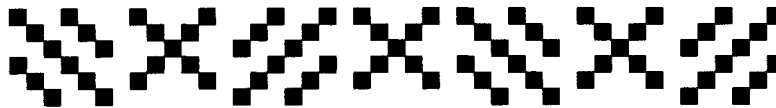


The White Plains, Indiana, Threshing Ring,  
1920-1943

*James Sanford Rikoon\**



Throughout Indiana and the Midwest documentation of the effect of agricultural mechanization on rural history is crucial to an understanding of the evolution of rural areas from their pioneer, tradition-oriented origins to the largely agribusiness, innovative present. One technological advance that initiated processes of adaptation and response was the mechanical grain separator or threshing machine. The “separator,” as it is named in rural areas, is a machine that automatically sorts harvested cereals into their three main components—grain seed, chaff, and straw. Threshing machines were adopted throughout the Midwest in relatively large numbers in the 1850s.<sup>1</sup> With this device, powered at first by horses, then by steam engines, and finally by gas engines around 1925 in most areas, grain fit for mill or market was delivered out of the side of the machine while the chaff and straw exited from the rear.<sup>2</sup> Separators enabled farmers to increase the amount of grain threshed during one season with far less labor input per bushel.

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<sup>1</sup> Until the mid-nineteenth century “threshing” commonly denoted only the separation of the wheat heads from the straw whereas the cleaning of the chaff from the kernel was called “separating.” Early threshing machines, sometimes called “groundhog” threshers because of their physical posture and noise, did not clean the chaff. By the turn of the century machines completing both processes were referred to synonymously as threshing machines or separators.

<sup>2</sup> Good general discussions and photographs of the various “powers” and separators used in grain harvesting can be found in Kirby Brumfield, *The Wheat Album: A Picture and Story Scrapbook of Wheat Harvests in Years Gone By* (Seattle, 1974); Jack Norbeck, *Encyclopedia of American Steam Traction Engines* (Sarasota, 1976); and Donald P. Greene, “Prairie Agricultural Technology” (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Indiana University, 1957), 290-319.

Unlike the wheat drill or other agricultural innovations of the mid-nineteenth century, threshing machines were complex and expensive implements. Most farmers were unable to afford or care for the device, and even those who could do so found it impractical to put out money for an outfit that could thresh their crop in one or two days. One solution was the creation of cooperative threshing rings. Best summarized as neighborhood cooperatives, these collectives allowed each farmer-member to help other ring participants with their threshing and thus be entitled to receive his neighbors' help when the separator and power arrived at his farm. In some cases the ring purchased a threshing rig themselves with the cost split among members; more often an outside thresherman who owned the necessary machinery was employed to work through the harvest.<sup>3</sup>

The White Plains Threshing Ring of northern Franklin County, Indiana, was one such local agricultural cooperative. The ring's organizational minutes for 1920-1943, which are reproduced below, are a case study of rural evolution during the years just before the combined harvester-thresher (combine) initiated a more individualistic harvesting system. By providing information on the kinds of activities that typified many midwestern threshing collectives,<sup>4</sup> the White Plains records provide insights into the ways in which one locale adapted traditional social and cultural patterns to changing technology and regional and national trends.<sup>5</sup>

The White Plains area in Franklin County includes the southern portion of Blooming Grove Township along with the northern and western border areas of, respectively, Brookville and Fairfield townships. The soil base is mainly clay with a slight

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<sup>3</sup> The best currently available discussions of Midwest threshing patterns include Angie Kumlien Main, "Annals of a Wisconsin Thresherman," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, XI (March, 1928), 301-308; J. C. Rundles, "The Thrashing Ring in the Cornbelt," in *United States Department of Agriculture Yearbook, 1918* (Washington, 1919), 247-68; and Emil Rauchenstein and C. A. Brown, *Successful Threshing Ring Management (University of Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 267; Urbana, 1925)*.

<sup>4</sup> Not all post-1920 Indiana threshing rings were as formally organized as the White Plains cooperative, though the Hoosier state seems to have had a proportionally higher number of formal ring structures than any of its neighboring states. This situation is due, in part, to an active promotional campaign by the *Indiana Farmer's Guide* and other state agricultural publications, especially between 1915 and 1925. The title of the *Indiana Farmer's Guide* varies from *Indiana Farmer* and *Farmer's Guide to Indiana Farmer's Guide*, depending on the year.

<sup>5</sup> Marybelle Burch, manuscript librarian, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, first called the author's attention to the White Plains Threshing Ring minutes. Later interviews, in 1981, with Basil Copes of Brookville, Indiana, a former ring member, were helpful in providing more details about ring activities.

loam mixture. The relatively level contour of the landscape derives from the Plains' location on the southern border of the Illinois Glacier boundary line. Settled first in the 1810s,<sup>6</sup> the White Plains neighborhood quickly developed into an active, diversified farming area. Until the post-World War II period the overwhelming majority of family farms occupied 80 to 160 acres, enough land to meet the needs of the resident family and to support the development of a small market interest. The mixed German and Anglo-American population that dominated settlement during the mid-nineteenth century could acquire cash by selling dairy products, livestock, or crop surpluses.<sup>7</sup> Grains, especially wheat and oats, along with corn, were primary farm and market crops until the 1940s. Of the cereals, wheat was generally the most profitable cash crop. It also provided the family with an important foodstuff and was mixed into some livestock feeds. The straw provided a raw material for bedding and winter shelters for the stock. Unspoiled straw mixed with chaff, bran, or some other supplement could be used as a basic winter feed. Oats were similarly used as a nutritious feed for the farm's horses, and oat straw, even more than wheat straw, was favored by stock as winter food. The only other cereals grown in the area were buckwheat and rye; neither grain ever gained any real popularity among area farmers.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to 1920 there apparently was no formally organized White Plains Threshing Ring with elected officers, by-laws, or secretary's minutes. For many years before this date, however, neighbors did exchange labor during the threshing season. Like most threshing rings of the nineteenth century, the White Plains organizational network was informal, and information was passed solely by word-of-mouth from season to season. Three major reasons appear to have motivated area farmers to become more organized. First, according to Basil Copes, a former ring member, inequalities existed in the amounts of grain raised by members of the same ring. Those men with smaller acreages found them-

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<sup>6</sup> August J. Reifel, *History of Franklin County, Indiana: Her People, Industries, and Institutions* . . . (Indianapolis, 1915), 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 139, 265-68; Agricultural Statistics and Reports, 1855, 1858, 1873, 1885 (Franklin County Courthouse, Brookville, Indiana). According to an 1852 Indiana law county assessors compiled agricultural information for farms in each township as part of their duties in assessment of taxes, and, until approximately 1919, they filed these reports with the county auditor. Included were statistics on total number of acres in each farm, quantities of farm products harvested, and kinds and numbers of livestock found on each farm. Indiana, *Special and Local Acts (1851-1852)*, 64. See also Samuel Shirk diary, 1852, photocopy (Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis).

<sup>8</sup> Agricultural Statistics and Reports; interviews with Basil Copes.

selves laboring much more at some of their neighbors' farms than these same men were required to do at the smaller places. A major concern, then, was to equalize this labor difference by providing the farmer who worked smaller acreages reimbursement for his extra labor at the bigger farms. The solution was the "difference" system. Although the exact workings of the White Plains ring's system are not known, the "difference" formula was based on comparisons of each ring member's total yields. The secretary of the ring kept a close account of these figures and taxed a "difference" to farmers with larger yields on the basis of a fixed amount per 100 bushels. Thus, in a hypothetical situation, if the rate was fifteen cents per 100 bushels and Farmer A's crop yielded 341 bushels and Farmer B harvested 544 bushels, then B would owe A a total of thirty cents if both men donated the same level of labor. Labor rates for the annual run for both ring members and hired men were based on bushels threshed and not on hours worked. By paying this way each farmer could quickly estimate how much he owed by dividing his yield by the rate of "difference" and multiplying this figure by the total number of hands. At the end of the threshing season, however, not all ring members exchanged debts. The secretary, whose computations were rarely challenged, attempted to cancel balancing debts wherever possible. After 1931 the cost of meals eaten by ring members was added to the labor and yield aspects of this system. Farmers were charged by the "plate," and these debts were also taken into account at the end of the season. According to Copes, those farmers who raised around twenty acres of grain would generally neither pay out nor receive any "difference."<sup>9</sup>

The White Plains "difference" system was outlined in the ring's by-laws, a short document (apparently no longer existing) that contained rules for the ring's yearly and daily activities.<sup>10</sup> It is likely that the by-laws solved a second major concern of area farmers—the need to provide greater consistency in member's activities from year to year and to provide a continuous structure outlining procedures and responsibilities. As the minutes indi-

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Basil Copes, Brookville, Indiana, February 6, 1981. The process of figuring "difference" in the White Plains ring was apparently a well-kept secret, known only to the three ring secretaries—Frank Moore, Harry Green, and William Suhre. No former ring members alive today remember ever learning it. Rundles discusses a few ways of figuring "differences" in "The Thrashing Ring in the Cornbelt," 247-68.

