

Green Magazine

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A retired nuclear engineer and John Deere tractors

January 1995 concluded a 39-1/2 year engineering career I had with General Electric Company Nuclear Energy Division at San Jose, California. My career went from the very beginning of nuclear power plant design to the worldwide construction of several nuclear power plants by GE.

This all began when this Minnesota farm boy was rescued off the farm by Uncle Sam at the beginning of the Korean War. At that time, we were still using the grain binder and threshing machine. Dad purchased a new John Deere "B" in 1938 that ended farming with horses. I was unduly impressed with the John Deere and spent many a day plowing, disking, dragging, etc. on that tractor. During World War II, I ran the tractor all day and Dad would take over after milking (I hated milking) and would run it all night during spring planting.

After my discharge from the service, I obtained my engineering degree on the GI Bill and took a job with General Electric at Hanford, Washington in 1955. It was during my tenure at Hanford, Washington that I first noticed the John Deere Lindeman crawlers being used in the Yakima Valley orchards. I was very impressed with the maneuverability of these crawlers in the hilly orchards.

In 1962, I transferred to GE Nuclear Energy in San Jose, California. Just 20 miles south of San Jose is Mor-



Lindeman crawler still used on the Frank Busch walnut orchard.

gan Hill, which was a beautiful orchard area and small town much like the small towns and orchard communities in the Yakima Valley. We purchased a walnut orchard with an old farm house and several old sheds, but were without a tractor to work the orchard. Being an old wheat and corn farmer with John Deere green in my blood, I went out and bought a 1938 John Deere "AW" for \$200. I soon found out it was impossible to stay on the tractor while going through the orchard pulling a disk. Of course, with a very tight budget at the time, we had to prune the trees up high enough so that with the disk hooked to the far left side of the tractor, staying on the tractor was doable (after much practice). The poor tractor ended up with a very short muffler and breather stack. I lived with this setup for a few seasons but always kept thinking about the little John Deere Lindeman crawler of the Yakima Valley.

In early 1970, I went to Yakima, Washington and purchased two Lindeman crawlers from Simco Equipment Co. and had them trucked to California. Our budget was still quite tight, so I sold one of the crawlers and got enough to pay for both the tractors and the trucking. This was acceptable to my wife and I had the tractor of my dreams. Shortly after, I sold the "AW" (now I regret that) and purchased a 1935 four bolt John Deere "B" with a No. 5 mower. Our family had grown to seven children by that time so I double cropped the orchard. In November, I planted oats between the trees for oat hay and in late April, it was cut, raked and baled. The 10 acre orchard produced eight to 10 tons of good oat hay. This took care of our few head of beef, which we raised for butchering.

Raising the oat hay brought on an idea—why not get a grain binder? My father lived in Minnesota and had sold the farm many years before and had moved to town. In the spring of 1980, during a phone conversation with him, I jokingly mentioned that I would like to get a grain binder since I was cutting and baling all this nice oats for hay. He must have been waiting for something special to do since about a month later, he called me and said, "Now you have to get a trailer and haul this Minnesota grain binder I just bought and it will cost you a hundred bucks because that's what I had to pay for it!" My wife and family thought I

had lost all my marbles and so did our neighbors out here in California. We went back to Minnesota that very summer with a trailer and hauled the binder to California.

I suffered with the ribbing about the "old grain binder" from our Minnesota relatives and our local neighbors and friends for about 10 years before the next step to madness came. This time, we were visiting my wife's relatives near Prior Lake, Minnesota. We were there to celebrate a birthday party for my wife's brother, Herman Beuch. Now get this—my wife was talking with one of Herman's neighbors and said, "Frank has everything but a threshing machine" in a ribbing of old Frank way. The neighbor said, "Hey, I've got one out at the farm in the machine shed." My wife said, "What? Oh, no!" Needless to say, I got called over to where they were visiting and this neighbor said, "Let's go right now and look at it." Well, when we got back, I was the owner of a 26x36 Wood Bros. threshing machine located on a farm near Lydia, Minnesota. When we got back to California, our neighbors and friends were thinking of sending me to the funny farm after that bit of news. I suspect our Minnesota relatives had similar inclinations. My co-workers at GE just produced blank looks or a shrug since none of them knew what a threshing machine was. But I sure was excited about the newfound toy.

