

FOR

HAMIOTA CENTENNIAL HISTORY .

THE HAMIOTA FLOUR MILL ESTABLISHED 1895.....1943.

This mill, one of many erected in Western Manitoba during the period between 1885 and 1895 was built by two Pioneers, Armstrong and Basler in the years 1895 and 1896. They obtained assistance financially in the sum of \$ 3000.00 as a grant by the ratepayers. It was a well equipped mill with modern machinery. The power used was steam which ran a 75 H.P. Corliss engine. The fuel used was either coal or cord wood. In the thirties cordwood was used exclusively. This was purchased from neighborhood farmers or shipped in from Winnipeg or Brandon via C.P.R.

Between the years 1886 and 1889 the mill changed ownership somewhat. By what records are obtainable Armstrong was replaced by Bridgeman and then later on to Edwards and Neelands. It seems that Edwards was the Miller at that time and Mr Tennyson was also involved with the mill in some capacity. The final owner was G.W. Spearman who owned the Rossburn Mill. He heard that the Hamiota Mill was to be put up for tax sale and came down and bought it. This would be around 1922 - 24.

Spearman thoroughly overhauled the steam plant and the mill. It may be of interest to note that in reconditioning the Hamiota Mill, George Spearman used some of the most advanced milling techniques and ideas on the North American continent. The method he devised to procure the large flaky bran for which the mill was noted in subsequent years, was a trade secret well and firmly kept. The knowledge and technique of that process was passed on to few although there were times when other companies tried devious means to find out or acquire the process.

When the depression set in during the late 1920's the local milling and gristing business really came to life. Rural roads were being steadily built or improved, trunk highways were creeping across the province, farmers were buying trucks and the distances which they came to the mill increased yearly.

A customer could bring in sufficient wheat to supply him with flour for a month, several months, or a year. He had two options in the manner which he paid

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for his 'grist.' He could 'toll' it, (ie) have the miller take off enough wheat at the daily street price to pay for gristing. (In 1933 the price of wheat on street fell to .20 ¢ a bushel. It remained at that price for the fall months and did not rise above thirty cents for over a year.) The other option the customer had was to pay in cash. In years of good crops and good wheat 'tolling' was often preferred by the customer. That sometimes presented problems. It necessitated extra storage capacity in the mill and quite often 'pioneer' mills were not equipped for that. Whichever method the customer chose he obtained from 38 to 42 pounds of flour per bushel of wheat depending on the grade and weight of his wheat. The balance of weight was made up in bran or shorts, offal, one third bran and two thirds shorts by weight. The shorts were heavier as in the Hamiota Mill all low grade flour, of which there was very little, was spouted to the shorts bin.

As the Depression deepened the gristing business of the mill picked up in proportion. There were several years when the mill yard was the busiest place in town. There were days when there were teams with wagons, cars, trucks, trailers lined up round the mill with grists enough to tax the mill to capacity operating twenty four hours a day. Contrary there were times when crops were so poor that a customer would bring in his total crop of wheat for a grist and still other years when the Mill would 'carry' a customer for flour until the next year's crop was harvested. Thankfully those instances were few and far between. The 1935 crop year was the worst. We had heavy rust and the grade for wheat was mostly 'feed.' That year we purchased good wheat from local farmers who had a carry over from the previous year. Thus we were able to keep the mill operating. Incidentally, I think it was the fall of 1935 that Joseph, 'Joe' McMurachy from McConnell brought us several heads of wheat that he had found in his crop. There was no sign of rust in heads or straw. The kernel was a beautiful shape, red in color and

