

TIMS IMPLEMENT COMPANY

The Years Before WWII

As stated earlier in my writing, Dad was working in town and very successful with the co-op farm store. After a bad experience there, he immediately bought and built a new privately owned farm store. When completed most of the key help left the co-op and came to work at Tim's Implement Company, along with the main tractor franchise. In 1939, the co-op store continued to operate, changing managers every two to three years. Tim's Implement continued to prosper by selling petroleum products (gas and oil) and General Motors trucks along with Allis Chalmers machinery.



At Tim's Implement Company, one of the main drawing cards were the gasoline pumps out front of the entry to the building. Beginning in 1939, there were three grades of gasoline; white, regular and ethyl which was the premium product. Prices ranged from twelve to fourteen cents per gallon. This included five cents per gallon for state and federal tax along with freight costs. This was the best price in town, and all the competitors complained because we were known as "price cutters".

Tim's Implement Company 1940
2nd and America Ave, Bemidji, MN

In the summer of 1940, the crops on the farm were looking good; that is, until a hail storm totally flattened a beautiful stand of barley. Our windbreak was a two acre stand of Norway and White pines that mostly fell to the ground due to the strong winds. Luckily none of them fell on any buildings. Dad's sister, Aunt Marie, came from Hawaii via Detroit, Michigan, and after picking up a new car, we helped her with sightseeing almost every day until her return to Hawaii.



July 4, 1940 – getting ready for
the annual parade



My Friends, Don, Herbie, Marvin and I decided to go to the harvest fields in North Dakota before school began to make our fortune. This was near Mayville, N.D. We worked for Junior Eklin for one day before rain began and we moved south about thirty miles and began shocking grain for a farmer who had three of the homeliest daughters we had ever seen. The drinking water was so bad with all the alkali, until we moved toward Fargo and began work on the extra gang for the Great Northern

Railroad near Bismarck, ND. The sun was so hot and the work was so hard that we lasted one day, hitch-hiking back to Fargo where we picked up our car and returned home to start our second year of high school.

World War II began in 1941 for the U.S. after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the only merchandise available was hardware, feed and minerals for livestock. With some of the key help leaving for military service and war efforts, including "yours truly".

After the War, and Back To Business

In the year 1946 when the war was over and I came home, Dad asked me to work in all parts of the business, while I was attending college. In 1948 I joined the business full time.



Selling automobiles was my main interest, but gradually I worked into selling tractors and motor trucks, along with gasoline transport. These were great times to be in this occupation as there was a demand for all these products.

Training was a requirement for us to hold our franchise on the many lines of equipment, and it seemed our best employees would go to the special training school and then leave us to go into business for themselves or to the iron mines. Working in the mines paid double the salary one could earn locally. In the mines they were required to belong to a union, pay dues, along with going on strike at an average of every eight months. The Mesabi Iron Mines were located seventy miles away. This was an ongoing problem until they closed the mines in the mid-nineteen-eighties.

Frequently our company would be notified to send an employee for special mechanic training classes to learn of the new changes on items coming out the following year. After a period of time, I made it my responsibility to attend all specialty schools, then personally train the employees or direct them when a problem arose.

One of the most interesting schools was put on by the Allis Chalmers Industrial Division. At the time I was attending college and working part time. Dad asked if I would like to go to Springfield, Ill. and represent our company for this special training course. I consulted with my advisor, as I would be absent from my classes for two weeks. He urged me to attend, by all means, as my chances of being a teacher weren't exceptional.

The subject was diesel engines from beginning to end. Classes were represented by people from South American countries; plus most states in the Middle West. On completion, I found a new knowledge about diesel engines that has been beneficial to me for the past fifty years.

Most mechanics are afraid of diesel and the close tolerance involved with this type of internal combustion engine. The fact remains, it was less complicated because carburetion and electrical components are not necessary, except ignition, which is only needed along with electric lights.

When I returned to college and shared my test scores with my advisor, Mr. Hobson, he was very pleased to see that I could be a success in some other field.



Tim's 1950

The advantage our company had was that we were more diversified by selling petroleum products; namely gasoline and fuel oils on a small scale.

Dad was so satisfied with my interest in the business that when I told him I was getting married I was given the position of assistant manager. My salary was two hundred dollars per month. From then on, it was a constant battle to beat the competition for sales; this being to sell more motor trucks, farm tractors,

and compete with nine other competitors. They were known as Red, Green, Gray, Yellow and Orange; or International, John Deere, Ford, Ferguson, Minneapolis, Moline, Cockshutt, and our company with Allis Chalmers. Also included were many short lines of equipment that we all stocked and sold. The motor trucks competing for every sale were Dodge, Chevrolet, International and our company with General Motors Company.

