

## A Time to Sow, a Time to Reap

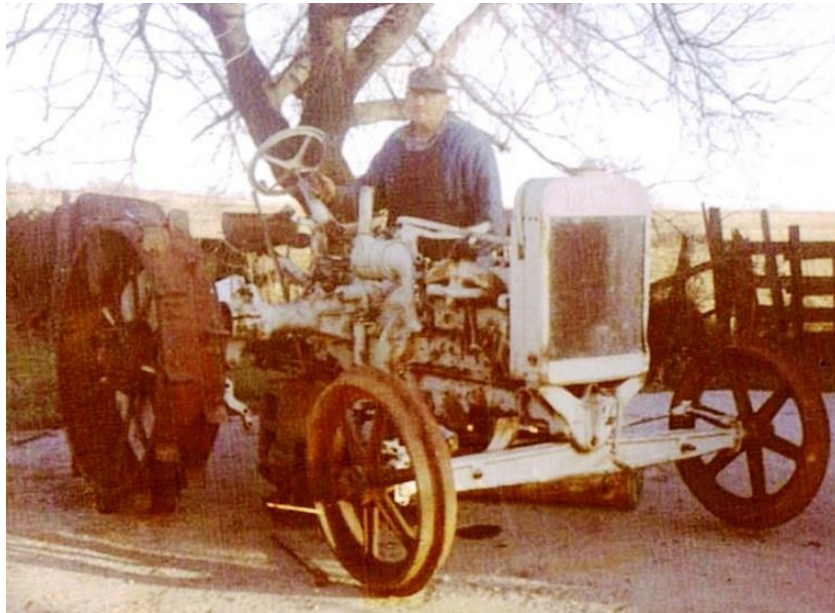
I can still feel the adrenaline pumping as my mom and I rushed to get the last garden produce harvested before the first big frost. Mom's gardens were always lush and provided all our veggie needs so those last straggler cabbages and tomatoes were a bonus and we sure didn't want to lose them. Dad hauled the bounty with his trusty lawn mower and homemade cart.



My dad was a corn/hay/pasture farmer. Here are a couple of pictures of Dad working in the fields many years before I came on the scene. This first one shows Dad in the early 20s with his little sisters, Bertha and Rosa. The back of the picture tells that he was driving a Do-All tractor.