<sup>10</sup> Generic by-laws, suitable for adaptation to particular ring requirements, were periodically published in farm magazines and journals. For examples, see *Indiana Farmer's Guide*, XXXI (March 8, 1919), 3, 42; *ibid.* (October 25, 1919), 34-35; *ibid.*, XXXIII (July 9, 1921), 8; or *Wallace's Farmer*, XLIII (September 13, 1918), 1309; *ibid.*, XLIV (June 20, 1919), 1275.

cate, the by-laws included regulations on the selection process for labor tasks, the times for beginning and ending the work day, the instructions concerning the expenditure of funds, and the selection process and responsibilities of ring officers, committees, and thresherman. With these by-laws, and the simple parliamentary procedure used during business portions of the organization and settlement meetings, ring members forged a more highly structured and formal work exchange than had existed previously. In contrast to the loose networks underlying the older cooperative patterns, the newer system parallels the increasing complexity of agricultural technology and tasks.

The increasing mobility of rural families and the growing number of farm renters in the White Plains neighborhood provided a third reason for the change to a more structured relationship for the threshing ring in the 1920s. By this decade between 20 and 25 percent of each year's membership were renters, a figure perhaps two or three times higher than a generation before. The by-laws provided a clearly understood threshing system that could be changed only by a majority vote.<sup>11</sup> The ring's core membership thereby assured themselves of a continuous system unalterable by any new minority. In 1920 the White Plains ring included nine families—Copes, Nierstheimer, Roberts, Green, McWhorter, Swift, Moore, Younts, and Klipple—that had been residing in the area prior to 1873.<sup>12</sup> Established farmers, who owned their own farms, retained tight control of the ring throughout its twenty-four-year history. This core consisted of the Copes, Green, Nierstheimer, Gesell, Fritz, Hoffman, Suhre, Roemer, and Pfaff families.<sup>13</sup> Although more than fifty family names appear in the ring minutes, the officers were, with only two exceptions, filled from this group. This continuity resulted in strong control over the difference system, the treasury, and the progression of meetings and procedures that characterized the threshing season.

In addition to the by-laws and formalized structure of the White Plains ring as organized in 1920, there existed a perhaps larger, albeit unofficial, set of ring rules based on the area's traditions, values, and attitudes in regard to work exchanges and social relations. The strength of these "rules" cannot be overestimated. Because new ring members often were not aware of these

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Basil Copes, February 13, 1981.

<sup>12</sup> This information is based on farm family names listed in *Agricultural Statistics and Reports*, 1873.

<sup>13</sup> *Franklin County Plat Book*, 1925 (Brookville Public Library). Using the plat book as a source, Copes identified the core families which composed the White Plains Threshing Ring and pinpointed the location of their farms.

folkways, they frequently found the unwritten codes more difficult to follow than the by-laws. One new White Plains member, for example, violated the tradition that bundle wagon drivers always unload their bundles at the same side of the separator:

We had one old fellow here in the neighborhood, well he moved in here that one year. The first year he was my partner [with the bundle wagons]. When you started in as pairs, the same ones stayed all through the ring. You got a fellow that stayed on the opposite side of you at the machine and you stayed on your side. You was supposed to go that way all through the wheat. If you got the dust in over at a threshing, why the wind would change at the various places. And we started in and he didn't have as large a load of bundles as I did and he wasn't no fool either I found out afterwards. He got on the clean side which you had that privilege on the first time. But the second time we came in he came in on my side and I thought, "Well he's just new to the ring and he isn't thinking too well. Now I'll wait till tomorrow." And the next day, the same thing. So I told him. I said, "We've got a little rule here that whichever side of the separator you start out on, you go through on that till the end of the ring." "Well," he said, "that dust hurts my eyes." "Well, it don't do mine any good either," I told him.<sup>14</sup>

Organization and settlement meetings marked the opening and closing of the White Plains threshing season. Both events took place at the Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Church in Blooming Grove Township. Approximately ten days before the threshing rig was due to arrive in the area, the president called the organization meeting. As the minutes indicate, the primary purposes of this gathering were to elect ring officers for the coming year, apportion labor tasks to ring members, hire extra laborers if needed, and admit new members into the ring. The Machine Committee reported on the thresherman whom they had hired and the prices agreed upon for the season's run. This meeting generally took place in the evening and rarely lasted longer than two hours.<sup>15</sup>

The key element of the organization meeting was the selection of the labor positions that each man kept throughout that season. Before 1922 the captain of the ring placed the men. In that year members voted to choose their positions by lot. After the positions were randomly selected, ring members could trade their selections if two men agreed to an exchange.<sup>16</sup> This flexibility explains what seem in the minutes to be uncanny streaks of continuous job selections. Howard Roemer, for example, a heavysset man who preferred to work with the bundle wagons, managed either to draw that job or to trade for it for sixteen of his seventeen years in the ring.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Basil Copes, February 13, 1981.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, February 6, 1981; Reifel, *History of Franklin County*, 428-29.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Basil Copes, February 6, 1981.

The major threshing tasks divided among ring members were bundle wagon or sheaf wheat team drivers, pitchers, grain handlers, and grain wagon drivers. The bundle wagoners worked in teams. Their job was to drive their wagons into the fields where the pitchers' main task was to pitch the bundles onto the wagons. The driver arranged the sheaves on the wagon bed, taking care to build an even load that would not tip over when the wagon was driven from the field to the separator, normally positioned near the barn. The threshing machine feeding carrier extended from the front, and bundles could be pitched by the drivers from either side. Working as a team, the feeders alternated pitching their sheaves, always heads first, into the cutting teeth of the separator.<sup>17</sup> After the grain worked its way through the machine, the grain seeds were carried by internal elevators to a grain weigher at the side. As the automatic weighers ticked off the kernels, half-bushel by half-bushel, the wheat handlers sacked the grain in two-bushel bags.<sup>18</sup> These sacks were then placed in grain wagons, driven to the farmer's granary, and unloaded. Occasionally the grain was not sacked but exited down a spout from the machine directly into the wagon box.

The minimum number of workers needed for the White Plains ring was seventeen. There were always eight bundle wagons and two grain wagons. The remaining men were assigned to pitching bundles or to handling the threshed grain, with the majority working as field pitchers. The bundle wagon tasks required the most skill and expertise, primarily in loading the wagons and pitching the sheaves into the separator. Hired labor, usually high school students or beginning farmers, generally worked as pitchers or grain wagon drivers.

Within the threshing ring hierarchy the captain held a unique position. He acted as a foreman over the ring members and harvest activities, though he was always careful to respect the rights of the thresherman who bossed the rig crew. The captain worked around the separator, feeding bundles of grain that either fell from the bundle wagons or missed the feeding carrier when pitched from the wagons. Perhaps most importantly, the captain was responsible for directing the season's threshing route. The ring's

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<sup>17</sup> Self-feeding carriers were available on most separators by the turn of the century. Before that time the sheaves' binds had to be cut by hand and the grain fed manually. This process required three extra workers—two men, one on each side of the machine, to cut the bundle ties and one man to feed the open bundles into the separator.

<sup>18</sup> Each ring member contributed a set amount of grain sacks to the ring for the season's run. Interview with Basil Copes, February 6, 1981.

threshing order normally alternated every year, beginning at either the northern or southern edge of the area. This pattern prevented any one member from suffering annual anxiety because he was at the end of the run and thus was more likely to suffer grain losses because of summer storms or hail. The captain also selected when and where ring meals would be eaten and decided the starting and ending time for each day's activities.<sup>19</sup>

The owner of the threshing rig was the ideal role model for many boys throughout the rural Midwest during this period. Interestingly, the thresherman did not operate the threshing machine itself; rather, he controlled the powerful steam or gasoline engine that powered the separator. William Scherer, the thresherman for the White Plains ring for over twenty-five years, lived only two miles east of the neighborhood. Scherer threshed for two rings in the area, each year alternating the ring he threshed first. His long involvement with the White Plains farmers reflects the tendency of threshing rings to establish long-term relationships with the thresherman who best suited their requirements.<sup>20</sup>

Scherer's rig crew consisted of himself, as engineer, a separator tender,<sup>21</sup> and a blowerman. The engineer, when working with steam engines, was assisted by a wagonman whose major task involved driving the water tank between the engine and the nearest water source to replenish the boilers of the thirsty steamer. The separator tender kept the threshing machine running smoothly. He could generally be found either standing on top of the separator, where he listened for any abnormal sounds and felt the bundles moving through the machine, or working around the machine with oilcan, grease gun, or adjusting tools. The blowerman labored at the rear of the machine from which a metal stack directed the air-driven expulsion of straw and chaff. By manipulating cranks that directed the angle, direction, and height of the blowing waste, he attempted to build an even and solid straw pile.<sup>22</sup> Before the threshing rig arrived at their farms, farmers

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> William Scherer was also employed by some ring members to hull clover seed and shred corn for ensilage. Both of these tasks required reciprocal labor donations among farmers although the number of workers needed was less than that required for threshing. Small informal rings were developed, but only a minority of the White Plains Threshing Ring members participated as all did not raise hay or have silos on their farms. *Ibid.*, February 13, 1981.

<sup>21</sup> For many years Scherer's separator man was Ralph Kline. It was normal for Kline to spend the evening sleeping outdoors near the threshing rig while the rest of the machine crew went home. *Ibid.*, February 6, 1981.

