

Monograph
Husking Bees

This paper is concerned with the old time Husking Bees, but it needs some prefacing remarks, how and why they came into being.

Three types of corn were raised-Indian corn for display purposes, (2) yellow and white corn for human consumption and (3) field or cow corn. The third type is what created that institution known as the Husking Bee-field corn was a large ear, sometimes a foot long and smooth kernel even after drying out-not wrinkled as the corn for human consumption, if old. Sometime in late September or early October the stalks were cut in the field and bundled standing up. These bundles were called corn shocks. After drying outside for approximately a month, they were transported into the barn-usual y the loft. A farmer with not too large a crop would do the necessary labor with his family-but those with huge crops would either pay additional help or have a Husking Bee. Webster's definition-a neighborly gathering to work for someone, or for some joint concern; as a quilting or a Husking Bee. (U.S. Derivation).

The Husking Bee was usually held on a Saturday night to make it a social evening. The ears of corn were ripped off the stalks-the husk stripped off and the ears were then ultimately either brought to a grist mill loose, barreled, or bagged or at the farm the kernel was machined off by a contraption into which the ear was inserted and a crank turned. To make the Bee more interesting ears of Indian colored corn were mixed with the field corn-the finder of such being able to buy a partner of his or her own choice-that was traditional.

The kernel that was machined off at the farm was fed to chickens and horses. The corn ground at the grist mill was called cob meal, as cob and all were ground, and was fed to cattle. The only part discarded in all this process was the cob of the corn that had the kernel machined off.

The White Farm by Voses Pond and the Batley Farm on Acton Street had Husking Bees that individuals still living remember. The following is an account of a Bee from the Maynard News of November 3, 1911:

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Presented at the January 1965 Meeting

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October 13, 1899, Husking Bee

20 young people responded to an invitation to participate in a harvest party at the home of Miss Nellie B. Peters on Saturday evening. Festivities opened with corn husking but as in the case of a similar party recently, red ears were conspicuous by their absence. This seems a bad year for red ears. Young ladies chagrined. Then after husking there was a program of vocal and instrumental music, followed by dancing and collation, and all appeared happy despite failure to be hobsonized.

November 3, 1911.

A large load of Maynard and Concord people attended a Husking Bee at Mrs. Quinn's Farm in South Sudbury Saturday night.

The word hobsonized in the News article must refer to the dictionary definition of Hobson's Choice-17th century-a choice without an alternative-so the last phrase would read "despite failure to have a choice without an alternative".

There were grist mills throughout the area so farmers did not have too far to travel. The Wayside Inn Mill is a grist mill used today for grinding flour for one of the Baking Companies. We in Maynard had a mill on Mill Street which was a combination grist, wood, and cider mill-according to Gutteridge's "History".

The above technical information was supplied to me by William Salo, of the Salo-Simon Farm.

Submitted by B.R.Koski-Jan. 1965