

# The Time Machine

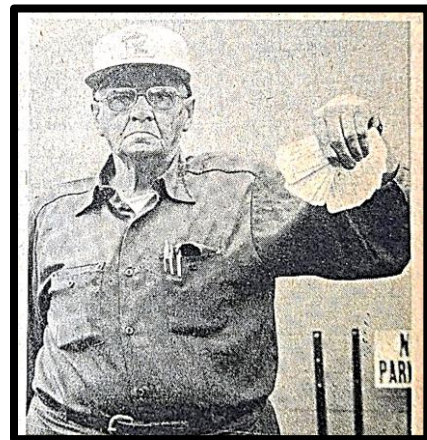
## “He Did What?”

### Article #37

You may have heard of F. Austin Johnson some years ago. He had his fifteen minutes of fame, on the world stage no less. Born in 1904, he started a four-hour per day project in 1950. Due to poor health he had to discontinue that project in 1979. The project was neither complete nor incomplete. He passed away in 1989.

Johnson and his creation were featured on three national TV shows, “The Guinness Book of World Records,” “Ripley’s Believe It or Not,” and “CBS Sunday Morning with Charles Kuralt.” In 1989 “Weird Al Yankovic” was inspired to write a song about the man and his creation.

In August of 1977 Johnson was making news for another reason. Nothing as exciting as his creation. No global or national interest, only state and local interest. Only amateur baseball fans to be exact. His Minnesota town-team amateur baseball notoriety was the result of not only his attending every state tournament since 1951 but attending almost every game of every tournament! This 1977 state tournament was held in Wadena for the second time in five years. You may note in the WPJ picture that Johnson is holding something. Admission tickets for every game of every session.



In spite of attending every game he still found time to visit with local friends and family including Jim Gobels of Aldrich and the Weiher's of rural Verndale. Henry Weiher's late wife Grace was Johnson's sister.

I hope I am not boring you. I best move on to the “rest of the story.”

Johnson's mom taught him to never waste anything. He took that to heart. He was frugal and he was a collector. At one time he had 7,000 pencils and 1,700 nail aprons. Of course, he had but one creation that literally and figuratively dwarfed all other possessions and defined who he was. It weighed 17,400 pounds. Johnson made it by hand over the course of almost 30 years. Four hours per day, let's say five days per week, and 50 weeks per year. If not for my junior high math teacher, Mrs. Louise Pleidrup, I would need a calculator at this moment. Louise, sans calculator, I come up with 30,000 hours dedicated to making one hell of a big ball of twine in Meeker County, Darwin Minnesota, population 336. In the summer, on average, they get 150 curious, daily visitors, wanting to see the sphere that measures thirty-four feet around, twelve feet in diameter, and eleven feet tall. And let's not forget, nearly nine tons!

Folks that knew Francis A. Johnson said he did not do this to break any records, he did this because it was there.