<sup>22</sup> The host farmer was often allowed to abandon his regularly assigned task in the threshing ring if he desired to work on his own strawstack formation. This folkway demonstrates the significance of the strawstack.

often built temporary pole shelters or sheds in their barnyards. By building the straw pile around and on top of the structures, the blowerman could create a cozy wintering place for the stock. The farm's straw pile, incidentally, also supplied other neighborhood visitors with a measure of a farmer's grain crop and, by extension, his prosperity.

A summary of the number of bushels of grain threshed per year and the average number of bushels threshed per farm is given in Table 1. Because of the methods necessarily employed in their reckoning, these statistics are only approximations. "Numbers of Farms" for each season was determined from the number of men given positions, including captain, as members of the ring. "Number of Bushels Threshed" is more problematic. Only for the years 1928 and 1929 did the secretary include these figures in the actual minutes of the settlement meetings. In 1931 a figure assumed to be the number of bushels threshed was added as an "extra" at the bottom of the minutes page; the 1940 total was listed on a miscellaneous settlement page in the back of the minutes volume. For the other years the number of bushels threshed was figured on the basis of wage rate for hired hands. For example, in 1938 the hired laborers were paid thirty cents for every 100 bushels threshed. The secretary reports that each man was paid \$12.90, a figure that suggests 4,300 bushels threshed that season. Use of this system assumes, of course, that the hired men did not miss any of the threshing and that monies paid were for threshing only. Although Basil Copes reports that these men rarely missed any work,<sup>23</sup> the equation likely contains a small percentage of error. It is possible to check the use of the labor rate system just described with figures given by the secretary for 1928, 1929, 1931, and 1940. These computations are found in Table 2 and show, at least for these years, that the level of error is extremely slight.

Within a week after threshing the last bundle of grain, the settlement meeting occurred. Until 1931, when members voted to end the social time, this event combined both business and social functions. Whole families were involved. The meeting began with the men gathered outside the church to "settle-up" their differences. Hired hands received their wages, and ring members voted on the thresherman that they wanted to work the ring the following year. The Machine Committee, appointed by the president at this time, was entrusted with the task of contacting the selected thresherman and fixing the cost of the next year's run.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Basil Copes, February 6, 1981.

While the men talked, the women remained inside the church to set tables in preparation for the social time, generally consisting of an ice cream and cake "social," with the cakes and drinks brought by the ring families and the ice cream purchased with funds from the ring's treasury.<sup>24</sup> When the men finished their business, they moved inside to join their families, a symbolic gesture to signal the end of the grain harvest season. The settlement meeting then concluded with time for visiting and the renewal of friendships and neighborhood bonds.

**TABLE 1**  
**Output of the White Plains Threshing Ring, 1928-1940**

Year	Number of Farms	Estimate of Total Bushels Threshed	Average Bushels Per Farm
1928	16	5,015	313.4
1929	16	5,247	327.9
1930	16	4,754	316.9
1931	15	12,600	840.0
1932	15	5,400	360.0
1933	14	4,600	328.6
1934	14	6,133	438.1
1935	14	8,200	630.8
1936	14	5,200	371.4
1937	14	5,000	357.1
1938	13	4,300	330.8
1939	13	4,000	307.7
1940	12	4,419	368.3

Source: Minutes of the White Plains Threshing Ring.

<sup>24</sup> In other midwestern rings it was common for the thresherman to bring the ice cream as a gesture of goodwill and, perhaps, as a minor form of American Midwest potlatch. Michael Jay Pyle, "Threshing: A Process and an Experience," 9; (unpublished manuscript, Indiana University Folklore Archives, Bloomington). interview with Luther Breimeyer, Greenville, Ohio, December 3, 1980.

**TABLE 2**  
**Comparison of Estimated and Reported Output**

Year	Wage Rate (per 100 bu.)	Wages Paid (per man)	Bushels Threshed Based on Labor Rate	Report of Bushels Threshed	Percent of Error in Labor Rate
1928	25 cents	\$12.69	5,076	5,015	.012
1929	35 cents	18.36	5,245	5,247	.000
1931	20 cents	25.25	12,600	12,612	.001
1940	25 cents	10.75	4,300	4,419	.027

Source: Minutes of the White Plains Threshing Ring.

Between 1921 and 1944 certain trends in ring activities reflect other economic and social changes both in agriculture and general rural social patterns. The peak of prosperity and normalcy in ring activities occurred between the ring's formal organization and the Depression period. Membership during this time averaged eighteen families, and the members never had to hire more than one extra worker. Membership, however, did decline from a peak of twenty-one in 1921 to sixteen in 1930. The decrease resulted mainly from the loss of farms located on the ring's northwest and western borders [see Figure 1]. When these farms changed hands, their new owners or renters, if they continued to need a thresherman, joined other nearby rings.<sup>25</sup> After the increase in wheat prices brought about by World War I, the market stabilized in the 1920s. Although the center of grain production had reached the north central states by this time,<sup>26</sup> Indiana farmers who took advantage of labor-saving machinery and cooperative help could still make good profits from their grain crops. Rates of "difference" paid, the most accurate reflector of profit margins and labor costs in relation to profit, paralleled these changes. "Difference" paid

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Basil Copes, February 13, 1981.

<sup>26</sup> Louis B. Schmidt, "The Westward Movement of the Wheat Growing Industry in the United States," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, XVIII (July, 1920), 409-12.

out in 1920 was thirty-five cents per 100 bushels, reflecting the high market prices. After dropping to twenty-five cents in 1921 as market prices went down, the rate of "difference" remained constant through 1930.<sup>27</sup>

Beginning in 1931 and continuing through 1937 the minutes reflect the impact of the Depression. In 1931 the "difference" rate dropped to twenty cents per 100 bushels, and the next year the level fell another five cents. From 1932 until 1937, when wheat prices began to rise again, the "difference" rate remained at fifteen cents per 100 bushels, the lowest level in ring history. Wages paid to hired labor also parallel the tightening of the money supply during this period. From a high of thirty-five cents per 100 bushels threshed in 1929 and 1930, labor rates declined to twenty-five cents in 1931 and fifteen cents in 1932. This low level continued until 1937 when the rate doubled, thereby jumping back close to the pre-Depression scale.

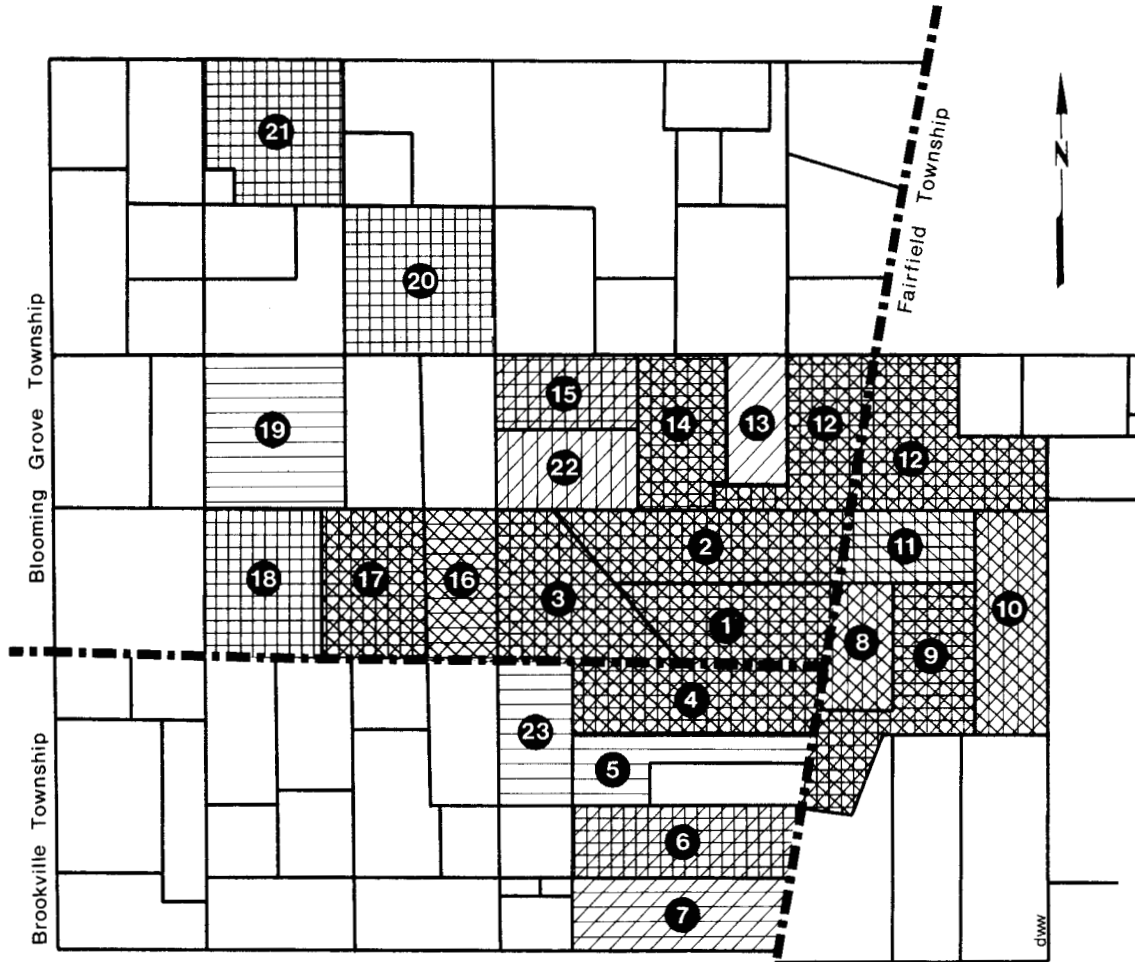
The decline in ring membership that began in the late 1920s continued through the next decade. In the early 1930s some farmers stopped raising cereal crops; in addition, a new generation of farmers who depended on tractors for their farm power and corn for their cash crop purchased or rented the farms of former ring members. The introduction of soybeans into the area in the mid-1930s also resulted in a decrease of acreage devoted to grains. By the late 1930s threshing rings throughout the Midwest were becoming dysfunctional as pull-type combines were successfully adapted for use on small farms where the Ford and John Deere tractors increasingly provided the power source. Relatively inexpensive and highly efficient, the pull-type combine cut and threshed grains in a single sweep of the field, thus freeing individual farmers from the necessity of engaging in cooperative labor to complete the grain harvest.