Tim's Implement Becomes My Business and Timan's Failing Health

In 1958, after seven years in the business, I bought the company and built a petroleum bulk plant with more delivery equipment. This allowed our cash flow to be more constant year round.

Dad came to the business fewer days each week after my purchasing the business, but continued to withdraw substantial amounts from the business bank account. The withdrawals were to build several commercial buildings around town. This was making it

difficult to meet the payroll on many occasions. Also Dad and I had been doing the selling, which left four people, including myself, to do the work of six people. To maintain our volume in sales, I employed up to four men which increased our dollar volume, but very little change in net profit.

We were fortunate in having schooled and trained local personnel employees. These were K.K., an excellent mechanic with a personality everyone liked. An efficient bookkeeper of Irish descent; and, J.G., parts department man and retired from Allis Chalmers that knew his parts like no one else. The service was done by T.J., who was also a mechanic.

The salesmen began using the vehicles more for personal purposes and not working for the company as expected. As a result, they were given the title of "bird dog" and paid a straight commission.

Eventually we installed more storage tanks, and added fuel oil, which required additional equipment. This involved trucks with tanks that had metering and pump equipment. This doubled our volume, plus income in winter when we needed it most. We also had supplies of kerosene and related products. There were continual price wars for all the fifty-one years we were in the fuel business. The supply representatives would compete with one another to get our business and would give additional discounts if we would pay before the statement was due.



After several years and a growing family, the business and machinery sales were moving at a fast pace, but very competitive because of nine other machinery dealers in town and all of them vying for the same customers.

Dad was not around the store except to see that the bank account was solvent to cover expenses while doing commercial building in the area. We discussed the idea of selling the business until he told me his intention was to turn the company over to me when he retired. With two sisters and two brothers I could readily see that this would not be acceptable. Mother wanted her son-in-law to be part of the company. He held a job as a local mail carrier and I simply refused to accept this proposal of mother's.

This was in the discussion stage for about a year, and we were getting nowhere; until a dealer in the area was willing to sell his dealership to me, on my own terms. When Dad heard about this, we again began to draw up a purchase agreement. After almost a year, this was completed - until time came to sign on the dotted line. The bankers objected because I was not paying the maximum interest rate.

Company/Family Troubles

Time had rolled around again to pay the real estate taxes. The bank account was low and Dad was upset and didn't like our financial situation. I reminded him that I had not had a vacation in five years, and thought he should try running the business for awhile. This discussion took place on Wednesday evening and I told him to be prepared to not see me the following morning. Arriving home Mello (Manilla) and four children were ready to leave with me for a vacation within an hours time. No one knew where we had gone for four days, until we were back Monday morning.

Arriving at work, and going through mail of three days, Dad came in about eight o'clock and said, "Let's go to the attorney's office and sign the necessary purchase agreement papers." He said that I could begin making monthly payments to him. After the down payment, and paying off a friend of his, the atmosphere began to change. Dad and Mother left for Arizona, like every year in the past, for four months and a nice winter vacation.

At the age of sixty eight, Dad decided to totally retire and I could hire him to pick up motor trucks, when needed, from different places within a radius of one hundred fifty miles. He could also deliver and pick up machinery in the local area. This was a very good relationship until he lost his drivers license due to running stop signs. At the age of seventy four, this was a heart breaker for him. Dad continued to show up at the shop almost every day with a cheerful attitude, but not being able to remember that he was no longer in charge of operations anymore, he tried to sell the business to his old friends. Soon I was getting phone calls in the middle of the night telling me he was at the local gas station, two blocks away from home, but unable to find his way home.

On a Saturday one of my employees told me Dad had been admitted to an old rest home about fifteen miles away. Two of my sons and I went to see him the following day and found him very depressed. When we were leaving his statement was, "they left me here to die". I was unable to contact the director, but Mother stated they had been up to visit him and that he wished to stay. I could not believe this, and immediately went through the legal channels to get him removed, and to a local facility where doctors were available every day. It was necessary to go to court; with much objection from Mother and my two brothers.

The county attorney ruled in my favor and Dad was immediately transferred to a local facility. This took almost a month, and during this time, Dad had acquired an infection that was never completely cured.

Every morning on my way to work, I could now see Dad and visit with him while he was eating his breakfast. I brought his friends to see him, which he appreciated. I also took him for drives in the country on weekends.