In June of 1994, it was time to go and get my prize. I drove my old 1972 Ford F250 with a 390 engine and a 27 foot flatbed trailer that I built myself to haul the threshing machine. We loaded the threshing machine onto the trailer at the Whipps' farm near Lydia, Minnesota where it had resided for the previous 50 years of its existence. We weighed empty and again loaded at New Prague and the total truck and trailer gained 6,000 pounds. At least, I knew what I had to tow to California.

The first thing we did was to get beside a big semi rig and make sure we could clear the underpasses. The height was less than the big rigs.

On a Monday morning, we departed the Herman Beuch farm near Lydia, Minnesota for the haul to California. Herman rode along as navigator and overhead clearance watcher



1935 four bolt model "B" John Deere pulling 1938 Minnesota grain binder, June 1998.

and to keep me alert. Our route was I-94 to I-90 and then south at Bozeman, Montana through West Yellowstone through Idaho to I-80, which took us to California. On our many trips to Minnesota going the various routes, this one was the preferred way. The first day of the trip went great without incident. The second day, we experienced high side and head winds in Montana and a blizzard for a spell at West Yellowstone. We made Reno, Nevada at the end of the third day, even with gusty side winds in Nevada. The next morning, we were ready to leave at 6 a.m. to do the final leg of the trip. Herman always checked the tires and general condition of the load when suddenly he said, "Hey, Frank, take a look at these tires—we aren't going over Donner Pass with these tires." Sure enough, the faces of the tires were gone and we don't know how many miles we had gone on the bare casings. The sidewalls were intact. We bought a full new set of tires for the trailer in Reno and we were on our way. We got to Morgan Hill by 3 p.m. on the fourth

day and the trip encompassed a total of 2,025 miles with fuel consumption of 4.8 miles per gallon. All along the trip from Minnesota, drivers in the cars passing us would give us the thumbs up, wave vigorously, honk or just smile. I suspect the smilers were thinking that there goes another one of those crazies from California.

Now that I had the threshing machine and binder, what I really needed was a model "D" John Deere to run the threshing machine. In February of 1995 (I had just retired), I located one from a guy in Sparks, Nevada. It was a 1934 with rubber tires and spoked wheels, not running but the engine was loose. I restored that tractor with an all out effort by August, a month before our first threshing demonstrations at the Santa Cruz County Fair in Watsonville, California. I located a large wheat field near Morgan Hill and persuaded

the owner to sell me an acre of standing wheat. This was in early June so out came the Minnesota grain binder. We put the canvasses on, figured out the twine routing to the tie head, greased and oiled it and it cut wheat and tied bundles as if it had only been in the shed over one winter. Binding out here in California was a rare novelty—we made the television news on two of the local channels showing this binder in action.

1999 will be our fifth year of doing threshing at the county fair. We raise about an acre of wheat and do the cutting in June and stack the wheat at the fairgrounds where we do the threshing. We do two or three short threshing runs each day of the fair. We clean the wheat after each run with an old fanning mill and some of the wheat gets ground into flour and bread is baked at "Claudia's Kitchen," which is a turn of the century kitchen setup at the fair. During the week days of the fair, the county schools bus the kids to the fair with thousands of kids attending each day. The kids love to see the

old threshing operation and they do the grinding of the wheat with about 10 or 12 hand grinders set up at Claudia's Kitchen. Our whole family (including kids and grandkids) participate in the binding and threshing. It is absolutely amazing the number of transplanted midwesterners out here who recall their younger days doing the threshing and all have a story to tell about it.

*Submitted by,
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