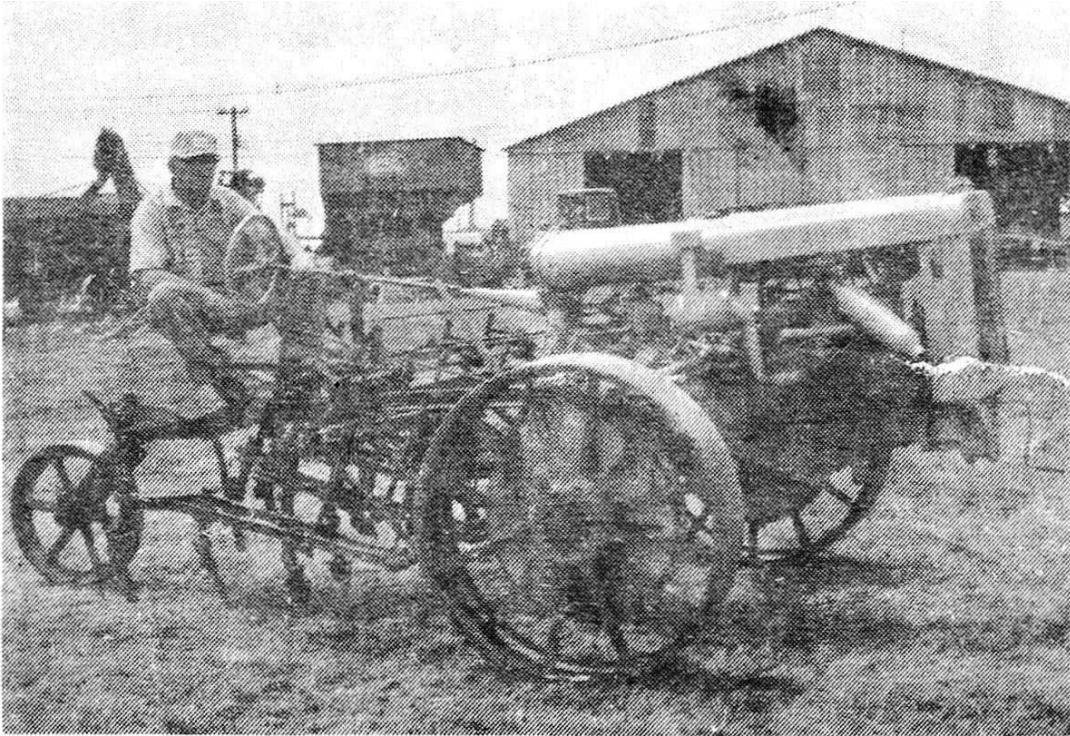


I can't resist throwing a curve into the time line of this story. In about 1970 Dad found a deteriorating 1930 Rumeley Do-All in a swamp along the Mississippi River. He restored it and drove it in parades at the Stephenson County Antique Threshing Show for a number of years. Below is Dad and his pride and joy before he got it all "prettied-up" with gray and red paint.



This model of Rumeley tractor had an interesting quirk. You could use it as pictured above or the rear wheels could be moved forward, the front wheels removed, and a tail wheel, seat and cultivator added to the rear of the tractor and, voila!, you had a squirrely-looking fancy cultivator for digging pesky weeds out of the corn. (Today's farmers spray on herbicides and, voila!, the weeds are gone too ....but this rig has a whole lot more character and hardly anybody today restores an herbicide sprayer.)





**THIS RUMELT DU-ALL, built in 1930 and owned by Folkert Saaijena, will be seen at the Stephenson County Old Time Threshing and Antique Show at the Stephenson County Fairgrounds, Freeport, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.**



Alas, health concerns forced Dad to sell his beloved Rumeley to his brother-in-law, Reinold Plautz in 1987. Part of Dad's heart went along with that tractor as it was moved to Nebraska.

The John Deere below was Dad's in 1927. Love those cleated steel wheels...no traction problems there.



Grinding corn was a snap with this next Johnnie Popper...more cleated wheels but look at that ratty seat! And isn't the car in the background a classic? Maybe Al Capone was visiting. That white shed almost looks like the one on Florence Road but it isn't. I believe this was taken the first place east of the homeplace when Gramma Hilka was living there.



Below is Dad putting hay in the barn mow in 1950. There is that hedge along the road.



OK, let's wander back to the actual theme of this story and pick it up with my Dad's corn picking. That corn was picked with the ear still attached, and then it was stored in corncribs.

(I remember the corncrib that Dad built in 1949. It was finished well before the harvest and I claimed it for a playhouse until I was forced out by ears of corn. I had such fun designating areas for the kitchen, dining room, etc. I used Crayons to write words all over the inside of that building --- even going so far as "painting" certain areas with my Crayons. That corncrib was mighty colorful on the inside. Then Dad filled it with corn and I never played in it again. Years later (about 45) I looked inside it after it was no longer in use and found traces of my artwork still there. Now, in 2013, the crib is just a memory too. )



After the harvest Dad hired a man to shell the corn from the ears. The sheller was mounted on a large truck and the owner made his living by traveling around the area to shell local farmers' crops.

(In 1940 Dad owned a sheller on a truck and did custom shelling. One frigid, December day he was shelling out a crib at a farmyard just west of the "homeplace". The lady who lived there invited him inside to warm up and there sat Mom (from Nebraska) who was visiting her relatives. Don't you just know, the rest of that story contributes to the fact that you are reading this story today?)

I have no way of knowing the exact date this next picture was taken. It is of my dad shelling corn for Dick Cornelius and Dick's granddaughter just sent it to me. I'd like to think it was taken the very day my parents met.)



Anyway, let's get back to the harvest story...The cobs made great fuel for Mom's cook stove and they were stored in a building (approx. 12' X 12') about fifty feet south of the house. Dry cobs tend to be mighty dusty and slippery; I used to have a ball sliding down the piles.