Entering the 1940s, the White Plains ring membership was down to almost half its 1921 number. The remaining members were mainly those core farmers who had dominated the ring from its inception. Instead of finding themselves without reason to continue the ring process at this time—when during many years there were almost as many hired hands as members—the ring farmers were again motivated to continue grain production by the shortages created by a major world war. The organization and settle-

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<sup>27</sup> An exception occurs in 1929 when a one-year experiment allowed members who used teams in their labor to receive a higher rate of difference. The change was voted down the following year because members felt that everyone had an equal chance to draw any job and, further, that the tasks evened out over the years. Interview with Basil Copes, February 13, 1981.

FIGURE 1. Farms Included in White Plains Threshing Ring During 1921, 1925, 1932 and 1940 Activities



Farms Numbered (Acreage)*	
1. Copes (102)	13. Heeb (60)
2. Hoffman (127)	14. Roberts (100)
3. Pfaff (139)	15. Nierstheimer (80)
4. Klipple (121)	16. Kimball (80)
5. Younts (65)	17. Koepple (107)
6. Roemer (130)	18. Weber (129)
7. Seibert (110)	19. Phelan (160)
8. Gesell (71)	20. Swift (160)
9. Suhre (108)	21. Moore (140)
10. Gesell (82)	22. Pfaff (80)
11. Shenkel (74)	23. Phenis (80)
12. Green (225)	

Key:	
1921 members	
1925 members	
1932 members	
1940 members	

\* This list includes farm owners listed in 1925 plat book. The boundary differences for 1921, 1932, and 1940 are not significant.

ment meetings continued through 1943. Ring members still ate their dinners together, although for the final two years this meal was not prepared by the host farm but was delivered at noontime by wives and children.<sup>28</sup> In 1941 "due to the lack of members the position of Capt. was discontinued." In 1944 some long-time members such as Basil Copes, Andrew Knecht, and Will Suhre invested in a small separator and gasoline tractor that could be operated by three or four men. Other ring members purchased combines to harvest their share of the wartime crops. The minutes of the White Plains Threshing Ring were put away by the last secretary, Suhre. In the late 1960s, when an individual farmer could harvest his entire acreage from the dust-free, sound-proofed cab of a self-propelled combine, the Suhre family passed the minutes to Copes, the last ring treasurer. It was perhaps as much the conservative natures of the White Plains farmers as their concern for history that led them to preserve the record of their threshing ring. Whatever the reason, however, the minutes provide an insight into that transitional period in Indiana's rural history when agricultural innovations and traditional patterns coexisted most harmoniously.

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<sup>28</sup> As noted earlier, the ring voted in 1929 to charge each man for his dinner. This rather uncommon move created a break with a long rural tradition of providing food to neighbors lending aid during the harvest. A motion in 1931 to return to the older pattern was defeated.

## Minutes of White Plains Threshing Ring<sup>1</sup>

Aug—13—1920

At call of President J.V. Younts the White Plains Threshing Ring met for the purpose of settling the business of the past season. Minutes of last meeting read and approved. The Ring voted to hire Wm Scherer for the next season. Wm Suhre, Adam Pfaff and Henry Nierstheimer were appointed as a Machine Committee. The meeting then adjourned for a social time with Cake and Ice cream as refreshments.

F.H. Moore, Sec't.

June 24—1921

At call of President J.V. Younts the White Plains Threshing Ring met to make arrangements for the year. On Motion Mr. Schuler, Carl Precht, Howard Roemer and Peter Fritz were admitted to the threshing ring. The election of Officers resulted in the following President J.V. Younts, Sect. F.H. Moore, Treas. Edw. Copes. Jesse Swift was elected as Captain. Minutes of last meeting read and approved. The Com. to hire machine for the present year made their report and the ring accepted the price for threshing as agreed by the Thresherman's Association,<sup>2</sup> the Com. was then discharged

Moved and Seconded that Sect No 5 be ammended to read 20 cts per 100 bu. instead of 35 cts per 100. Motion Ammended to read 25 cts per 100. bu. Ammendant carried also motion carried as ammended.

The Captain placed the men as follows.

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<sup>1</sup> The original minutes of the White Plains Threshing Ring were kept in a paperbound notebook measuring five by eight inches with the majority of entries in pencil. The notebook is currently in the possession of Basil Copes, Brookville, Indiana. The following transcription was made from a microfilm copy of the minutes located in the Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis. The ring secretaries' original spelling, punctuation, and grammar have been followed as closely as possible. The faded nature of the original and the quality of the microfilm, as well as often illegible handwriting, have made some decisions necessarily arbitrary. Variant spellings of both first and last names of ring members and workers are found throughout the diary. These spellings have been retained without correction. Spacing has been standardized and raised letters brought down to the line.

<sup>2</sup> This reference connotes that Scherer belonged to an organized group of thresherman that attempted to set consistent prices for their services. While such organizations, or "brotherhoods" as they were often called, were found throughout the Midwest, only a minority of threshermen joined their ranks.

	Sheaf wheat teams	
Adam Pfaff John Hoffman Peter Fritz Harry Green		M. Phelan H. Nierstheimer H. Roemer F. Moore
	Pitchers	
John Roemer Kimball, F. D. Greenley		Carl Precht J.V. Younts
	Grain Wagons	
S.D. Roberts		Edw. Copes.
	Grain Handlers	
C. Seibert Wm Suhre		W. McWhorter G. Klipple
	Extra Man <sup>3</sup> Schuler	

The ring voted to have a social ti[me] at the settlement meeting. [Graden?] Klipple, S.D. Roberts and M. Phelan were appointed as a com. to make arrangements for the meeting.

Motion to adjourn carried

F.H. Moore

July 27th 1921

At call of Pres. J.V. Younts the White Plains Threshing Ring met for the purpose of settling up the business of the threshing season just closed. Minutes of last meeting read and approved. The ring voted to hire Wm Scherer to thresh for the ring next year. The ring then proceeded to make the settlements for the past season. The meeting then adjourned for a social time. Ice cream and cake were the refreshments.

F.H. Moore Sect.

June 9th 1922

At call of Pres. J.V. Younts the White Plains Threshing Ring met for the purpose of making arrangements for the season of 1922. Receipts rec'd. from Franklin Furniture Co for flowers furnished

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<sup>3</sup> The "extra man" took the position of other workers on a rotating basis or whenever a member was excused, for whatever reason, from his normal task. Interview with Basil Copes, Brookville, Indiana, February 6, 1981.

for the funeral of Henry Heeb. The bill of Frank Moster for 4.<sup>00</sup>/<sub>100</sub> for flowers furnished for the funeral of John Roemer.<sup>4</sup> On motion the bill was allowed and assisstant made. Mr. S.A. Wilson, Joe Gingling, Henry Gesell and Albert Koeppel were admitted as members of the ring. The meeting was then declared open for the Nomination of Officers. S.A. Wilson was elected as President. F.H. Moore was elected as Sec't. M. Phelan was elected as Treasurer Jesse Swift was elected as Captain. Moved and Sec-onded that the ring draw for their places. Motion carried  
The tickets were prepared and resulted in the following

Bundle teams

F.H. Moore  
W. Suhre  
H. Roemer  
D. Greenley

M. Phelan  
P. Fritz  
J Gingling  
H. McWhorter

Grain teams

H. Nierstheimer

H. Green

Pitchers

H. Gesell  
S. Wilson

A. Koeppel

C. Seibert  
F. Kimball

Grain wrestler<sup>5</sup>

E. Copes  
J. Schuler  
C. Precht

J. Hoffman  
S.D. Roberts

S.D. Roberts, Chris Seibert and Henry Nierstheimer were ap-  
pointed as a machine Committe.

F.H. Moore, Jesse Swift and Edw. Copes were appointed as a Com.  
to make arrangements for the settlement meeting The meeting  
then adjourned

F.H. Moore  
Sect.

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<sup>4</sup> This practice supports the concept of the threshing ring as more than a purely contractual relationship. The purchase of flowers for deceased neighbor-  
hood residents was practiced in the area before ring formalization and continues  
today.