The doctor informed me his heart was as strong as any man forty years of age. In 1968, at the age of seventy eight, suffering from Alzheimer's, Dad passed away two months

after our youngest son was born. His funeral was held at the small country church where we all had been members for so many years. (Aardahl Lutheran Church)

After dad passed away, the courts were working on the will that my mom and dad had written when he was suffering from Alzheimer's. After almost a year, I was informed that a reading of the will was to be held. I made it a point not to show up for this, as my sister had advised me that the will had been changed in her and her husband's favor.

The judge advised us siblings, not to discuss anything, other than the weather, due to such a hostile attitude, and this made Mother very angry. At this time a guardian had been appointed for Mother and the estate, which she objected to and finally got that ruling reversed. Immediately, her brother, my uncle who was somewhat of an accountant, told me that I had not made a down payment when I purchased the business and unless I could prove otherwise, I would be forced to close within thirty days. At the time of the hearing, I requested a delay in payments because one of the buildings on the business premise had been condemned by the local fire chief as a hazard due to its deteriorating wood frame structure.

When I began getting static from my two brothers on this, I walked out and told them to do as they damn well pleased. They did give me a delay in payment for three months and I explained that after nine years of payments, it might be difficult to find records of this. The answer was that I better have proof – or else!

Mello and I went to the shop early on a Sunday morning to begin the search for the records. We found the cancelled checks, along with the ledger and records of the proper payments being made. The guardian agreed to meet one week later so that I could get this matter cleared up with my uncle Herman, who was so concerned about Mother's financial affairs. We all met one week later and I presented the check which was being questioned, to Herman. His reaction as he took the check, was to hold it up to the light, then he said, "Well Connie, this is o.k." At this time I told him to stop bothering me, and if he was satisfied that all payments were current. To that Herman replied, "Oh, no, we can check the account at any time we wish."



I had about all of Herman, and all concerned that I could take and the following day, the president of the local bank made arrangements to lend me the necessary amount so that I could pay off the contract. This was at a much higher rate of interest than I had previously been paying. I hired a lawyer to bring the contract and title up to date and Mother received the remaining three years of payments in one amount. Paid in Full. The last payment on my business was the summer of 1972.

Tim's – 1970's – after old part torn down

Tim's Implement 1968-1990

The local Ford dealership went on strike a few years later, and as a result, were forced to sell their business to a new owner. Over the years all the competitors changed ownership, went bankrupt, sold out or moved away - except Tim's Implement Company which remained in business for fifty-one years, from 1939 -1990 when I sold to the local cooperative store that was started by Tim in 1934. It is still in operation today.

Trucks And Buses

Friendly competition erupted when the truck dealers were selling school buses. The school board always awarded the bid to the lowest bidder after each bidder made their presentation. This often lasted until 2:00 A.M. in some of the remote areas of the district.

Our service department was so well liked that we received more than our share of school bus sales, along with a little help from the body companies.

I lost a bid to the Ford dealer when Beltrami County, bought three trucks for forty thousand dollars. My bid was thirty nine thousand nine hundred and thirty nine dollars. The county paid sixty-three dollars more, saying that Ford had a better service department. I asked the board if any of them had seen my service department - none had. I reminded them that I had both gas and diesel service, and with that I told them to return my deposit and that I would never bid again. The following year, some companies were on strike and I was the only bidder. I delivered the unit. After that we were all friends again.

The motor truck people were always "crowding" us for more sales, even when they could not make delivery. We had a very loyal customer who had waited eleven months for a truck that should have been delivered in three weeks.

The district representatives were all different, but had one thing in mind, and that was to sell more trucks. About every two years General Motors would rotate the district representatives. Of course, when a new man arrived many changes were recommended. The new district representative was two years out of General Motors Training Institute, calling on a dealer that had been around for over fifty years and always paid their bills promptly. His recommendation; change the way we answer the business telephone, which did not include other parts of the business. This new system was short lived.

The next recommendation was that we install all new dealer identification signs. This would take half of the profit each month due to the rental charges. We refused to do this as our business had been on the same location for over fifty years with sufficient identification. Their next move was to get signed orders for a certain model truck that the factory was overstocked with. This I refused to do until I received delivery on trucks that had been on order for over six months.

The district representative charged over eighty dollars in telephone calls while waiting for my return from a sales call. Shortly thereafter, a salesman arrived stating he was there to prepare for installation of a new identification sign. When I advised him that I had notified General Motors that I would not purchase their signs, as the ones I had were satisfactory, his reply was, "this is the third place I have been today that has given me a refusal." At this time he called General Motors with his complaint. They promised to reimburse him his expenses. With this he was on his way to the next dealer.

