

Whatever Happened to...the Old Linn

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I expected to have a busy Thanksgiving Day this year. With six adults and four children to feed, I arose earlier than my normal 4:30 a.m. in order to bake pies before I needed the oven to roast the turkey. The weather report the previous night had predicted "2 to 4 inches" of snow overnight, and sure enough, there it was – not 2 or 4 inches, but more like 8 inches of the fluffy white stuff. The first thought that came to mind was that I was thankful we don't live in the Buffalo area where more than 2 feet of snow had fallen in less than two days which had made life more challenging for students, drivers and potential airline passengers. My second thought was that I hoped the roads between Cleveland and here had been cleared sufficiently so that Mark, my partner, could make it home in our Kenworth for the holiday meal I was preparing.

I have a great deal of faith in the ability of the various D.O T.'s to clear the roads of snow and ice. This also includes our own Town of Palmyra Highway Department. There was however, a time prior to the 1930's when this last statement could not have been made. The acquisition of heavy-duty snow moving equipment was a big event in our town. Consequently, this month I am deviating a little from my normal format in this column. I am going to use the words of former Town of Palmyra Highway Superintendent Jim DeBrine as he recently described his service and that of his father, Jim Sr. in that office. Following are some of Jim's memories regarding "The Old Linn."

"The Town of Palmyra was one of the first in the area to own a Linn Halftrack; basically a snow plowing machine. To me, it was a huge, monstrous machine that nothing in the world could ever stop. It was manufactured in Morris, NY and the local sales rep was a man named Howard Whitman who owned a house and shop at what was called Hannans Corners on Route 31 near Pittsford.

There were many stories of the mighty fetes of the Linn. Before the days of high speed snow plowing and large snow removal equipment, the Linn was one of the mainstays when it came to opening roads after snowstorms. Sometimes it was many days before the people in outlying areas could hope to get to town or to get their milk to market. Sometimes a group of shoveling had to shovel some of the snow from the top of the drifts before the Linn could plow its way through. Four miles an hour was about the top speed, but when the snow was real deep the going was much slower. The cab was made of wood and was very Spartan. There was no heater or defroster, but there was an eight by

twelve opening in the floorboards just behind the engine manifold and exhaust pipe that provided some heat to the cab. At times the exhaust pipe would get cherry red when the engine was working hard. There was once an occasion when the radiator hose broke allowing the alcohol antifreeze to spill out onto the manifold and the whole engine compartment and cab caught fire and the driver and helper beat a hasty retreat.

The Linn that I remember and worked with was powered by a big old Waukesha 4-cylinder engine and had pneumatic tires on the front. It had a 4-speed transmission with a forward/reverse lever that would give you the same speeds whether you were going ahead or back. The plow equipment was archaic by today's standards. The wing and plowmen had to stand in the body on the back of the machine to raise and lower the plow. They widened the wings by operating large hand cranked winches. It was a cold and dangerous job and the apparatus was responsible for at least a couple of broken limbs and several frozen ears and fingers.

The Linn had a good-sized hydraulic dump body and was sometimes used to haul crushed stone from Oaks Corners, which was the only quarry in the area at that time. It was an all day trip and it could carry only 6 to 8 tons at a time.

During the 193's, a particularly bad winter killed off many of the orchards in the area. The Linn made the rounds pulling out the apple and peach trees in the Marion and Williamson areas. Once again the equipment was available and it gave the crew work during an off time.

In the early 1940's, Jim Sr. had a call one very blustery night from Dr. John Hagaman that he had a patient on the far end of the Cambier Road who he suspected had an appendicitis attack. He wanted to know if there was any way that we could precede him with a plow so he could get to his patient. Dad (Jim Sr.) called Jack Martin in to drive the Linn and I went along as the helper. All went well until we got to a sharp curve in front of where Gomer Johns used to live on North Creek Road. Doc was following along behind with his nearly new Buick car that had some type of new automatic transmission. Just around the curve there was a huge drift that even the old Linn shied away from, so we decided to go around it by going through the fence and into the lot. Doc's transmission gave up the "go" at this point and we ended up towing him the rest of the way to Cambier Road and then back to town. By the time we arrived at Doc's house call, the patient had recovered from a bad case of indigestion and Doc's services weren't needed.

Back then Garlock Packing Company would call on the town and the Linn when they had to move one of their heavy presses from one building to another. They would have their employees mount the press on a heavy stone boat type of platform and then the Linn would tow it to its new location.

Another Linn story involves moving houses. Several years ago, probably back in the late '30's, the east end of Main Street seemed to be the right place for the expansion of gasoline and service stations. Land was being purchased by the big oil companies in likely locations. Some properties had occupied houses on them. Most were torn down, but two that I remember were moved to a different location. I don't know if Abe Cleason had the contract for clearing the sites, but he ended up with two of the structures. He jackeded them up and put them on large skids, probably old utility poles in preparation to dragging them to the new sites. Some type of arrangement was made with the town and very early one morning the Linn was hooked to the larger of the two units and it was towed down what was then the newly located Route 31 onto some property east of town that he owned. I don't know if the other house was part of the deal too, or whether Cleason's trucks moved that one. The marks that the crawler cleats on the Linn left in it's effort were visible in the concrete pavement for many years until they were paved over with macadam. As a result of the gas station influx, no less than six stations were clustered in a one-block area around the lower end of Main Street.

During the late 1940's and early '50's, the Linns were phased out. Ours was last seen being used in a junkyard near Canandaigua with the Quickway mounted on the back loading scrap. The Town of Walworth and Town of Arcadia had the last ones that I remember. I believe that Grover Swank in Marion ended up with one of them."

We have it on pretty good authority that Palmyra's Linn made it's way to Pennsylvania after its career in Canandaigua was finished.

Thanks Jim. To that I can only add, those were the good old days!