<sup>5</sup> "Grain wrestler" is another term for grain handler and is, perhaps, a more  
descriptive term for the tasks involved.

July 24—1922

The White Plains Threshing Ring met for the purpose of settling up the business for the year past. Meeting called to order by Pres. S.A. Wilson. Minutes of last meeting read and approved. The business of settling was then taken up. The Ring voted to hire Wm Scherer for next season. The Machine Com. appointed at the previous meeting are retained for the next season. The meeting then adjourned for a social time.

F.H. Moore  
Sect

July 9th 1923

The White Plains Threshing Ring was called by President S.A. Wilson to make arrangements for the Threshing Season of 1923. Howard Snyder and Chas. Doner were admitted into the Ring. The minutes of last meeting were read and approved. The election of Officers was then taken up. For Pres. S.A. Wilson, V.P. M. Phelan, For Sec't F.H. Moore, Treas. Edw. Copes, For Cap't Jesse Swift. The ring drew for places which resulted as follows

	Bundle Team	
Howard Romer		M. Phelan
Wm Suhre		Chris Siebert
H. Nierstheimer		Harry Green
S.A. Wilson		John Hoffman
	Grain Team	
Henry G. Gesell		Joe Gingling
	Grain Men	
F.H. Moore		A. Koepfel
D. Greenley		Chas. Doner
	Pitchers	
Edw. Copes	Howard Snider	Carl Precht
Jacob Schuler	P. Fritz	

The Pres appointed the following as a com[.] for the social meeting. F.H. Moore, Jesse Swift and Edw. Copes. Moved and seconded that the Ring buy 2 Grain Forks to stay with the machine. Motion carried. No business appearing the meeting then adjourned.

F.H. Moore  
Sect



IN THIS EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIANA THRESHING SCENE THE LUGS HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM THE BACK WHEELS OF THE RUMELY TRACTOR (MANUFACTURED IN LA PORTE, INDIANA) POWERING THE SEPARATOR, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF LOCAL ROAD LAWS. AS WITH THE WHITE PLAINS RING, THE BUNDLE WAGONS ARE UNLOADING IN PAIRS AND THE SEPARATOR TENDER IS IN HIS NORMAL POSITION ATOP THE SEPARATOR.

Courtesy J. C. Allen & Son, Inc., West Lafayette, Indiana.

Aug 1st 1923

At Call of Pres. S.A. Wilson the White Plains Threshing Ring met for the purpose of settling the business for the past season Minutes of last meeting read and approved. The settlement between the Members was then taken up. The Pres. appointed F.H. Moore, Henry Nierstheimer and Edw. Copes as a Machine Committee for the year 1924. All other business being transacted the meeting adjourned.

F.H. Moore  
Sect

July 7th 1924

At call of Pres. S.A. Wilson the White Plains Threshing Ring met for the Purpose of making arrangements for the season of 1924. Minutes of last meeting read and approved Six men applied for membership in the Ring and were accepted. Jesse Swift was elected as Pres. for the next year. F.H. Moore was elected for Sec't for

the next year. Edw. Copes was elected Treasurer for the next year. Adam Pfaff was elected as Captain. The ring drew for places as follows

	Bundle Teams	
S.A Wilson		Howard Roemer
F.H. Moore		Henry Gesell
P. Fritz		M. Phelan
H. Gesell		F. Kimball
	Pitchers	
Fred Hoffman	H. Green	J. Koepfel
W. Phenis	H. Nierstheimer	
	Grain Team	
Edw. Copes		D. Greenley
	Grain Men	
Jesse Swift		Chris Siebert
Ray Jones		

The Ring voted to continue buying flowers for a Member of the Ring in case of his Death.

The Com. on Machine report that they have hired Wm Scherer to thresh the grain for the season of 1924. S.A. Wilson, Adam Pfaff and H.C. Nierstheimer were appointed as a Com. for the settlement meeting.

No further business appearing the meeting adjourned

F.H. Moore Sec't.

Aug 4th 1924

At call of Pres. Jesse Swift the White Plains Threshing Ring met for the purpose of settling up the business of the season just passed Minutes of last meeting read and approved The settlement of accounts was next in order. The ring voted on the machine for the next season which resulted in Wm Sherer receiving the vote. Peter Fritz, Ray Jones and Harry Green were appointed as a Machine Com. The Meeting adjourned for a social time.

F.H. Moore Sec't.

July 1st 1925

At call of Pres. Jesse Swift the White Plains Threshing Ring met for the purpose of making arrangements for the Threshing season of 1925. Roll of members called and Minutes of last meeting Read and approved. Harry Pfaff, Geo Hoffman, Wm Suhre and Albert

Moster applied for membership in the ring. They were admitted. The ring elected Officers as follows.

Pres. Jesse Swift	}	Capt. Adam Pfaff.
Sec't F.H. Moore		
Treas Edw Copes.		

The machine Committee made their report The ring voted to not hire a water boy.<sup>6</sup>The ring drew for their places which resulted as follows

	Bundle Teams	
Jesse Swift		Howard Romer
F.H Moore		Ray Jones
Harry Pfaff		Edw. Copes.
P. Fritz		D. Greenley
	Pitchers.	
John Koeppl		H. Nierstheimer
Harry Green		H. Gesell.
	Chris Siebert	
	Grain Teams.	
Wm. Suhre.		Albert Moster
	Grain Men	
Geo. Hoffman.		H.C. Gesell.

The ring voted to hire a man to go thru the threshing at 30 cts per hundred.

Kenneth Copes was hired.

A Committee was appointed as a machine Com. as follows. F.H. Moore Howard Romer and H.C. Nierstheimer. A Com. on banquet for the settlement meeting was appointed as follows. Wm Suhre, Peter Fritz and Ray Jones. Moved and Seconded that the ring quit threshing at 6:30 O'clock and go home for supper. Motion carried. The meeting then adjourned.

F.H Moore Sec't.

<sup>6</sup> The water boy's job was to make continuous trips to bring fresh water to the threshing crew. When no water boy was hired, the task fell to the children on each host farm.

Aug. 10th 1925

At call of Pres. Jesse Swift the White Plains Threshing ring met for the purpose of settling up the accounts for the season just past. Roll of members called.

Minutes of last meeting read and approved. A Vote was taken to decide whether Wm Scherer is to thresh the ring for the coming year The vote resulted in his election. The same machine committee was retained for the next year. The ring then settled the accounts for the past season. The meeting then adjourned for a social time Refreshments of Ice cream and cake were served.

F.H. Moore  
Sec't.

July 11th 1926

At call of President, Jesse Swift the White Plains Threshing Ring met for the purpose of making arrangements for the coming year and for any other business that might come before the meeting. Roll of members called.

Minutes of last Meeting read and approved.

Ira Dunn was accepted as a member. The following were elected as Officers

President = Henry Gesell.

Sec't. = Frank H. Moore.

Treasurer. = Edw. Copes.

Captain = Adam Pfaff.

The Ring drew for places as follows.

	Bundle Teams.	
Henry Gesell.		Harry Pfaff.
F.H. Moore		Ira Dunn.
Howard Roemer		Jesse Swift
H.C. Gesell.		Christ Seibert.
	Grain Teams.	
Wm Suhre.		H. Nierstheimer
	Pitchers	
Ed. Copes		Geo. Hoffman.
Albert Moster	Ray Jones.	John Koepfel.
	Grain Men	
Harry Green.		Peter Fritz

A Committee for the settlement Meeting and Social was appointed as follows

Peter Fritz—Wm Suhre and Howard Roemer

Motion carried to dinner the hands and they go home for supper. No further business the meeting adjourned.

F.H. Moore  
Sec't.

Spt. 2nd 1926

At call of Pres. Henry Gesell, the White Plains Threshing Ring Met for the purpose of settling the Acc'ts for the threshing season just past and to transact any other business that might come before the meeting.

Roll of membership called.

Minutes of last meeting read and approved.

The Ring voted on Machine for the next year with the following result. Wm Scherer was chosen. A Machine Committee was appointed as follows Adam Pfaff, Harry Green and Henry Nierstheimer.

The ring proceeded to settle the accounts for the past season. The meeting adjourned for a social time.

F.H. Moore Sect

Peter Fritz returned \$1.90 to the treasurer for ice cream returned.

July 8 1927

At Call of Pres Henry Gesell the White Ring Threshing Ring met for the Purpose of making arrangements for the coming season. Roll called and Minutes of last Meeting Read and approved. Elmer Suhre was admitted into the Ring. The following Officers were elected for the next year. Pres'. Henry Gesell. Sec't. F.H. Moore. Treas'r. Edw. Copes./Cap't. H C. Gesell. A motion to amend Sec't 3 of the By-Laws to Read. The Captain shall be chosen by chance the same as the other hands. Motion Carried. The drawing resulted as follows.

Bundle Team.

Henry Gesell  
Adam Pfaff  
Wm Suhre  
Elmer Suhre

Peter Fritz  
Howard Romer  
Geo. Hoffman  
Ira Dunn

Pitcher.

Edw. Copes.  
Harry Pfaff.