Shortly after the identification problem, I told the General Motors Director that I did not want them calling me; if it became necessary for contact I would call them. The hassle General Motors was giving me was becoming a nuisance, so I called my friend, Buster, who had three General Motors automobile brands and said he would buy my inventory, or else I was going to have one of his automobile lines. We met for breakfast the next day, and in less than fifteen minutes he had bought my inventory - less three trucks that I kept.

My dealers license was still in effect, and as a result, I bought and sold used cars and trucks, which was more profitable than living with the truck franchise.

My only salesperson at that time was Mr. H.K. a very hyper type individual. He was very effective in sales until becoming an alcoholic, which caused him to not appear for work on time, or else miss part of a day. Finally, a customer accused me of being inebriated on the job, thinking I was H.K. This ended his position with our company, and he began work with two other dealers located in our city. This employment was for a short period of time, and he finally moved to another area.

Many students from the local college worked for me on a part-time basis. This required some training, but worked well until it was easier for them to obtain college loans.

My bookkeeper was an Irish lady that was very efficient until I purchased the business with the understanding she would work full time for me, and not the previous owner. This arrangement worked for several years until she got far behind with her work. She was doing bookkeeping for the previous owner, making it impossible to keep up with my office work. N.H. had a bad nicotine habit, and as a result, died of lung cancer after a short illness.

D.A. had been a good customer of mine for many years, and had sold his farm. One day he came in and asked for a job. Living out of town, he had to travel twenty miles each day, and when winter storms came I wasn't able to depend on him being at work. He too was a heavy smoker. He was a fuel truck driver, light duty mechanic, and all around handyman. There again, cancer took his life before the age of fifty.

H.K., a cousin of Kendel K. left his job with a small sawmill and lumberyard for a better job with me, learning to be an expert mechanic. Kendel had a likable personality, and I had known him since we were kids in school. He called me one morning about 5:00 o'clock stating that he had hit a deer while driving our gasoline transport truck going for

fuel some 140 miles away. This was very minor and was on the road again within twenty minutes. After several years Kendel left for a job in the Iron Mines, which was 130 miles away. This was a higher salaried job and he had excellent mechanical skills.

Standard Oil Company was next door to our property and every so often, they would call authorities due to some infraction of the law we were supposed to be guilty of. For all the time of our fifty years in business, every Standard Oil proprietor, of which there were three, had problems. One man committed suicide, one went bankrupt, and the third imbibed so heavily of spirits that he became heavily mortgaged.

While J.H. operated the Standard Oil business he was also city mayor. As mayor, he had authority to pick the jury for Municipal Court. J.H. picked me during the busiest time of the season, and did not allow me to park my gasoline transport truck on the street. I parked it on my property that adjoined his, which blocked his front entrance view.

J.H. was finally replaced by D.L. who bought the property and was very cooperative about boundary lines. When time came for him to sign papers, Standard Oil officials said my property line crossed into the middle of their main building. The county attorney advised me to sign off until I demanded an official survey. This did show a line cutting off one third of my property to the rear. There was an old fence line showing property that I assumed was mine, for over seventeen years. This proved it was mine, by address possession law. I offered to exchange properties, but with no luck. After a year of negotiations with my attorney, and a cost to me of over a thousand dollars, they agreed to my terms.

Our company would bid to get the school bus fuel business - like most of the gas stations in the city. Standard Oil would bid their tank wagon price, which was real low during the school year, as farmers bought very small amounts of gasoline at this time. We still managed to get our share of the business.

Many good customers as well as many poor ones sometimes required credit. One of our best was St. Mary's Mission on the Red Lake Indian Reservation. They purchased over 90% of their needs for farm operations. This included school buses and equipment. Dealing with the Priests or the Brothers was always a learning experience. Me, being a Lutheran, made no difference to them. The Brothers would come into town, and when one, by the name of Brother Mike and a priest by the name of Father Cassion would come and we would go to a little Italian restaurant and "wheel and deal" until they were sure I wasn't making much profit. Then I would sponsor their bowling team with my advertisement. One day between Christmas and New Years they called me up to the Mission and bought two new tractors with ten pieces of equipment. They had found money in their budget that had to be spent before the end of the year. Lucky for me, I sold a tractor that was coming due to be paid for the following month.

Another customer I had on the Red Lake Indian Reservation bought a transport load of gasoline. After making the third trip up to collect the bill from him he became so angry that he told me, "if you come up here again, you will not go back alive." As the

Reservation is “closed”, it is like another country and being one of only two in the United States at the time; needless to say we absorbed the loss.

(Lowell sold Tim’s Implement Co in 1990.)