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and of a fair weight. I suggested to Mr McMURACHY that he contact Crop Sciences Laboratory of the Manitoba University and have their opinion . I think he did so for some time later he told me that the Laboratory had designated it as a "Club" wheat, that they were interested, and would go into the matter further .Several years later Mr McMURACHY came and asked us if we could grist him some of this wheat. I obtained Mr Spearman's permission to do so and Gordon Sheardown and I cleaned the mill thoroughly and we ground a grist of some thirty bushels of McMURACHY Wheat as we called it. It was easy to handle and the yield of flour was good. I was a bit concerned with the color of the flour. It had a very slight yellow tinge. I took some of it home to my wife and she baked a loaf of it. The loaf lacked 'oven spring' or rising quality, was dense in texture and rather heavy. I sent a sample of flour to the Dominion Laboratory in Winnipeg and they tested it thoroughly there for baking qualities. The report was along the same lines that my wife found in her testing. Lack of oven spring, heavy and yellow in color and dense. Definitely not a good bread flour. I was very disappointed and so must have been Joe McMURACHY. However the Crop Sciences Laboratory kept working on the wheat and eventually came out with a rust resistant wheat that included in it's parentage the McMURACHY Wheat. From a few random heads in a badly rusted field of wheat, the interest and curiosity of Joe McMURACHY and his determination over several years to grow enough from those few heads to obtain enough wheat to make a grist of flour, the dedication of Crop Scientists at The University of Manitoba , came a wheat that almost banished the scourge of Rust from the Western Prairies. That is over forty years ago .If there are errors in dates, I use that space in time for my excuse. Too late I realize the absence of a diary. In that particular run of the Old Mill Gordon Sheardown fired the boiler and ran the steamer, I set the mill and kept an eye on the outrun and my wife, Grace (Atkinson) baked the first bread. In all

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the grists that came during the years I operated the Mill, this grist Joe McMurachy brought us was the most important in the history of the Hamiota Mill.

From the time of George Spearman's acquisition and overhauling of the mill the gristing business gradually grew until it was attracting customers from a greater distance. This was partly due to the automobile and trucks and also the reputation of the quality of 'Over The Top Flour' was spreading. From the years 1930 to 1943 customers came from as far away as Minnedosa, Strathclair, Newdale, Elphinstone, Rapid City, Kemnay, Virden, Oak Lake, Kenton, Bradwardine, Harding, Lenore, Miniota, Beulah, Birtle, Foxwarren, Binscarth, Solsgirth, Oakburn and from Pipestone, Melita; Maryfield, Redvers, Welwyn, Tantalton, Rocanville and Spy Hill in Saskatchewan.

Customers came with a few bags of wheat in their cars. Others from nearby areas with team and wagon. Still others from greater distances came by truck, several neighbors would club together and one truck would bring several grists. We had a great deal of business from Redvers and Maryfield, Sask. in this manner. At times there were lineups of vehicles waiting their turn at the mill. For several years during the fall the mill had to operate twenty four hours a day to meet the demand. Those were the times when the odd customer found he had to wait overnight in order to take his grist home with him. Such usually slept in the mill on a pile of warm bran with some burlap bags as blankets; the 1930 forerunner of the now much touted water bed. The latter lacks the soothing rumble of the mill to lull one to sleep. An old pioneer of 90, if I recall his name correctly it was John Black from East of Oak River, arrived one morning with his team and wagon with wheat for a grist. He had driven fourteen miles and wished to drive back that afternoon. The lads in the mill unloaded his wheat for him, he tied up his team behind the mill, fed them and then went down town to feed himself. He

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was on his way home with his grist by 1.30 P.M. A twenty mile round trip.

On another occasion two customers arrived with a few bags in the back of their car. They seemed very concerned and on being questioned it turned out that they had started with a trailer behind the car and it had been loaded with another nine bags, but it was'nt there ! On their return trip home they found the trailer in a slough East of Oak River. It still had nine bags aboard but they were pretty low in the water. The Mill got a lot of customers from Oak River and district and doubtless the two unfortunates would come in for a bit of good natured kidding.

During the '30's the mill served some twelve to fifteen hundred customers and some falls and summers it was a busy place. The poor wheat crop in 1935 made a big difference to the trade and it never really picked up the volume of gristing. Fuel for the steamer became difficult to procure. In 1939 George Spearman Jr. who had taken over the Mill on the death of his father decided to dispose of the old Corliss steamer and replace the power with a Diesel engine. He purchased a Russton Hornsby 65 H.P. that had been used to run an electric light plant in a town in southern Manitoba . It was in good shape and once installed it provided ample power for the mill at a minimum of expense. At the time of installation fuel oil was selling retail for around 12 ¢ a gallon. On a twenty four hour run the diesel used about 20 gallons .