H.C. Nierstheimer  
Christ. Siebert

F.H. Moore

	Grain Team.
John Koeppel.	Harry Green

	Grain Men.
Albert Moster	Ray Jones <sup>7</sup>

Moved and Seconded that the extra men be paid the same am't as the members of the ring in difference 25 ct per 100. The Pres. appointed the following as a Committee for the Settlement meeting John Koeppel, Adam Pfaff & Harry Green.

Meal arrangements the same as last year. Moved and Seconded that the Settlement Meeting be held in the afternoon Motion carried.

F.H. Moore  
Sec't.

August 5th 27

At call of Pres. Henry Gesell the White Plains threshing Ring met for the purpose of settling the accounts for the season past and to transact any business that might come before the meeting Roll of members called.

Minutes of last meeting read and approved

A Machine Committee for the next year are appointed as follows. Geo. Hoffman, Harry Pfaff and H.C. Gesell. The Ring proceeded the settle the acc'ts for the past season.

The meeting then adjourned for a social time with Ice Cream & cake.

F.H. Moore Sec't.

July 11th 1928

At the call of the Pres. Henry Gesell the white Plains Threshing Ring met to make arrangements for the coming year. The officers elected were Henry Gesell Pres. Basil Copes Treas. Wm Suhre Sec. Clive Story Wm Studt & Gus Pelsor were admitted as new members of the ring. Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. Alfred Gesell was hired by the ring. His pay being 25 per hundred bushel The Capt. Henry Neirstheimer was asked to buy a new fork and to pay for same. He being later paid by the ring. The time to quit loading was set at about six oclock, the exact time to be left to the judgment of the Capt. The difference in threshing is the same as last year 25¢ per hundred bu. Meals

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<sup>7</sup> The names of the grain men were omitted in the minutes. Names were determined by checking the preceding and succeeding years' membership list.

& other items to be the same as other years. The Pres. appointed a committee of Pete Fritz Geo Hoffman & Gus Pelson to make arrangements for the settlement meeting to be held at the church in the afternoon. The members drew their jobs as follows Henry Nierstheimer Capt. Bundle wagons Wm Studt Henry Gesell Adam Pfaff Harry Pfaff Clive Story Howard Roemer Chris Siebert & Wm Suhre, Grain teams were Basil Copes & Henry Gesell, Pitchers Pete Fritz Geo Hoffman and Gus Pelsor, wheat handlers were John Keoppel Harry Green

William Suhre Sec

Aug 7 1928

At the call of the Pres. Henry Gesell Jr. the White Plains Threshing Ring met for the purpose of settling the accounts for the season. Roll of members called Minutes of the last meeting read and approved. A committee for hiring a machine for next year was appointed as follows Harry Pfaff Basil Copes and Wm Suhre. Henry Nierstheimer was paid \$1.75 for a new fork. Alfred Gesell was paid \$12.69 as extra man for the ring. The ring threshed 4253 bu wheat 627 bu oats & 156 bu rye. The ring paid Pete Fritz \$11.50 for 10 gal ice cream Basil Copes Treas reported a balance of 57¢ in the Treas. After all accounts were settled the members and their families had a social time of ice cream & cake

William Suhre Sec.

Amended By Laws in this meeting

July 8 1929

At the call of the Pres Henry Gesell the members of the White Plains Threshing ring met to make arrangements for the season The officers elected were Henry Gesell Pres. Basil Copes Treas—Wm Suhre Sec. Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. The men drew their places as follows Bundle teams—John Keoppel, Wm Studt, Harry Pfaff Henry Neirsthimer, Gus Pelsor Geo. Hoffman Clive Story & Chris Siebert Grain Wagons were Henry Gesell Jr. Basil Copes Pitchers Adam Pfaff Harry Green Pete Fritz Grain Handlers Henry C. Gesell Wm Suhre Capt. Howard Roemer. Aaron Gesell was hired to pitch wheat for 35¢ per hundred bushels. The ring decided to amend the by-laws to read that each man must pay 35¢ for his dinner. And also that each man taking a team shall receive 40¢ per hundred bu. difference while hands receiving 25¢. The difference in threshing was to be figured to a bu. A Committee for the next meeting was appointed. Wm Studt Geo Hoffman & Wm Suhre

Wm Suhre Sec.



A COAL BURNING ENGINE FIRES THE SEPARATOR IN THIS EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIANA THRESHING PICTURE. IN MOST THRESHING RINGS, INCLUDING THE WHITE PLAINS RING, EACH FARMER HAD TO SUPPLY THE COAL OR WOOD TO RUN THE ENGINE AT THE "HOME" FARM. THE BUNDLE WAGONERS ARE UNLOADING INTO A SELF-FEEDER WITH A DIVIDING BOARD DOWN THE CENTER. NORMALLY, HOWEVER, ONLY ONE MAN STOOD ATOP THE SEPARATOR RATHER THAN THE THREE HERE DEPICTED.

Courtesy J. C. Allen & Son, Inc., West Lafayette, Indiana.

Aug 8 1929

At the call of the Pres Henry Gesell Jr, the White Plains Threshing Ring met to settle up business for the past season. Roll of members called. Minutes of the last meeting was read & approved.

Aaron Gesell was paid \$18.36 by the ring for labor as pitcher. Geo Hoffman was paid \$11.00 for ice cream. The Treas. Basil Copes reported a balance of \$1.98. A vote was taken for a thresher for next year with 3 no's and 11 yes' for Wm Scherer. A Committee was appointed to see him composed of Adam Pffaf, Peter Fritz & Harry Green. The ring threshed 5247 bushels. The meeting adjourned for a social time of ice cream & cake.

W.F. Suhre Sec.

June 30—1930

At the call of the President Henry Gesell the members of the White Plains threshing ring met to make arrangements for the season. Minutes of the last meeting was read and approved. Of-

ficers elected were Pres. Henry Gesell Treas. Basil Copes Sec. Wm Suhre. Benison Masters & Elmer Klemme were admitted as new members of the ring. The ring voted to strike out the admendent to the by laws of making a difference between a team & a hand. The difference of all shall be the same as last year 25¢ per hundred bu. and to break on 80 bu. Dinner same as last year 30¢ per plate.<sup>8</sup> Henry Schriber was hired as extra pitcher for 35¢ per hundred bu. The Capt. was ordered to buy two new forks the ring to pay for them at next meeting. The Committee for the social time at the next meeting were Pete Fritz, Elmer Klemme, Geo Hoffman The men drew their places as follows Capt. John Niersthimer Bundle teams Howard Roemer Benison Masters, Adam Pffaf, Elmer Klemme, John Koeppel Harry Green Henry Gesell, Pete Fritz. Grain Teams Geo Hoffman & Gus Pelson. Grain handlers Chris Siebert, Clive Story. Pitchers, Basil Copes, Wm Studt Wm Suhre.

No other business meeting adjourned

Wm Suhre Sec.

July 19 1930

At the call of the Pres Henry Gesell the White Plains Threshing Ring met to settle business for the past season. Roll of members called. Minutes of the last meeting read & approved. Henry Schriber was paid \$16.64 for labor as pitcher. Geo Hoffman was paid \$11.50 for ice cream. The treas. Basil Copes reported a balance of 56¢ The ring purchased 2 new forks for \$3.20. The ring also paid 4.00 for a floral piece for the late Henry Niersthimer. A vote was taken for Wm Scherer for thresherman for next year, the vote being 12 yes 1 no. A Com. was appointed to hire him composed of Adam Pfaff Pete Fritz Basil Copes. The Com. was asked to see if they could not get a reduction in the price of threshing for next year. The ring decided to buy floral pieces for all deceased members of the ring, the price being \$4.00. The Pres. was to take charge of this when occasion came This applies only to actual members of the ring. The ring adjourned for a social time of ice cream and cake

Wm Suhre Sec.

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<sup>8</sup> In the 1929 minutes it is written that "each man must pay 35¢ for his dinner." It appears that the 1930 figure is incorrect as the 1931 minutes state that "we pay 35 per plate, the same as last year."

July 7 1931

The members of the White Plains Threshing ring met for the purpose of making arrangements for the coming year. Roll of members called. Minutes of the last meeting was read and approved. Officers elected were Pres. Henry Gesell Jr. Treas. Basil Copes, Sec. Wm Suhre. Harry Stewart was admitted as a new member of the ring. Motion made that a difference of 20¢ per hundred bu. be paid. Motion carried. Motion made that we discontinue paying for our dinner. Motion lost. Motion made that we pay 35¢ per plate, the same as last year. Motion carried. The ring hired Paris Hornsby and Bryan Sloane as grain handlers for 20¢ per hundred bu. The Pres. appointed a social Committee for the next meeting of Pete Fritz Geo. Hoffman and Elmer Klemme. The members drew their places as follows. Capt. Wm Studt Bundle wagons Basil Copes Henry Gesell Jr Geo Hoffman Harry Green Adam Pfaff Elmer Klemme Chris Siebert, Clive Story. Grain wagons Harry Stewart Wm Suhre Pitchers Howard Roemer Henry Gesell John Koepfel Pete Fritz. As there was no other business the members adjourned.

Wm Suhre Sec.