Those cobs were carried into the kitchen with a wooden bushel-basket and dumped into a woodbox behind the stove. The cobs were free fuel and provided the heat for many a good meal.

Now it is time to zoom off and add in a bit about another crop that was harvested: oats. Early oats harvest was difficult with the plants being cut at ground level, the cut plants were made into bundles, then the bundles were stacked into pyramid-shaped shocks and left to dry.

Below is a picture of Dad and Alfred Kruse, taken in 1975, at a demonstration for the Antique Engine Club. It shows how the grain was cut and bundled.

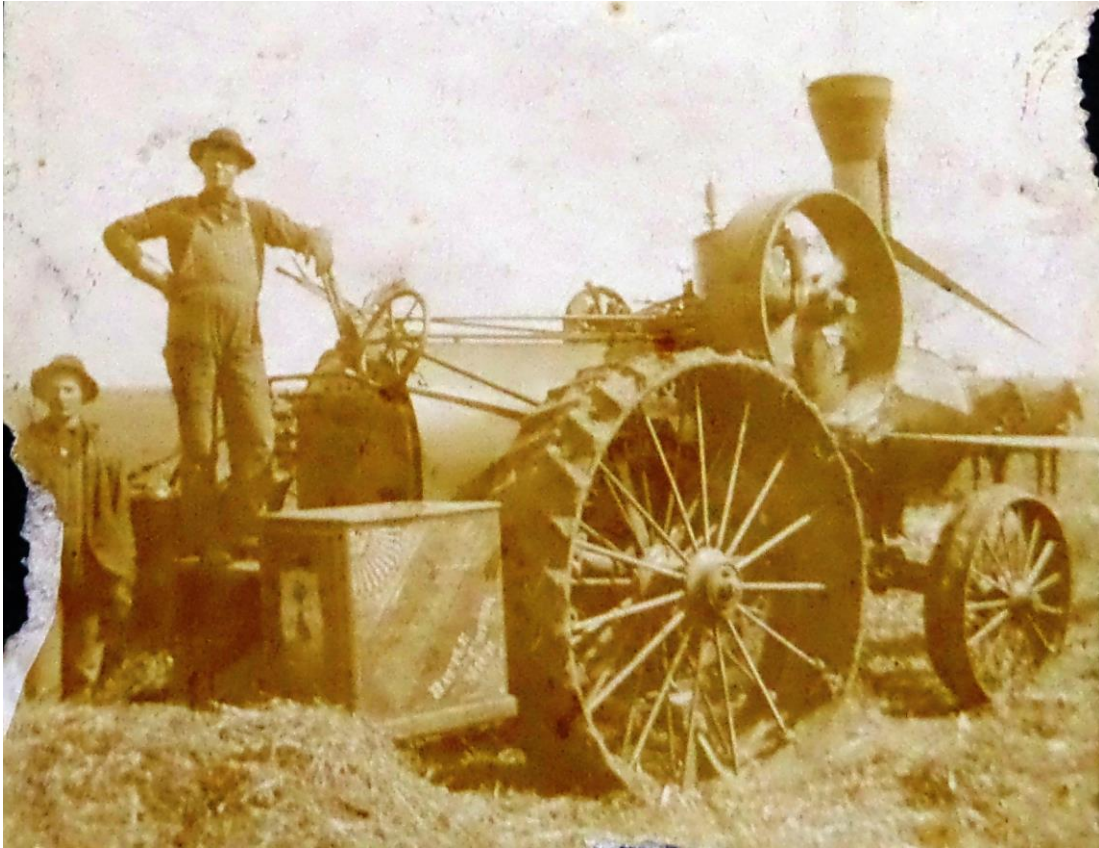


One of my early memories (I was about 3 or 4) of harvest is the sweltering summer that my folks needed to shock oats. They waited for the late evening coolness after dark and used a full moon to illuminate the field. The dog and I had a ball running among the shocks in the moonlight and my folks got the job finished.

