1954 Spring

Rich had me help him this summer with haying. He had bought a small Massey Ferguson tractor, a hay sickle and a hay rake and would hire out cutting hay for any one that needed those services. I believe that he started doing this as a side job because Mr. Frasier, a neighbor about a mile south of him needed someone to help him with his farm. Rich had called Dad and asked him if I could help him this summer which I was excited to do. When I got there Rich had already mowed and raked the first cutting of hay. It was ready to bale when I got there. Rich had also got Lois’s youngest brother, DeLynn who was a year or two younger than I, to also help. Rich was able to borrow a hay bailer from another neighbor for trade for some of the hay that Rich would receive for harvesting Mr. Frasier’s crop. It was an old wire hand tie bailer, which meant that one person set on each side of the bail chamber. As the plunger would move forward the person on the left side of the chamber would insert a set of wire needles. He would then thread two wires through the needles to the opposite side. At the same time the person on the right side would insert the previous set of wires back through the needles so that the one on the left side could tie the two ends of the wire together to hold the bale of hay together. Each stroke of the plunger would compact the hay and push the bail of hay down the chamber until the bail dropped out the back of the chamber. A puff of hay dust would blow out each side of the chamber with each stroke of the plunger. The plunger was operated by a gasoline V-4 cylinder engine. The engine had a 4 inch wide and 6 inches diameter pulley that drove a belt which went around a 6 foot diameter fly wheel, attached to a crank shaft that drove the plunger. The bailer was pulled by a tractor, so it took a team of three to operate it. The first morning as we tried to start the engine, which has a hand crank starter, the engine would not start. We would take turns cranking the engine until we would become tired and then the next person would try. When the engine failed to start we checked the spark plugs, the points, the timing, the carburetor and all seemed ok. We worked on the engine until by noon when the three of us were excused. Rich finally decided that we would quit and go back to the house for lunch. As we were eating I came up with an idea to start the engine. We took a jack back to the field with us and we disconnected the tractor from the bailer, moved the tractor to the side so that the right wheel of the tractor lined up with the pulley on the bailers engine. We removed the belt from the fly wheel and put it around the tractor tire and to the drive pulley on the engine. When we had the belt tight we jacked up the tractor wheel so it was off the ground and start the tractor up. With the tractor wheel free from the ground it would turn the engine over. It didn’t take long until the engine would start. We would then shifted the tractor into natural, let the bailer’s engine run for a few minutes to warm up before turned it off, replaced the drive belt and reconnect the tractor to the bailer. The engine would then restart with one pull of the starter rope. We had to use that procedure each morning to get the engine started and then it worked fine the rest of the day.

Rich drove the tractor, I set on the left hand side of the bailer and DaLynn set on the right hand side. Things went quite well for a couple of days, but then one morning as we made a pass around the field, the bailer suddenly sunk into mud until the bailer laid up to the frame. Luckily for DeLynn and I both jerked our legs out as the bailer sunk for the way you set on the bailer your legs are under the frame f the chamber. We found out that the day before water had been turned down the irrigation ditch and had seeped down through a gofer hole to the bottom side of the field before surfacing. We had to get a neighbor with a large dump truck to come down and pull the tractor and bailer out of the mud.

I stayed and help Rich the rest of that summer before returning home for school in the fall. The next spring I again went up to work for Rich. I believe that was the year that Rich’s boss at the grocery store told Rich that he needed to decide if he was going to farm or work as a butcher in the store. Rich was getting so many calls from people wanting his help that he was spending more time of work than he was at the store. Rich and Lois talked it over and he quite the store. He purchased more equipment which included a new bailer that was powered by the PTO of the tractor and was an automatic tie. When I got there Rich had already bailed the 1st crop of hay for Mr. Frasier and was ready to haul it out of the field. Rich had to go into town so asked if I would go to Mr. Frasier’s and haul the hay that was left back to his place and also showed me where he wanted it stacked. The remaining hay in the field was Riches pay for the work he had done. I took the tractor and trailer and went to the field, loaded the hay onto the trailer and returned and stacked it as Rich had directed me. I was just unloading the last of the load when Rich returned. He came over and was just a little ticked at me for hauling such small loads. I asked him what he meant. He said that I could have loaded the trailer fuller instead of making two trips. I told him that I hadn’t made two trips but had only made one trip. He said that I couldn’t have put that much hay on to the trailer and got up the hill to come out of Frasier’s driveway. He would not believe me when I again told him that I had only made one trip and had stacked the trailer 7 ½ layers high. He said that I couldn’t have because he had sacked the trailer 6 ½ layers high and when he tried to come out of the driveway the load tipped over almost pulling the tractor over backward. I told him to go in and ask Lois how many trips I had made and when he came out he said he just couldn’t believe that I hadn’t tipped over. I told him that he hadn’t told me and I just came up the hill very slowly and hadn’t had any problems.

Mr. Frasier had a pasture that the weeds and grass had got out of control. He asked Rich if he would mow it down. Rich asked if I would do that for him and of course I agreed to. Rich warned me that I needed to be careful when I opened the field as the Mink Creek ran along the east side of the pasture. The hay sickle attached to the three point hookup on the rear of the tractor. It extended to the right side of the tractor and operated from the power take off. When you opened a field you would normally drive counter clock wise with the tractor driving in the field and the sickle cutting next to the edge of the field. After you made the opening swath you would turn around and cut in a clock wise direction. On the opening swath I watched for the creek on the east side and could easily see where the weeds dropped off to the creek. I kept the swath back from the creeks bank but I didn’t realize that there was a high water bank and the swather just cut the weeds off even with the top of the bank. When I reversed direction on the second swath driving the tractor on the first swath and came near the creek the tractor suddenly dropped of the high water bank a distant of 2 to 3 feet. The tractor almost rolled on over but for some reason tipped back still being on a very dangerous slop. Had it rolled it probably have rolled on top of me. I carefully climbed off the tractor. I realized that I needed help to get the tractor out of the creek bottom. I remembered that a neighbor had a large dump truck and so walked there. He came down and when he saw the tractor questioned why it had not completely rolled over. He hooked a chain to the tractor and to his dump truck and pulled tight before he would let me get back on the tractor, fearing that the tractor might still roll. With he pulling with the truck and me driving the tractor we got it back onto level ground. There was no damage to the equipment so I thanked him for his help and finished mowing the field.

With Rich now working full time at farming he was having trouble keeping enough work for the two of us. I therefore went to work for Mr. Anderson, another farmer just down the road, from Rich’s, helping him hay. He had came up with the idea of pulling a sleigh (really just a sheet of metal) behind the bailer and having me and another fellow stack the bails onto it as the bails came out of the chamber. When the sleigh was full we would wrap a chain around the stack and with a steel bar shoved into the ground, pull the stack off the sleigh. This helped us so that we didn’t have to drive all over the field to load the hay. At noon when we quite for lunch we noticed that the frame on the bailer had cracked. I believe that pulling the sleigh put too much stress on the bailer. Anyway we took the bailer to the shop where Mr. Anderson proceeded to weld the crack. The motor area was covered with old grease and hay dust and the area of the crack was right there by the motor. This bailer was not new enough to have the PTO but did have than automatic tie. I noticed that with the welding, the grease and dust had caught on fire. The flames were curling right around the fuel tank so I notified Mr. Anderson of what was happening. He just looked at the fire and said it would be ok. I went to the other side of the barn as I was afraid that the gas tank would blow up. It didn’t and things went ok. After that job was finished, I went to work for Mr. Melvin Anderson on his dry farm.