and improved farming by cutting a furrow six or seven inches deep. The invention of the reaper, almost simultaneously by Obed Hussey of the Cincinnati area and Cyrus McCormick of Virginia, was a major breakthrough that promised to end the backbreaking and time-consuming task of cutting grain by scythe and cradle.

Other improvements brought about several transportation revolutions, as well as social and political reform movements. Public schools were introduced so all children, even those living on the frontier, would have access to free education.