Then the shocks were fed thru a thresh machine to sort the grain from the rest of the now-dried plant. Usually, the farmers helped each other and a whole crew of men (called a threshing ring) descended on the farm on threshing day. The farmer's wife had the fun of cooking and baking enough food to fill about 10 or 12 hungry men. This meant plenty of coffee, sandwiches and cake at 9AM, then a full meal of meat, potatoes, several veggies, homemade bread, and a selection of pies at noon. At 3PM the guys were ready for teatime. That meant tea, lemonade, more sandwiches and cookies. Often other farmers' wives came to help with the food. Paper plates and plastic cups did not exist then so you can imagine the many dirty dishes that needed to be dealt with.

Below is a picture of a very early threshing crew. The machine was powered with a steam

engine. I believe that is my Grampa George Saaijenga and my dad..probably about 1910 or 1912:



Here is another from a distance. The whole crew was ready for action in their bib overalls and summer hats:

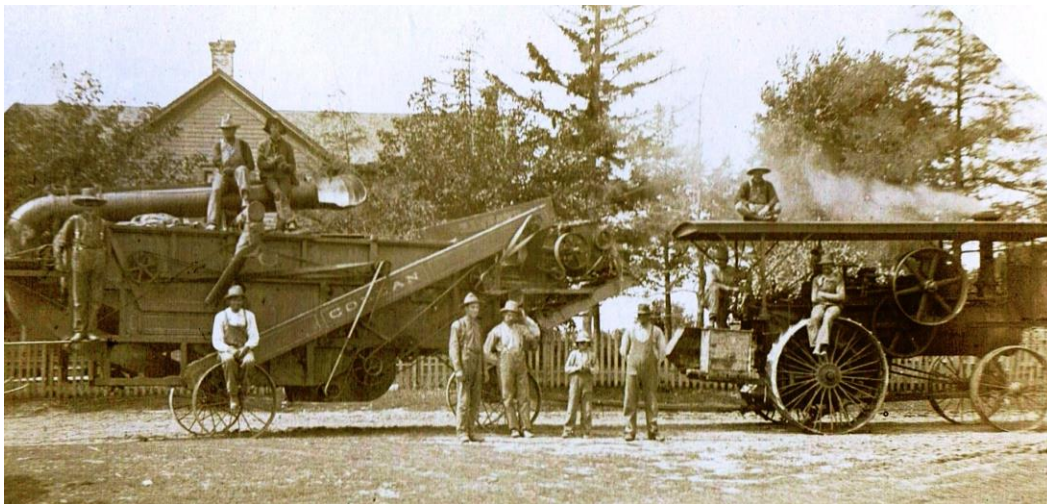




Below are the shocks....raw material for the day:



In this view I think the tall fellow in the middle is Dad. I do not recognize the house.



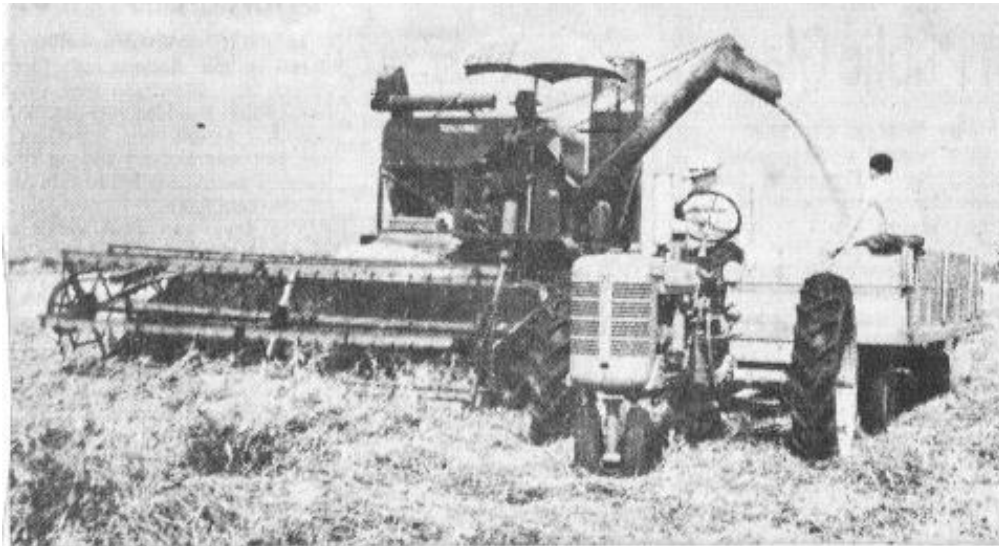
The picture below is Dad's machine, taken in 1944. By that time the machine was tractor-powered. Yup, that's Dad and his kid just behind the tractor:



