

### **Thoughts of an old planter.**

The photos are of a grain planter that is slowly decaying in my pasture. It was built by the Van Brunt company around the year 1900. The ancient machine was used for three generations on a farm in Carver County.

I bought this grain planter in the spring of 1970.

At the time, I was preparing to plant my first crops on this farm. I intended to raise oats and wheat. I owned a tractor and tillage equipment.

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 archaic device. Single row grain drills were used in Babylon and Sumer. This particular machine planted sixteen rows. The rows were six inches apart. Overall, it planted a swath eight feet wide. It was built with wooden wheels. Wooden spoked wheels, with an outer steel band were common on successful Midwest farms 120 years ago. Steel wheels, with steel spokes were used on farm machines after 1920.

This drill was designed to be pulled by horses.

In 1935, the Carver County farm got a field tractor. The long pole for hitching a team of horses was shortened so the drill could be pulled by the tractor. Thousands of machines were converted from horse power to tractor power simply by sawing off the long pole that ran between the two horses. I can remember my father sawing the pole off of a hay mower and then affixing two steel plates to adapt it for our 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 to buy the drill on that Sunday.

The old farmer 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 seller’s son was now running the farm. The son had purchased a bigger and much 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.

We pulled the drill from a haymow. The son loaded it onto my Pa’s pickup with a tractor loader. It hung a foot or so over the end of the pickup’s eight-foot box.

When we got to this farm, I used my tractor and loader to lift the drill off the pickup.

The machine survived the handling and the trip just fine.

It worked flawlessly.

The old farmer had cared for it well.

I used the Van Brunt drill for two years, both spring and fall. In the spring, I used it to plant oats and spring wheat. In the fall, I planted winter rye. Rye, like “winter” varieties of wheat, gets a start in the fall, survives winter well, grows quickly in spring and produces grain by early summer.

As I rented more acres of farm land, I too felt the need for a bigger and faster machine.

One spring morning in 1972, I planned to use the old drill to plant 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. It was spring and I was in a hurry. 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 morning, it looked like the drill in the last photo, except it had wooden spoke wheels. This reference photo is of a Van Brunt drill that was built in the 1920s. John Deere bought the Van Brunt company in 1910.

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.  
I had unhitched the drill at the edge of a field. It was a nuisance to drive around.  
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. Some might say I was trying to do too much.  
After a decade or two, things changed. Sometime in that period, 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 regret being careless and wasteful with the machine he 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 the years, and of the amazing brevity of a lifetime.  
I do not know who will move the drill.  
Or when.  
It will not be me.  
It will not be in my time.  
Best regards. Tom







