

1915

Reef



ROMANCE OF THE GRAIN GROWERS' OF SASKATCHEWAN

History, Aims and Objects



EARLY fifteen years ago a small company of Saskatchewan farmers gathered together in the little town of Indian Head, Saskatchewan, to talk over the then deplorable conditions under which they had to dispose of their wheat, and to endeavor to find some means of common action for the protection of themselves. The Hon. W. R. Motherwell, now Minister of Agriculture for Saskatchewan, and Peter Dayman, of Abernethy, called a meeting of a number of farmers from Abernethy, Wolseley, Sintaluta, Qu'Appelle and other points to convene at Indian Head for the purpose of discussing and formulating plans for the establishment of a farmers' organization which could deal more effectively with their common disabilities than could possibly be done by individual action. This meeting was held in December, 1901, and these far-seeing pioneers, knowing something of the magnitude

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of the problem which they were facing, decided that local organizations of farmers should be established throughout the country at all points where an interest could be created, and that these Locals should each send delegates to a Convention where a central executive representing them all should be elected.

A campaign to organize local associations throughout the country was undertaken forthwith entirely by voluntary workers, with the gratifying result that when the first Grain Growers' Convention was held at Indian Head two months later, no less than thirty-eight locals were represented. The Association was placed on a permanent basis at this the first convention, and from that time to the present it has been an ever increasing power in the West.

At that time the farmers had no way to market their grain except through the elevators of capitalistic companies whose one aim and purpose was to secure the grain for the smallest amount of money the farmer could be made to accept for it.

Farmers found it almost impossible to ship over the loading platform, and when doing so had still to pay tribute to the elevator companies. The railway companies were then in league with the elevator companies, and even after the organized farmers had secured the enactment of a law compelling them to give the farmers cars in their proper turn the railways disregarded the law so that farmers were entirely at the mercy of the elevators. No wonder then that many abuses were suffered by the farmers. In grade, weight and price they had to accept what the elevators cared to offer or keep their wheat. Those were the days of 30c and 40c wheat. It was not until the Association was formed and had taken legal action against Railway agents that it finally

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became apparent that the farmers were in earnest and meant to show real fight.

From that time till now the fight has continued, always with at least a measure of success to the organized farmers, but few results of greater value have been attained than that of securing and retaining the car-distribution clause in the Canada Grain Act. This clause alone has been worth to every farmer selling grain during the past thirteen years at least ten cents per bushel on every bushel of wheat sold. In this one matter alone the Grain Growers' Association has been worth tens of millions of dollars to the farmers of Saskatchewan.

The founders of this movement were well aware that in attacking the grain and elevator interests they must fight also the transportation companies, and the great financial institutions of the country, a powerful aggregation indeed for these dauntless spirits to attack. They knew also that in organization lay the hope of their ultimate success, and that if the farmers of the country could but be persuaded to take an active interest in their own affairs, and to join the movement in great numbers, that very much good could be accomplished. It has taken nearly fifteen years of earnest and persistent effort to build up from this beginning all the great farmers' organizations of which the West is now so justly proud, and to which we today owe so very much.

Very early in the fight it was discovered that the greatest obstacle in the way of winning these important reforms, so essential to the saving of the farmers of this great wheat growing province from sinking into absolute serfdom, was not the Banks or the Railways or even the oppressive Elevator Companies. The greatest barrier and the most disheartening to those self-sacrificing

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pioneer leaders was found to be the indifference and mistrust of the farmers themselves.

By patient and long continued effort this barrier has to a considerable extent been overcome. Farmers have learned that unless they take themselves seriously they will be taken seriously by no one else. Still, after fifteen years of steady growth there are many farmers who have not yet allied themselves with the farmers' movement, and these while of course benefitting by the vast amount of good work which has been accomplished, do not realize that by permitting their indifference or their suspicion to keep them out of the Association, they are a real obstacle in the way of the success of the farmers' movement and a real help to those who are opposed thereto.

CHAPTER II.

Great Good Accomplished

The Association has accomplished so much, so very much, during the fifteen years of its existence, that in this article only a few points may be enumerated.

1. From that small beginning at Indian Head it has built up the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association with now over twenty-five thousand members, the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association and the Alberta Farmers' Union. In trading bodies it has created the Grain Growers' Grain Co. with head office at Winnipeg, the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Co. with head office at Regina, and 230 elevators throughout the province, the Alberta Farmers' Co-operative Elevator Co., Calgary, Alta.; The Saskatchewan Hail Insurance Commission, Regina, and the Co-operative Wholesale Department of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, at Moose Jaw. The Grain Growers'

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Guide, published in Winnipeg, and with more than thirty thousand subscribers is also a product of this movement.