Sept 11—1931

The members of the White Plains Threshing Ring met to settle for the past season. Roll of members called. Luther Story and Bryan Solone [Sloane?] were paid \$25.25 a piece for labor. The difference in labor and meals was paid by each member. A vote was taken for a thresherman for 1932. The vote being Wm. Scherer nine 9, Clarence Wolber three 3<sup>9</sup> Oscar Gettig two 2. The Pres. appointed the following Com. to hire Mr. Scherer Basil Copes ch. Adam Pfaff and Pete Fritz. Owing to the lateness of the season<sup>10</sup> the ring voted not to have ice cream or social time. As there was no other business the meeting adjourned.

Wm. Suhre Sec.

Extra[:] 12612 bu of grain was threshed

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<sup>9</sup> Clarence Wolber was William Scherer's main competitor in the White Plains area. Wolber lived on a farm in Section 22 of Blooming Grove Township. Interview with Basil Copes, February 13, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> 1931 was a very wet year, as evidenced by the nine week period between the organization and settlement meetings. Threshing that summer began in late August, and by mid-September farmers began harvesting their corn. That summer also witnessed the paving of Route 1, the major road between Brookville and Blooming Grove. Steam engines, with their heavy weight and lugged wheels, were not allowed to travel on the new surface. That season William Scherer switched from steam power to a lighter gasoline tractor. *Ibid.*

July 5 1932

The members of White Plains threshing ring met and were called to order by the President H. Gesell to make arrangements for threshing the 1932 crop. Minutes of las meting read & approved Roll of members called H. Davis was admitted as a new member of the ring. Officers elected were Henry Gesell Pres. Basil Copes Treas. & Harry Green Sec. Motion was made to pay 15¢ per. hundred difference for threshing. motion carried. Basil Copes chairman of committe to hire thresher reported hiring Scherer to thres. ring for 4¢ per. bu.<sup>11</sup> A motion was made not to have social time at settlement meeting *Motion Carried.* The ring hired Phil Raby & Luther Story as grain bundlers for 15¢ per. hundred bu. Motion was made that Capt. should not send teams to field for loads after five thirty *Motion Carried.*

[The members] drew their places as follows Capt. Wm. Suhre. bundle wagons H. Roemer, A. Pfaff, Wm. Studt H. Stewart, H. Davis, C. Story, C. Sibert & E. Klemme. Grain teams J. Keopple & P. Fritz. Pitchers, Geo. Hofman Basil Copes H. Gesell & Harry Green

There being no other business the meeting adjourned.

H. Green Sec.

July 26, 32

The members of the white plains threshing ring met to settle for the past season. Roll of members called. Minutes of last meeting read and approved. Phil Raby & Luther Story were paid \$8.10 each for labor. The president appointed the following committe to hire thresher. Pete Fritz chairman Wm. Suhre & Basil Copes. There being no other business the meeting adjourned.

Harry Green Sec

June [?] 1933

The members of the white plains threshing ring met to make arrangements for threshing. The meeting was called to order by the President Henry Gesell. Roll of members called. Minutes of last meeting were read. James Wingate, Ed Rosenberger Cliff Heeb & Edgar Precht were admitted as new members of the ring. Pete Fritz Chairman of committe to hire thresher reported hiring Scherer to do the threshing. The members drew their places as follows. Grain teams Basil Copes & Cliff Heeb. Bundle teams.

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<sup>11</sup> This figure is down from the six to seven cents per bushel of wheat threshed that was charged in the mid-twenties. The price for rye threshing was generally the same as for wheat; oats typically ran from one half to three quarters of this amount.



THE ACTIVITIES UNDERWAY IN THIS EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIANA THRESHING SCENE PARALLEL THOSE CARRIED OUT BY THE WHITE PLAINS RING. THE WAGON NEXT TO THE STEAM ENGINE IS PROBABLY THE WATER WAGON, AND THE MAN ON THE SEPARATOR MAY WELL BE TALLYING THE NUMBER OF BUSHELS THRESHED ON THE AUTOMATIC WEIGHER.

Courtesy J. C. Allen & Son, Inc., West Lafayette, Indiana.

Edgar Precht, Ed. Klemme H. Gesell, A. Pfaff, C. Seibert H. Roemer, Wm. Suhre & H. Green Capt. J. Wingate. Pichers Wm. Studt E. Rosenberger & P. Fritz. Duroc Karl & George were hired to help do threshing at 15¢ per. hundred bu. There being no other business the meeting adjourned.

H. G Sec.

July 21 1933

The members of the white plains threshing ring met to settle for the past season. The members were all present. The minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. Duroc, George and Karl were paid \$6.90 each for labor. Members of ring voted that supper would not be served Machine hands next season. A Motion was made that any member of ring who had any grain to thresh other than wheat that would get mixed with wheat should thresh

it before he threshed his wheat.<sup>12</sup> Motion Carried. The President appointed the following Committee to hire thresher for next season Pete Fritz, Chairman Basil Copes & Wm. Suhre. There being no other business the meeting adjourned.

H. Green, Sec.

June 27, 1934.

The White Plains threshing ring met to make arrangements for threshing the 1934 crop. There were 12 members present. The minutes of the last meeting was read and approved. Andy Knecht and Chester Schomber were admitted as new members of the ring. The following officers were elected. Henry Gesell, Pres. H. Green Sec. & Basil Copes, Treas. Pete Fritz Chairman of Committee to hire thresher reported hiring Scherer to do threshing. The members drew their places as follows. B. teams Clif Heeb, B. Copes A. Pfaff, E. Rosenberger J. Wingate A. Knecht, C. Schomber & H. Green Grain teams. H. Roemer & Wm. Suhre Pitchers P. Fritz E. Klemme & Wm. Studt. Capt. H. Gesell L. Gesell, H. K[a]liser and E. Klemme were hired to help thres the ring at 15¢ per. hundred bu. There being no other business the meeting adjourned

H. G. Sec.

July 16, 1934

The white Plains threshing ring met to settle for the past season The members were all present. Minutes of last meeting were read and approved Herman Kaiser Lurton Gesell and Elmer Kleeme were paid \$9.20 each for labor. A motion was made to hire Scherer to do the threshing next year. Motion Carried. There being no other business the meeting adjourned.

Harry Green, Sec.

July [8?] 1935<sup>13</sup>

The White Plains Threshing Ring met to make arrangements for threshing grain. There were 12 members present. Minutes of the last meeting were read & approved. John Manne—C. Carleton and Elmer Quante were admitted as new members of the ring. A

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<sup>12</sup> As some of the threshed wheat would be used as seed the following year, farmers complained when they found other types of grain, especially rye, mixed in with their seed wheat. If each farmer finished his threshing with wheat, no problem would arise. Interview with Basil Copes, February 6, 1981.

<sup>13</sup> Preceding the July, 1935, entry is a list of names and jobs that, with a few exceptions, matches the formally written list in the secretary's minutes. It is assumed that these were the originally drawn places as taken down by Green, who adjusted the list to correspond to any trading of positions that occurred.

motion was made to have the present officers another year. H. Gesell Pres, Basil Copes treas, Harry Green Sec. Motion carried The members drew for their places as follows. Bundle Teams. B. Copes, A. Pfaff, J. Wingate Wm. Studt P. Fritz C. Shombre E. Rosenberger & H. Green Grain teams. Wm. Suhre & A. Knecht. Grain Handles. H. Roemer & C. Carleton Pitcher. J. Manne Capt. H. Gesell E. Quante, F. Faffe L. Gesell & G. Metzger were hired as pitchers for the ring at 15¢ per. Hundred bu. There being no other business the meeting adjourned.

H. Green. Sec.

August 5, 1935

The white plains threshing ring met to settle for the past season. Roll of members called. Geo. Metzger, Fred Pfaff & Lurton Gesell were paid \$12.30 each for labor for ring. Geo. Gesell was paid \$10.95 for hauling drinking water. The members voted to hire Scherer to do threshing next season. There being no other business the meeting adjourned.

H. Green Sec.

June [?] 1936

The Members of the White Plains Threshing Ring met to make arrangements for threshing grain. The meeting was called to order by the President H. Gesell. Roll of members called. Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. The officers elected were H. Gesell Pres Basil Copes Treas. & H. Green Sec. The members drew for their places as follows. Wm. Suhre Capt. Bundle Teams. A. Pfaff, H. Roemer, E. Rosenberger, J. Wingate, B. Copes, C. Schomber, J. Manne & P. Fritz. Grain Teams. H. Gesell & C. Carleton Pitchers Wm. Studt. Grain wrestlers A. Knecht, & H. Green. E. Quante Gesell Bros. & Carl H. were hired to help thresh grain at 15¢ per 100 bu. There being no other business the meeting adjourned.

H. Green Sec.

July 15 1936

The members of the White Plains Threshing Ring met to settle for the past season. Meeting was called to order by the President H. Gesell. Roll of members called. Gesell Bros. E. Quante and Carl H. were paid \$7.80 each for labor for the ring. P. Fritz & A. Pfaff were appointed as committe to hire thresher for the next season. There being no other business the meeting adjourned

H. Green Sec.

July 5, 1937

The White Plains threshing ring met to make arrangements for threshing grain. The meeting was called to order by Pres. H. Gesell. Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. Carl Precht was admitted as a member of the ring. The officers were elected. H. Gesell Pres. Basil Copes Treas H Green Sec. A motion was made to pay 30¢ per. Hundred bu. difference for threshing. Motion carried. A motion was made for members to pay 50¢ each for dinner. Motion Carried. The members drew for their places as follows. Bundle teams P Fritz E. Rosenberger, Precht Roemer Knecht Schomber Suhre & Copes Grain teams. Green & Wingate Pitchers. Studt Pfaff, & Manne. H. Gesell capt. Geo. Gesell & Dale Wingate were hired to help with grain at 30¢ per. hundred bu. Com. to hire thresher reported hiring Scherer to do threshing. There being no other business the meeting adjourned  
H. Green Sec.

