

# Gunnar Simundson's Address Pool Elevators' 50th Anniversary

by Gunnar Simundson

Excerpts from an address by Gunnar Simundson on grain production during the early years in the Arborg district delivered at a banquet in the Arborg Hall on April 18, 1975, celebrating the 50th anniversary of Manitoba Pool Elevators:

"In an effort to give a short brief on history of grain growing and grain marketing in this territory, an immediate question is where to begin. Why not a few glimpses from the first records on land tillage? That dates back to the very first years of the settlement which is now preparing to observe its centennial this year. The first plantings were done in plots hoed by hand in small clearings out of the bush and timbered land along the river banks and along the lake shore. The harvesting was, of course, all done by the sickle and flail process and remained that way until the arrival of the first harvesting machinery. It is on record that the first thresher was brought to the Riverton area by Gunnsteinn Eyolfson in 1890. The power for this machine was developed by a team of horses working treadmill, which was from there transmitted by belt to the thresher. About the turn of the century, the Borgjörd brothers, Jón and Guðmundur, brought the second thresher, which was also driven by animal power (in this case, four teams driven in a circle and hooked up to a gear mechanism transmitting power to the machine). Not long after, the first steam-driven threshing machines were brought in. Some of the early owners were Jón Thorkelson and his son Siggí in Arnes, Dori Austman and Joe McLennan of Riverton, Guðmundur Nordal in Geysir, Paul and Siggí Sigurdson at Hvítárvollum, Pete Hykawy in the Bjarmi district and Siggí Finnson and Einar Sigurdson each with a steam outfit in Viðir. Along with these were the first smaller gas engine-driven threshers. These first operators included Nels Johnson, Jakob Sigvaldason, John Thorsteinson, Ignace Kaprawy, Nick Firman, and Guðmundur Magnusson and his son, Mike.

With the coming of the railroad in 1911, plans went underway to ship out grain. Of course, no single farmer had the volume to fill a carload, so several growers filled a 1200-1500 bushel grain car, loaded from the platform. The grain was all hand-

ed in bags, and each owner's lot had to be weighed before the grain was dumped into the car. Within a few years, a Grain Growers' Association local was organized. It had a large membership right from the start. One of its first achievements was to install, for community use, a scale which was large enough to accommodate an ordinary wagon or sleigh load. The Sigurdson-Thorvaldson store and, later, the Co-op kept records of load weights and service fees. The cost of weighing a load was ten cents. The Grain Growers local, as such, did not take part in grain sales or shipment, but engaged in several other group activities. Among these were gathering and booking orders for carload lots of farm supplies, mainly binder twine, mill feed and flour. Two men promoting these activities were Valdi Jóhannesson and Valdi Sigvaldason, with the latter shouldering the secretarial work and book-keeping as well as being in charge of distribution of the supplies.

It created quite a sensation when S.M. Sigurdson, who was engaged in storekeeping in 1918, harvested and shipped out a carload of wheat grown on his farm, Hvítarvellir. He was, without doubt, the first man to grow that volume of wheat in one year. Bert Wood, at that time an implement and Ford car dealer in Arborg, built a grain handling warehouse at the tracks close to where Pool Elevator A was later located. This warehouse was equipped with pushcarts of possibly about 1000 lb. hopper size and a floor level scale to weigh the carts.

A good crop, both in yield and quality, was harvested in 1922. Considerable grain was shipped in the fall. There was even a hassle over whose turn it was to use the loading platform. This undoubtedly induced the Searle Grain Company to build the first elevator in Arborg the next summer. For several years, this elevator bought nearly all the grain shipped out from Arborg.

In 1925, the Manitoba Wheat Pool became active in the grain business and shortly after this the line elevators agreed to handle Pool grain. Many farmers in the Arborg area became Pool members and had their grain disposed of through that organization during the years before the disaster of the Depression forced the Pool into liquidation.