2. The Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, alone, has now (June, 1915) nearly eleven hundred organized local bodies within the province, all of which are carrying on valuable social and educational work, and most of which are engaged more or less in co-operative trading through their own Central Office at Moose Jaw.

3. It has taught the farmers to realize that they are a factor of real importance in the affairs of the nation.

4. It has taught them to know and to trust each other, and that they can act in common where their common interests are concerned. It has taught them, also, that co-operation for their common good is the surest road to individual success, and that no farmer can fully succeed while his district fails.

5. It has exerted a very great influence upon legislation, has secured the enactment of many laws and prevented the enactment of others and has won for the farmers as a class recognition by legislative bodies and by urban society from ocean to ocean such as could never have been secured without extensive organization.

6. The Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association is probably the first body in Canada which has given woman her proper place in its activities and its councils—exactly the same status as that held by men.

7. It has, by its wholesale co-operative distribution of farm supplies, caused a reduction of prices on scores of commodities, and has saved to its members many times the amount of capital used in the undertaking.

The paramount purpose of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association is to draw

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into one comprehensive organization all the farmers of the province, both men and women, and to bring about by their mutual study of their mutual problems common action of them all for the solution thereof.

CHAPTER III.

The End Aimed At

The problems which command the attention of the Association involve everything that concerns the mental, moral and material well-being of all the people upon the land. The activities of the Association are essentially educational, for before we can hope to secure all the reforms so necessary to the bettering of conditions of agriculture we must educate ourselves to an understanding of the problems which are involved.

The Association is strictly non-partisan and numbers amongst its members men and women of all shades of political opinion. It is working for better social conditions upon the farm, for better roads, better schools and better home environment. We want better houses, brighter, healthier homes with more comforts and conveniences for our women, and we want them for less money. We seek to create an environment which will ensure a more joyous childhood for our boys and girls, with greater opportunities to fit them for a better, broader and nobler manhood and womanhood.

The attainment of all these ends depends in a very large measure upon the ability of the farmers to retain for the use of themselves and their families a just proportion of the wealth created by them. Towns and cities in Saskatchewan create practically no wealth; still they grow rich and have all the comforts and advantages modern inventive genius can devise. We believe that they secure too large a proportion of the wealth which the farmers produce, and we

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aim to remedy this condition. In seeking a permanent remedy it must be borne in mind that no farmer farms for the sake of raising wheat. We are farming for the sake of the houses, barns and fences, the food, clothing and comforts; the social environment and education which we hope to secure for ourselves and our children in exchange for the wheat which we raise.

To raise more wheat for the labour expended, to raise more and better eggs and meat should be the aim of every farmer but to accomplish this will avail him nothing if he fails to secure profitable prices for them. Even good crops coupled with high prices will not save him if he is obliged to pay too high a price for the food and the clothes and the comforts for which he is working.

Every public body, every exploiter of the farmer—the speculator, the merchant, the banker and the carrier—is teaching him to raise more wheat and more meat, but the farmers alone, through their own organization, must secure for themselves better homes and food and clothes for that wheat. These bodies all hold that the farmer's business is merely to produce; that marketing his products and purchasing his supplies are businesses that he ought not to touch. They really mean that he should cease to give attention to his own business at just about the point where they begin to get their rake off. To be good farmers means more than to raise wheat. No farmer is successful unless he accomplishes more than the raising of bumper crops. He is successful only if he attains his ultimate end as above outlined. In our organized effort to help each other to attain this ultimate end we have found it absolutely essential that the farmer should look after his own business both in the marketing of his product and in the purchasing of his supplies.

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1. For the handling of our grain product we have already built up elaborate machinery owned and controlled by ourselves.

2. For the marketing of live stock, eggs and poultry, the Executive has now under consideration comprehensive plans which it is hoped will greatly encourage and assist these branches of the farmers' business.

3. In the purchasing of supplies the Association has already accomplished very much and the field of service of the Co-operative Wholesale department is being continually extended. A great deal yet remains to be accomplished in this field. The bitterest of organized effort is opposing the development of co-operative buying by the farmers of this province, and it is only by the loyal support of the farmers generally of the Association's work in this connection that the fight can ultimately be won.

4. The Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association is not making gain for shareholders out of its activities. The surplus earnings of the Association from its trading operations are returned to those who do business through the Central. The trading activities of the Association are purely co-operative, and are carried on for the benefit of its members who use them, and not for the profit of shareholders who may or may not do business with the Association.

By removing our business activities from the field of "business for profit" and placing them on the plane of "business for service" this work has fitted itself in with the very loftiest of our educational work, while at the same time we have established a new and loftier principle of business which merits the support of every fair-minded farmer who is seeking to better conditions upon the farm and in the rural community.

J. B. MUSSELMAN,
Central Secretary.