Later years found Dad harvesting the oats with a combine pulled behind his tractor. He hauled the grain to the yard and stored it in a round metal bin.

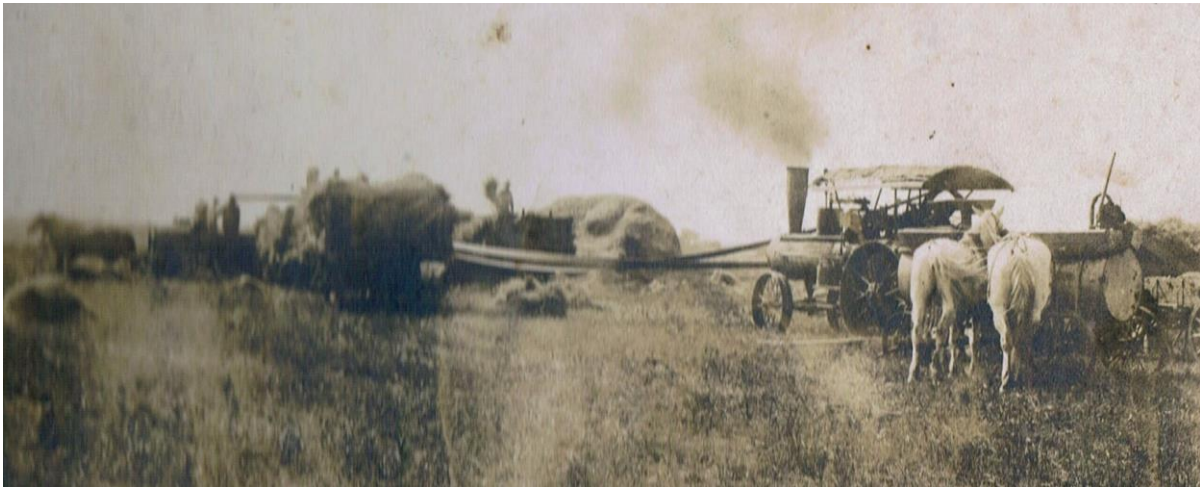


Below is a 1955 picture of Dad and Mom's neighbors with a new-fangled self-propel combine for oats. Modern farming was coming fast.



A SELF-PROPELLED COMBINE is shown at work on the Viri Garnhart farm, northeast of German Valley. Here Henry Buttel operates his combine, while Randy Garnhart, son of Viri, keeps pace with the grain wagon. Observing operations is Wendell Garnhart of Freeport. Grain harvest is in full swing in the county, with many farmers reporting exceptionally high yields, in spite of much lodging of the grain fields.

One more to see is my Grampa Carl Pieper's threshing rig in Nebraska in 1917. Can't you just feel the heat and itchy straw dust settle over you? But those white horses are "keepers".



Back to the corn harvests: In later years Dad used a mounted picker. This system was a corn picker that was mounted around the tractor and was a huge improvement over the pull-behind models. There was a canvas Heat Houser sort of wrapped around where the farmer sat on the tractor and it helped keep away some of the cold...and the harvest ran into mighty cold weather sometimes.

One year the harvest was running late and I can still picture my parents, standing in the driveway just north of the cattle yard (or, as Mom called it, "the corral"), debating if it would be OK to pick corn on Thanksgiving Day. They agreed that it was not a Sunday so it would be acceptable and Dad picked corn all day. Snow came a few days later. After 1976 Dad no longer tilled his land

and renters harvested the crops.