On the outbreak of war in 1939 the gristing business dropped sharply. Under wartime orders second grade flour was no longer run to 'shorts'. That necessitated some changes to the flow of the mill and for two years the output of the mill was mostly limited to export and sale of flour locally. Finally in 1942 George Spearman sold the mill to the Boissevain Milling Co. That company tore the old mill down removing the machinery to Boissevain to extend their operation in that town. The extended mill burned on Christmas Eve , 1943 . The Russton Hornsby

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diesel was sold separately to an oil company in Alberta where it was used to pump nine oil wells simultaneously. The engine still stands amid prairie scrub in the country around Vermilion, Alberta. A friend recently sent me a photograph of it. The big five and a half ton flywheel has been removed and replaced by twin industrial wheels of lesser weight. It does not look as if it would ever run again.

Operating the steam plant and the mill was not without exciting moments. One of those happened about the second day I worked in the mill. Mr Spearman had told me what my duties were to be. Grade the wheat as the grists came in, make out a counter check to the customer showing on it how much wheat he had brought in and the quantity of flour and feed (bran and shorts) he was to receive in return. Then I had to help sack the flour and feed or do it myself if I had no helper. The miller took no part in any of this. His job was to mind the rolls and the rest of two floors of machinery above, scourers, sifters and reels. My second day in the mill the miller came running round to my side yelling, "There's a choke in the fourth break in the sifter, get upstairs and clean it out, and hurry!" I did not know any more about what he was talking than some of my readers will now. As he was getting a bit purple in the face I guessed he meant 'hurry' when he said it. I headed up for the top floor. At least I knew where the sifter was. Sure, there it was gyrating round as quiet as could be , minding it's own business and as far as I could see it was'nt choking. I went back down and told him so. The miller at that time was Bob Crombein, a German chap. He was so mad at me he reverted to a stream of German which to my limited knowledge of German implied he did not like me, any of my ancestors etc etc. all this as he was dashing upstairs to find that elusive 'fourth break.' When things cooled down a bit and I had more time I went to Crombein and asked him to explain a bit of the mill operation to me so that I could be of more help to him. All I got was a stream of German in reply, so I figured I was not liked 'back of the rolls . We each kept our respective places for a couple of months and by reading material at night that Spearman had given me , I at least learned the 'flow' of the mill. After New Years 1933, Mr Spearman phoned me and said, "We're going to steam up, can you come in?" Crombein had gone for Christmas Holidays, so I asked Spearman. "Is Crombein back?" "No, and he's not coming." "Who is going to run the mill?" "You are. between us we'll keep her going." So commenced a nine year period in which I learned milling from

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one of the best millers in Canada if not on the North American Continent.

There were other periods of excitement in those nine years. One was directly after we had had the yearly steam pressure inspection and test done on the boiler. The Inspector came on a Saturday and gave the boiler the routine test for pressure. The customary test in which the boiler is filled with cold water until the pressure guage shows two hundred pounds, the needful limit when your operating licence calls for one hundred and ten pounds steam pressure. When the water pressure is fully on the boiler, a hammer test is given round seams and areas where the boiler is subject to strain. Whether or not this last test was given that Saturday will never be known. On Monday morning we steamed up as usual and had run about an hour when the fireman came running into the mill to tell me there was trouble in the boiler and we had better get out as he was afraid the boiler was going to burst. Running down to the engine room I heard a noise like a scream coming from the boiler. Yanking open the fire doors I could see a stream of boiling water about twelve inches wide fanning out from the underside of the boiler. Yelling to the fireman to put on the fresh water pump to the boiler and to open the blow off valve at the back of the boiler I closed down the engine and both of us raked out the fire on to the boiler room floor. The noise of the three inch blow off pipe was deafening and I am sure the nearby residents were scared half out of their wits. Boiling water mixed with steam was blowing for fifty feet across the mill lot. We also opened the safety valve and locked it open. When the steam guage started to drop quite perceptibly we looked at each other with a sigh of relief almost as loud as the escaping steam. After lunch when the boiler had cooled sufficiently I crawled in on the fire grates and inspected the damage. The metal was split just behind the centre seam of the boiler. I inserted my jack knife blade and ran it backwards and forwards following the split. It was like cutting paper. Both the fireman and I had enough excitement for

