

Thoughts of an old grass seeder.

There is a grain planter slowly falling apart in my pasture. It was built by the Van Brunt company around the year 1900. It was used by three generations on a farm in Carver County.

I bought this grain planter from the grandson of the original purchaser in 1970.

At the time, I was preparing to grow my first crops on this farm. I intended to raise oats and wheat and I needed a planter. Grains like oats, wheat, rye and barley are commonly called "small" grains as opposed to corn.

Farmers normally call a small grain planter a "grain drill". The grain drill is an ancient device. Single row grain drills were used in Babylon and Sumer. This particular machine planted sixteen rows, each row was six inches apart. Overall, it planted a swath eight feet wide. It was built with wooden wheels. Steel wheels were not used on grain drills until 1920.

The drill was designed to be pulled by horses. In 1935, the Carver County farmer got a field tractor. The long pole for hitching horses was shortened so the drill could be pulled by the tractor.

I found an advertisement for this drill in the Minneapolis Sunday paper. In the 1970s there was still a multipage section of classified ads for farm machinery. My Father owned a pickup. Pa and I drove to the Carver farm on that Sunday. The old farmer who was selling the drill was the grandson of the original purchaser. The farm was neat and obviously prosperous. The old man had carefully used and carefully maintained his grandfather's planter. The man's son was now running the farm. The son had purchased a bigger and faster grain drill. The ancient Van Brunt was no longer needed

I paid the asking price of \$20. Twenty dollars was not much but it was a fair price back then.

The son helped us pull the drill from a shed. We loaded it onto my Pa's pickup with a tractor loader. It hung over the back of the pickup's eight-foot box.

The next week I used the drill. It worked flawlessly. The farmer had cared for it well.

I used it for two years. Then as I rented more acres, I too felt the need for a bigger and faster machine. One spring morning in 1972, I planned to use it for a small field of oats. My "new" drill was set up that day to plant wheat.

I do not recall exactly what, but something was not working correctly on the old Van Brunt. I was in a hurry to get things done. I unhitched it exactly where it now subsides. I used the new drill instead. That was forty-five years ago.

When I unhitched the old drill that spring morning, it looked like the drill in the second photo, except wider, cleaner and with brighter paint. This reference photo is from the Internet.

I intended to put the drill back under a shed, but I never got around to it.

This was not an economic loss. I only paid \$20 and I used it for two years.

It was a nuisance to drive around. The drill was actually part way into a field.

For several years, the sight of the drill reminded me that I should find the time to move it to a shed.

I could have.

I should have.

I never did.

Time was terribly short in those years. I was working full time, went to school at night, farmed 500 acres of corn on nights and weekends, with a wife and four children.

After a decade or two I made a conscious but passive decision to leave the drill rest.

I am not sure why.

Sometimes the drill reminds me of my father. That is a sweet memory. He was a good and wise man.

Sometimes it reminds me of the man that I bought it from. In 1972, as we pulled the drill from his barn, the old farmer told us that it reminded him of his father and grandfather. I was careless and wasteful with the machine he had cared for so well.

Sometimes the old drill makes me think about priorities and about being in a rush.

Sometimes it makes me reflect on nature's relentless ability to recycle all things.

Always, it reminds me of the passage of time, and of the amazing brevity of a lifetime.
I do not know who will move the drill.
It will not be me.
That drill will remain where it is until after the day I die.
Best regards. Tom