In 1961 I became a farmwife and was deeply immersed in harvests. Farmers invest huge amounts of money to grow crops: seed, fertilizer, weed spray, bug spray, fuel to run the equipment, plus the cost of the equipment. Then they cool their heels and wait for a return on their investments. The farmer is the only businessman who pays retail price for all his input and sells his output at wholesale prices.

Let's start with the oats harvests on Florence Road., south of Freeport, IL. Oats were never grown while I lived there but I have a couple of interesting pictures to plop in here anyway. One early picture shows Clem Faist and Robert with Raymond Hoefer's pull-behind type combine in 1947.



Oats was stored in the granary and the picture below shows oats being unloaded from Clem's truck. I can't ID the people....the man was possibly from Baileyville.



Most assuredly, you are sitting on the edge of your computer chair, waiting for the low-down on corn picking but I'm going to lead you down a different path for now. I found some great old

pictures of farming south of Freeport many years ago and am itching to look at them again with you.

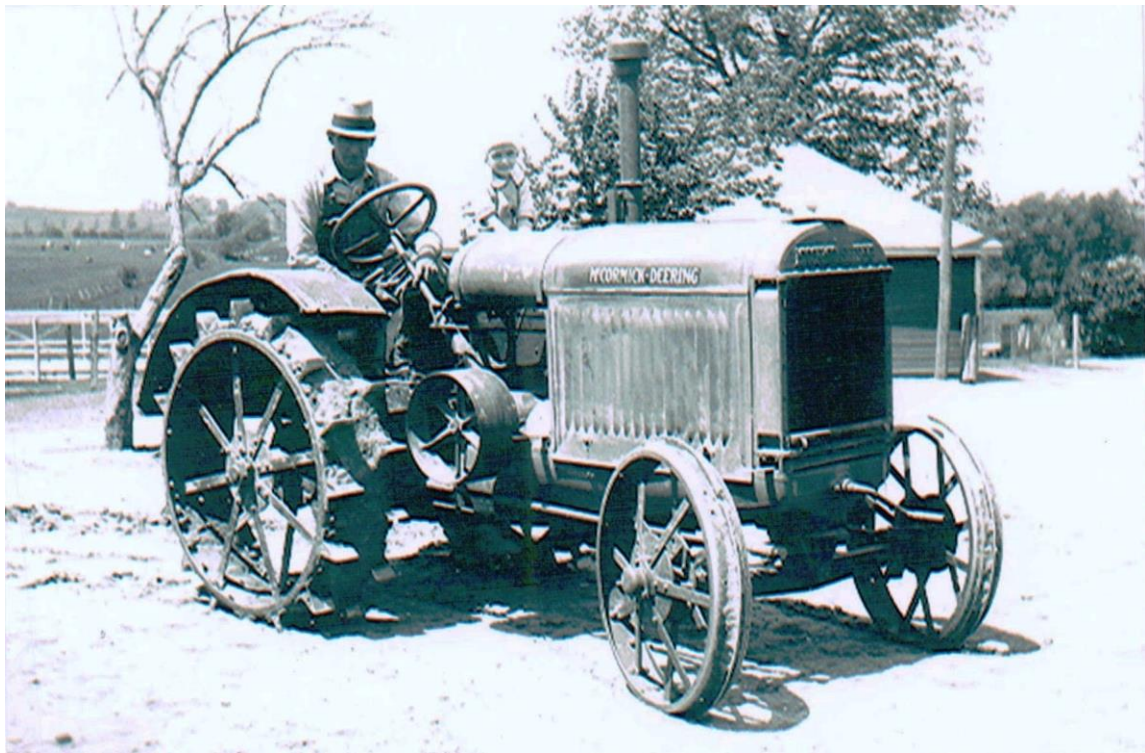
I believe this first picture is of Clem Faist and his brothers Al, George and John at the Joseph Faist farm. This is looking toward Walnut Road. Note the boys are all wearing bib overalls.



In 1937 Clem was farming on his own and he and his daughter, Marion, were busy hauling bovine excretory exhaust (Have you figured out that term yet? It looks pretty apparent to me.)