July 28 1937

The White Plains Threshing Ring met to settle for the past season Roll of members called. The hired hands were paid \$15.00 each. C. Schomber & Pete Fritz were appointed as committee to hire thresher for the next year.

The meeting adjourned.

Harry Green Sec.

June 29—38

The White Plains Threshing ring met to make the arrangements for threshing. The meeting was called to order by Pres. H. Gesell. Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. There were three members absent. C. Doner & Stinger were admitted as new members of the ring.

The members drew their places as follows. Cap. C. Precht.

Bundle teams. Stinger Wingate Knecht, Schomber Green Gesell Manne & Studt.

Grain Teams Copes & Fritz. Pitchers Suhre & Doner. The members hired F. Suhre D. Wingate [manuscript unclear]<sup>14</sup> Ross Heeb Howard Lanning & D. Precht to help with threshing at 30¢ per. H. bu.

The meeting adjourned

Harry Green Sec.

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<sup>14</sup> A smeared word appears at this point in the minutes. It was impossible to determine whether this was a separate name, Ross Heeb's first name, or simply an error on Green's part.

July 15, 1938.

The members of the White Plains Threshing Ring met to settle for the past season. Roll of members called. The minutes of the last meeting were read & approved. The hired men were paid 12.90 each. The members voted to hire Scherer to do threshing the next year. Wm. Suhre & Harry Green were appointed as committee to hire thresher for the next year. The meeting adjourned.

Harry Green Sec.

June 29, 39

The White Plains Threshing Ring met to make arrangements for threshing. Meeting was called to order by Pres. H. Gesell. Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. Geo. Pflum & Harry Stang were admitted as new members of the Ring. Officers elected were H. Gesell, Pres. Basil Copes, Treas. & H. Green Sec. The members drew for their places as follows:

Bundle teams. Knecht, Stinger Suhre Stang, Doner Wingate Gesell & Green. Grain teams Copes & Schomber.

Pitchers Studt & Pflum. Capt. Precht. A motion was made to pay 25¢ per. Hundred bu. difference. Motion carried. Six hands were hired to help with threshing at 25¢ per. hundred bu.

The meeting adjourned.

H. Green Sec.

July 17, 1939

The White Plains Threshing Ring met to settle for the past season. Meeting called to order by Pres. H. Gesell. Roll of members called. The hired hands were paid \$10.00 each. The member voted to hire Scherer to do threshing the next year. Wm. Suhre & Basil Copes were appointed as committee to hire thresher. Some of the member complained of being short on number of bu. threshed machine measure. The committee were instructed to hire Scherer if he would agree to weigh grain correctly next year.<sup>15</sup>

The meeting Adj.

H. Green Sec.

July—8—1940.

The White Plains Threshing Ring met to make the arrangements for threshing. Meeting called to order by Pres. H. Gesell. Minutes

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<sup>15</sup> This complaint refers to the fact that some farmers noticed a difference between the amount of bushels counted on the machine weigher, which provided the basis for the thresherman's costs, and the amount of bushels credited to the farmer who brought his grain to local markets. Basil Copes remembers this incident well; he passes it off as a small problem involving only two or three ring members. Interview with Basil Copes, February 6, 1981.

of the last meeting were read and approved. Committe reported hiring Scherer to do threshing. The members drew for their places as follows. Bundle teams. Wingate Copes Knecht Suhre Precht Gesell Studt & Green Grain Teams. Stang & Keopple Pitcher. Geo Pflum  
Capt. C. Schomber.  
Seven hands were hired.  
The meeting adj

Harry Green Sec.

July 26 1940

The White Plains Threshing Ring met to settle for the past season Meeting called to order by President H. Gesell. Roll of members called. The hired men were paid 10.75 each. C. Schomber & G. Pflum were appinted as committe to hire Scherer for the next year. The meeting adj.

H. Green Sec.

June 30—1941

The members of White Plains Threshing Ring met to organize for the coming year. Minutes of the last meeting were read and accepted as recorded. Officers were elected as follows Henry Gesell Jr. Pres. Basil Copes Treas. Wm Suhre Sec. Chester Schomber reported hiring Wm Scherer as thresherman Due to the increase price of wheat 6¢ per bu would be charged. Motion made we pay 30¢ difference including hired labor. Motion carried Members drew their positions as follows.

Bundle Teams Geo Pflum Harry Stang Harry Green Andrew Knecht Basil Copes Carl Precht Henry C Gesell & Wm Suhre. Grain Teams Chester Schomber Henry Gesell Jr. Due to the lack of members the position of Capt. was discontinued. Last teams were to clean up at separator and last Grain Team to care for canvass & forks.<sup>16</sup> Chas Wolying, W.B. Cornett Bob Cornett J.C. Penny & Fred Suhre were hired as pitchers. Maynard Stang & Francis Rosefeld as grain men. Calvin Schomber as water boy.

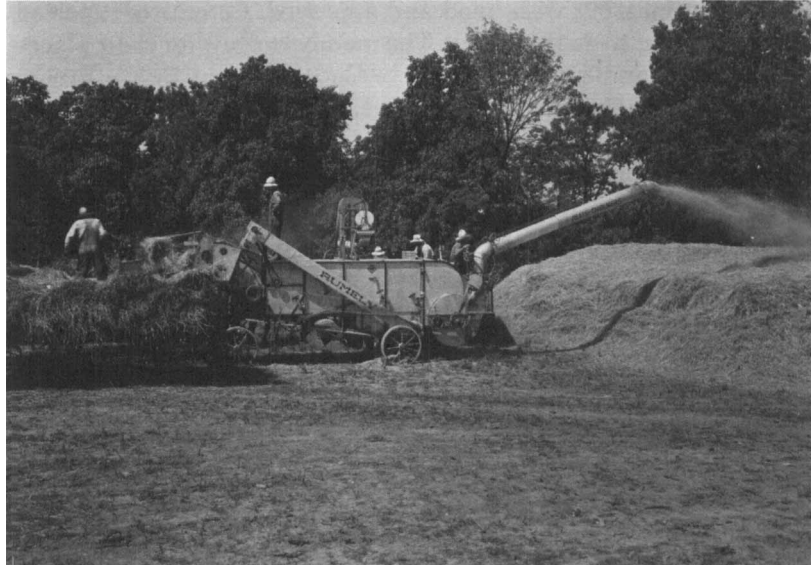
Henry Gesell Pres.  
Wm Suhre Sec

July 21—1941

The members of White Plains Threshing Ring met to settle for the past season. Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved as recorded. Roll call of members was called and all were

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<sup>16</sup> Both of these jobs were formerly handled by the captain.



THIS EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIANA PHOTOGRAPH ILLUSTRATES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BLOWERMAN TO THE THRESHING PROCESS. HERE HE IS CONTROLLING THE BUILDING OF THE STRAW STACK BY MANIPULATING WHEELS AND CRANKS ON THE DISCHARGE PIPE. THE AUTOMATIC WEIGHER IS ALSO EVIDENT IN THE CENTER OF THE SEPARATOR.

Courtesy J. C. Allen & Son, Inc., West Lafayette, Indiana.

present Members paid into the treasury \$139.20 which was paid out to the hired men according to labor performed. The members of the ring voted to have Wm Scherer as thresherman for 1942. Henry C. Gesell Harry Green and Basil Copes were appointed by the chair to contact Mr. Scherer and make arrangements for next year

Henry Gesell Pres \_\_\_  
Wm Suhre Sec \_\_\_

June 29—1942

The members of White Plains Threshing ring met to organize for the year. Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved as recorded. Officers were elected as follows. Henry Gesell Pres. Basil Copes Treas. Wm Suhre Sec.

Walter Estridge was admitted as a new member of the ring. Members of the ring drew their positions as follows—Bundle Teams Schomber Precht—Pflum—Copes—Snow—Green. Grain Teams Knecht—Estridge—Pitchers H. Gesell Jr. & Suhre. Clarence Pflum was hired as grain handler. Fred Suhre as pitcher & Herbert

Estridge as water boy Salery for hired men & difference between members of ring was put at 40¢ per hundred bu. The members of the ring voted to carry their dinner. Time to start in morning was set at 8 oclock (Central war time) and not send any teams out after 6 P.M.

Henry Gesell Jr. Pres.  
Wm. Suhre Sec.

1942 Settlement meeting missing

1943 Organization meeting missing

July 21, 1943

The members of White Plains Threshing ring met to settle for the past season Minutes of the last meeting were read & approved as recorded

The ring paid to the treasurer the amount of \$25.60 to hired help and members according to labor performed

The chairman appointed Henry C. Gesell, Basil Copes & Harry Green as a thrashing committee for 1944

There being no other business the meeting ajourned.

Wm Suhre Sec.  
Henry Gesell Pres.