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that day. I believe Jack Anderson was firing at the time. The mill was "down" for a month until we got the old boiler out and installed a substitute. There were some exciting things happen. Those old milling days were not always monotonous. Somewhere in his journeying about Spearman had picked up a brass steam whistle. It lay round for several years and I got the idea that as we always started to grind at 7.A.M it might be all right to let the community know the mill was steamed up and operating. So permission was asked and granted to hook up the whistle to the steam line. This was done over a week end and on Monday morning we let 'er go sharp on 7 A.M. That was one morning the nearby residents knew that it was not their alarm ringing. ~~It~~ It was the one and only morning that old whistle blew. Mr Spearman appeared in the mill about eleven A.M. and told me he thought once was enough. His phone had been going all morning and I guess what he had been told had distrubed him a bit. I gathered his phone calls had been mixed with sufurous language and hysterics. Scuttlebutt reported that a nearby resident was on his way to the bathroom when the whistle blew but he didn't quite make it !

The names I recall of the men who worked as firemen or in the mill with me are as follows , not always in chronological order but they were part of an era that was fast disappearing. Men who were not afraid of a day's work, mostly twelve hours for meagre pay in the "Dirty Thirties." They comprise quite a list :

Jack Davis, Britton Belcher, Bill Sherridan, Lloyd Whyte, Frank Mathison, Jack Frame, 'Joey' McLean, Ralph Pulver, Jack Anderson, Tony Kempinski, Arden Mansell, Gordon Sheardown, Charlie Wilkinson of Brandon, Bill Delbridge, John A. Sutherland, Jack Houck , Maurice Coldicot and George Shaw .

The Flour Mills of the early days were often an intregal part of a pioneering community. They were a gathering place for homesteaders for many miles around. In many cases the grist mills were built several years before the railroads came.

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This necessitated that all equipment and machinery be freighted either by ox team or horses over a distance of many miles, their only road a prairie trail. There were at least forty four of those small mills built in Western Manitoba in those early days. Some were powered by water, some by steam , some of the very early ones by horse power, The Hamiota Mill was equipped to utilize steam from the time it was built. A mill of the same design still stands at Esterhazy, Saskatchewan.

Norman Turnbull

The Birtle Flour Mill..... Established //--1928

The date of the establishment of the Birtle Mill is at time of writing, uncertain. The location was at first near what is now known as the Birtle Dam in the park. It was driven by water power. Later it was moved to another location on the river and on the north side of the town, but the south side of the river. In the new location it was driven by steam and continued in operation fairly regularly until 1928 when it burned. The miller at that time, Mr George Dafoe, lost his life in the fire.

The Hamiota Flour Mill. Established 1895---1943.

This mill situated far from water power, was operated by a 75 H.P. Corliss Stationary steam engine. ~~It was a~~ well equipped mill with modern machinery. It was built by two pioneers, Armstrong and Basler with a grant of \$3000.00 by the ratepayers. Later it changed hands to Basler and Bridgeman, later on to Edwards and Neelands and finally to George Spearman who thoroughly reconstructed and overhauled the machinery. Spearman and latterly his son ~~George~~ operated the mill from about 1924 to 1943 when it was sold and the machinery moved to Moissevain. It might be of interest to note that in reconditioning the Hamiota Mill, George Spearman used some of the most advanced ideas on the North American continent. A real student of milling processes he was not afraid to tackle something new. Nor was he adverse to teaching a younger man who he knew to be interested all ~~in~~ that he had learned about milling. As ~~the~~ ^{he} writer operated this mill for nine years for the Spearman family, both as manager and miller ~~he~~ ^{was} well aware of the knowledge passed on to ~~him~~ ^{me} on the operation and flowing of flour mills.

Colin McMurphy Engineer.