Clem's little girl was right there beside her daddy in the fields along Walnut Road.



In 1938 Clem got a second helper, a little boy named Robert. Below are some more cool old pictures. By then the family lived on Florence Road. In 1939 the kids were supervising as neighbors helped with the hay crop. Aren't those some magnificent teams?



The little boy grew and became his daddy's right hand man. The picture below (1946) is taken just north of the house. A big John Deere and modern tillage tools would have made short work of that job but they got it done, too, in a slower, gentler world.



Yup, there was plenty of bovine excretory exhaust on Florence Road too.



I have no clue where this next picture (BELOW) was taken nor the identity of the little boy but he sure was proud to be helping.





The horses were an important tool at corn planting time.



Hay making time was easier with extra help from neighbors. Clem is the first man on the left and the little boy with a soda is Robert. Rich Meyer thinks the taller boy is Irvin Wubbena and the man next to Clem is Ralph Wubbena. He thinks the fellow on the far end of the rack is Duane Drake and the Jeep may have belonged to the Brattruds, who went around the community doing custom baling.



The picture below of hay making in 1910 at the Henry Hoefler (my kids' great grampa) farm near Pearl City, IL, is added here because it floated to the top of the pile and it is so interesting. It looks like the Hoefler kids were right there in the mix. See the little girls at the base of the ladder. Kids on the farm just never change, do they?



OK, time to start picking corn again. Early corn picking on Florence Road was the “pick-it-on-the-ear” method and corn (still on the cob) was stored in the red corncrib northeast of the barn or in the wire cribs west of the barn.



The next step up was a picker-sheller which left the cobs in the field. This was great but you still had to trail the picker behind a tractor and could only drive where the corn was already picked. The outside rows were chopped for silage in September to facilitate the coming corn harvest. (Later, when the silage was no longer needed for steers, somebody with a self-propel combine was hired to “open up” the field.)

Bringing only shelled corn to the farmyard created a need for storage for all that nice shelled corn and a way to dry it successfully. The corn-on-the-cob dried before it was shelled so it did not

mold. This new system picked the corn before it was dry enough to store. Enter the dryer bin!



The first bin, built in 1965, held 6,000 bushels of shelled corn and a powerful LP drying system did its job.

Soon after that we bought a self-propel combine and it was a dandy improvement. It harvested four rows of corn every pass across the field instead of two with our former methods.

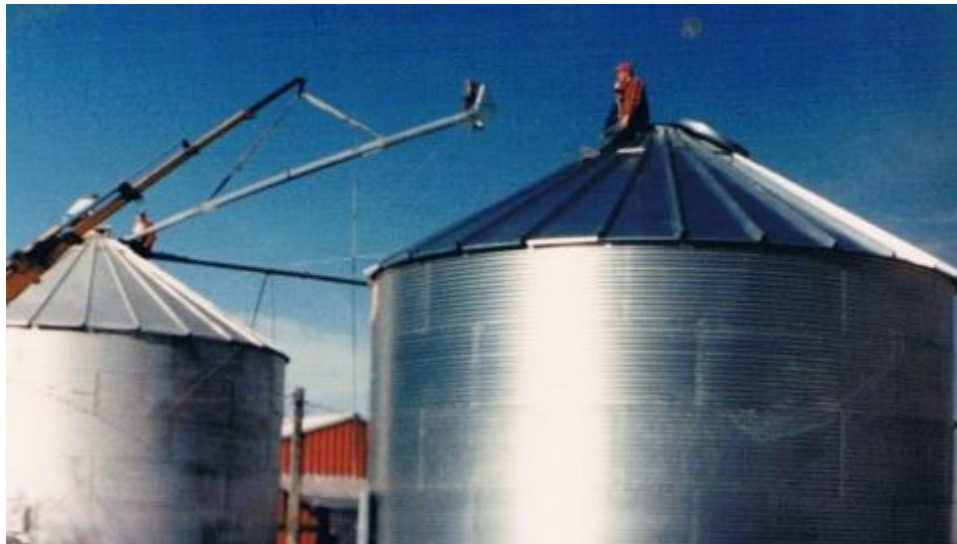




Corn genetics and more efficient tillage methods increased yields greatly. That plus farming another 80 acres of cropland at German Valley made a good bit more storage necessary. Enter three more bins!

