

Uncle Louie used Dynamite to take the Silo down.

One of the tools available to farmers to clear tree stumps was dynamite.

Dynamite was sold in hardware stores by the case.

The boxes of dynamite and primers were usually under or near the cash register for safety, but no special permit was required to purchase or use dynamite.

That is exactly how Archy Larson sold dynamite from his hardware store on the south side of main street in Elk River.

He was also a 'no questions asked' fur buyer.

Whenever we trapped or shot a fox, or found a fresh killed mink on the highway, we would take it to Archy.

I got to know Archy a little bit because he was from Orrock.

Archy was a native and a pioneer in this part of Sherburne County.

He owned land around here.

In 1974 I rented a couple hundred acres of farmland from him.

Pa knew Archy because Archy once coached a men's softball team from Orrock.



Tom Barthel, Frank Croteau, Al, Jim, John, Ken.

Back to the main subject of dynamite.

I vaguely remember helping Uncle Louie blasting stumps in the northeast 40 of Grandpa Barthel's 160-acre farm.

That was the last wooded 40 on the farm.

I was pretty young then.

Ten years later, I was a teenager when I helped Louie dynamite the old wooden silo.

Louie needed to make room for the huge cement stave silo that is still there.

Uncle Louie was always in for a little fun.

We got the dynamite idea from Bill Lindenfelser.

Bill's farm was directly south of Louie's across the county road.

Not too close, because both farms had long driveways.

I recall that I once swatted 20 acres of oats for Bill, but we did not often farm together.

Louie was helping me change plow shares when we heard a terrific BOOM from Bill's place.

All we saw was a hundred-foot cloud of dust and debris where Bill's red, wooden silo had been.

The farm had a small, well-constructed smoke house.

Like all purpose-built smoke houses, this one was relatively air-tight with a dirt floor.

Closely spaced metal pipes ran from side to side overhead.

The dynamite was stored in the smoke house except during times when the building was used for its original purpose.

There were no windows and no electricity to the smoke house, hence no artificial light.

Several times I was given the job of preparing the building for smoking meat, I opened the doors on both ends to get all the daylight possible. I did not wish to miss a loose stick of dynamite in the dirt and dust.

Louie did not intend to salvage any material from the silo.

He only wanted to clear the site the new, huge, 20-foot-diameter, by 70-foot-high concrete silo he had ordered.

Several years earlier, we had pulled a similar wooden at our farm over carefully with tractors. We did that so my brother John and I could salvage the wooden staves of our silo for a hay barn floor. Uncle Louie had no such restrictions.

We cut the bolts that fastened the wooden structure to concrete foundation.

Louie prepared a charge of a couple sticks, lit the fuse, then tossed it into the silo pit.

We took cover on the far side of the cow yard.

The blast was loud enough but just damaged the roof and blew dust through every crack of the silo.

I blamed myself for not thinking about the pigeons.

Many times, I had climbed Louie's huge barn and that silo in the dark to harvest sleeping pigeons.

Pigeons were easy to field dress and especially good to eat.

The blast blew the roof off and turned the silo pigeons into mush.

I asked Louie if he ever asked Lindenfelsers how much dynamite they used.

He had not.

In fact, he answered in such a way that suggested that a man should not have to ask how much dynamite was required to bring an old wooden silo down.

Louie prepared another charge.

I expected this charge would be powerful enough. It was.

The second charge blew that poor old silo to smithereens.

It took quite a time for all the tiny parts to return to earth.

The blast even loosened and tipped much of the concrete foundation.

That helped with the cleanup.

Tom, 2025.



All wooden silos were similar. 12 feet in diameter, 35 feet high, with a 3-foot pit for extra storage and to let the corn juice drain away, a roof, an outside metal ladder, and a dormer for top access.