Clarkson Clark Smith Son in law (Spearman)

John B. Littlewood
Jack Frame

Jack Anderson
Alfred Wright
Edwin Marshall

Godwin Shanderson
Long Thompson
Jery McLeane

George

When the Depression set in during the late 1920's the local milling business really came to life. Farmers came from miles around with grain. The old mill started to run 24 hours a day to meet the demand. A customer could bring in sufficient wheat for a year's supply of flour and "tell" it (i.e.) have the miller take ^{very} off sufficient wheat to pay for grinding. The wheat was purchased at the daily street price prevailing. Or alternatively the customer could pay in cash which was 20¢ a bushel. ~~For this~~ whichever way he chose he obtained from ²⁵ 38 - 42 pounds of flour per bushel depending on the grade of wheat. The balance was bran and shorts, one third bran & two thirds shorts by weight. The shorts were heavier as in the Hamiota Mill all low grade flour was spouted to the shorts bin.

From 1936 - 1943 the Hamiota Mill drew customers from as far away as Minidosa, Shoal Lake, Black Lake, ^{Pymnscott,} Newdale, Elphinstone, Rivers, Oak Lake, Tirden, Foxwarren, ^{Busta,} St. Lazare, Melita, ^{and} Carleton Place, Rapid City, Moline, Kenton, Bradwardine, Harding, Kemnay, nearly districts in Saskatchewan also contributed. Maryfield, Redvers, Lantalon, Welwyn, Rocanville were the locale of many customers. They came with a few bags of wheat in their cars. Some with a fair load on trailers, some with trucks in the latter just beginning to appear on our roads. Many with teams and wagons. One pioneer of 90 came 14 miles from East of Oak River with a team & wagon. He arrived about noon. ~~Had~~ He tied up his team behind the mill, went down town, had his lunch and was on his way home with his grain at 1.30 P.M. A 28 mile round trip. His name if I remember was John Black. Others that came from long distances sometimes found the supply of flour run low & had to sleep on a pile of bran on the mill floor for the night until their grain was done.

On one occasion two customers arrived with a few

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Between the years 1886 and 1889 the mill changed ownership somewhat. Evidently by what records are obtainable Armstrong was replaced by Bridgeman and then still later on to Edwards and Neelands. The final owner was G,W,Spearman who owned a mill at Rosburn; heard that the Hamiota mill was to be put up for Tax Sale and came down and bought it, this would be around 1922 -24.

During the time that the mill was operated by Edwards and Neelands I believe *Edwards was E. Tennyson also worked in the mill at that time* Tennyson was miller, there must have been other millers but of these there is no record. When G,W. Spearman purchased the mill he thoroughly overhauled the steamer and milling machinery. It may be of interest to note that in reconditioning the Hamiota Mill, George Spearman used some of the most advanced milling techniques and ideas on the North American continent. The method he *Devi* devised to procure the large flaky bran for which the Hamiota Mill was noted was a trade secret well and firmly kept. The knowledge and technique of that process was passed on to few although there were times when other companies tried devious means to find out or acquire the process .

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(The Mill drew customers from many miles around) From 1930 to 1943 customers came for many miles. The era of trucking was starting then, and there were times when a farmer owning a truck would fetch in several grists for neighbors along with his own. There were also times when crops were poor that a customer would bring in his total crop of wheat for a grist and still other years when the Mill would "carry" a customer for flour until the next year's crop was harvested. Thankfully those instances were few and far between. The 1935 crop year was the worst. We had heavy rust and the grade for wheat was mostly 'feed.' That year we purchased good wheat from neighborhood farmers who had a carry over from the previous year. Thus we were able to keep the mill operating. Incidentally I think it was in the fall of 1935 that Joseph (Joe) McMurachy from McConnell brought us several heads of wheat that he had found in his crop. There was no sign of rust in heads or straw. The kernel was a beautiful shape, red in color and of a fine size.

I wish to express my
 appreciation to all those
 who helped me to compile
 this M.S. on Chillan.
 Especially to Wm. S. Scarth
 of Victoria B.C. whose father
 was one of the ~~Chillan~~ continuous
 patrons of Chillan while he farmed.
 The quotation I used was
 from Wm Scarth's manuscript
Binscarth - 1970

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