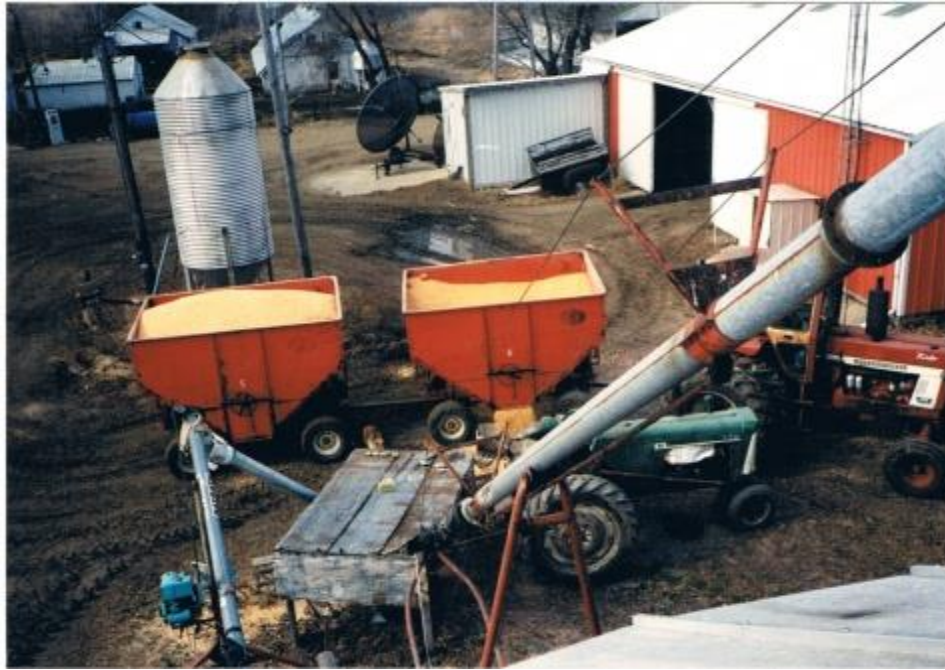


Overhead augers connected the four bins.



Corn was brought in from the fields with wagons, and then the grain was dumped into a pit and augured into the dryer bin. Now lining up those wagons to squirt out the corn properly into the pit was a challenge for me. If it didn't line up right the first time, there was no way I could back up that collection of wheels and wagon tongues without the whole mess looking like a pretzel so I simply had to circle the bins and take another whack at it: it took three or four revolutions sometimes, it did, it did.





After it was dried down, the corn was moved thru a series of augers into the other three bins.





When all those augers got rolling, you jolly-well better have somebody in constant attendance. If one motor stopped, it wasn't pretty and you could expect to get lots of exercise scooping up a massive heap of spilled corn...no lolly-gagging allowed here.





For a few years corn was brought from my folks' farm at German Valley with a fifth-wheel trailer. Harvest season weather isn't always the best and that corn got some hairy rides during the nine mile trek.







And then in 1993 the combine made its last trip across the fields at 455 West Florence Road.



The equipment and bins were sold and Jeff Becker rented the land until the end of 1999 when the corn ground was sold. The last day he was combining I was able to ride a few rounds with him and collected a little corn. This last corn from the land under the Faist name was placed in small jars for my five kids.

It was the end of an era.



There is no more corn to pick but the memories live on in this old cornfarmer's heart. Nothing beats sitting on a tractor, waiting for your wagons to be filled, watching a hundred wild ducks and geese circle above you. It was comforting to wake up in the night and hear the dryer cycling as it did its job. The unique aroma of drying corn is hard to forget, as is the feeling of urgency harvest time evokes as everybody rushes to beat the first snow. And you knew something good was bubbling in the oven for supper in that warm house.