

Humboldt Flour Mill and Grain Elevator District

Statement of Significance

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Description of Historic Place

The Humboldt Flour Mill and Grain Elevator District is a collection of eight grain handling facilities that occupy several lots along Fifth Avenue. The district includes the flour mill section, mustard processing plant and several grain elevators and warehouses. The Mustard processing plant sited at 5th Ave and 13th St. consists of a complex of four connected elevators built between 1959 and 1966, two warehouses attached to the elevators constructed in 1961 and one freestanding warehouse built in 1988. The district also includes a flour mill building

constructed in 1956. South of Fifth Avenue between 11th and 14th Street and adjacent to the railway siding are three grain elevators built between 1933 and 1985. The district also includes a large elevator built in 1978 with an office and various other outbuildings located between 14th and 16th Street north of 4th Avenue adjacent to the railway tracks and the other lots in the district.

Heritage Value

The heritage value of the Humboldt Flour Mill and Grain Elevator District lie in its status as the only remaining example of a collection of more than three grain elevators within one community in Saskatchewan. The collection of elevators also displays the major changes in form and style of the elevators that appeared during various periods in the evolution of the grain handling industry. The Mustard processing plant sited at 5th Ave and 13th St. consists of a complex of four connected elevators built between 1956 and 1966, two attached warehouses constructed in 1956 and 1961 respectively and one freestanding warehouse built in 1988. The smaller elevator in this complex was built in 1957 and is of heritage significance because of its unique design. It appears to be based on an older medium height standard plan elevator but has been cut in half from top to bottom with the cupola standing flush with the easternmost wall. Two other elevators, built in 1959 and 1960 respectively, exemplify the “tall standard plan” design that was commonly built with minor variations by many grain companies between 1910 and 1965. The easternmost elevator in this complex was built in 1966 by the Humboldt flour mills. This structure is of heritage value because of its unorthodox flat-roofed design that was not based on any standard plan. These structures reflect an earlier era in the grain handling industry when towns commonly had impressive skylines featuring 4 or more elevators owned by various grain companies located along the rail line.

South of Fifth Avenue between 11th and 14th Street and adjacent to the railway siding are three grain elevators built between 1933 and 1985. The western-most elevator was built in 1933 by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and exemplifies the “medium-height standard planⁱ” design. From 1905 and 1925, this design was built with minor variations by many grain companies during the grain industry’s period of maturityⁱⁱ between the years of 1930 and 1970. The structure features a sloping shoulder roof topped with a centred cupola and has a capacity of 30,000 bushels (816 tonnes).

The elevator on the railway siding at 5th Avenue and 12th Street is a steel elevator. The structure which has a capacity of 20,000 bushels (544 tonnes) is of heritage significance because it is one of the very elevators built out of steel in Saskatchewan.

The easternmost elevator was built by the Searle Grain Company in the 1950s, bought by Federal Grain in 1967 which was acquired by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in 1972. The structure was traded to

Cargill then later acquired again by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in 1996. The structure exemplifies the “tall standard plan” design that was commonly built with minor variations by many grain companies between 1910 and 1965. The structure features a sloping shoulder roof topped with a centred cupola. The elevator has a capacity of 65,000 bushels (1768 tonnes), and a 58,000 bushel (1578 tonne) crib annex.

Located between 14th and 16th Street north of 4th Avenue adjacent to the railway tracks stands a large Cargill elevator built in 1978 together with an office and various other outbuildings. This heritage value of this elevator lies in its status as an example of the “Modern Tall” elevator design that was common built after 1950. This structure is representative of the grain handling industry’s period of attrition that began in 1970 as amalgamation and consolidation forced grain companies to build larger, more efficient facilities.

The Humboldt flour mill is of heritage value as one of the last remaining examples of locally-built flour mills that, at one time, were cornerstone industries that played a significant role in the agricultural and economic development of Saskatchewan. Farmers hauled wheat to mills, exchanging a portion for flour, and selling the remainder. In 1915, at least 37 flour mills in the province provided farmers with a market for their grain. Changes in technology and centralization of the flour-milling process during the 19th century resulted in the closure of most of the province’s flour mills by the end of the century.

The heritage value of the Humboldt Flour Mill also resides in its role in introducing mustard production to Saskatchewan. In 1959, the Humboldt Flour Mill began encouraging the cultivation of mustard in Saskatchewan. The importance of this crop grew so that by 1993, Saskatchewan had become the world’s largest exporter. The mill, located on the same site since 1913, is one of Humboldt’s most prominent and early businesses and produced well-known brands of flour—Prairie Rose and Supreme Flour—that became household names across Western Canada. The Humboldt Grain Elevator District and its seven elevators built between 1933 and 1986 are a collection of structures that are representative of the changes and amalgamations that took place in the prairie grain handling network over many decades.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage value of the Humboldt Flour mill and Grain Elevator District resides in the following character-defining elements:

- The placement and proximity of structures to each other and to Fifth Avenue to create an overall skyline of elevators in Humboldt. This is reflected in the following elements: the four elevators which serve as a mustard storage and cleaning facility are located in close proximity to the flour mill; the location of the flour mill on the same general location as the first 1913 mill.
- Elements of design and construction, including their characteristic wood-crib construction of the elevators, the wood siding and sloped shoulder design of the elevators comprising the mustard cleaning facility— this series of elevators built in the 1950s show how private industry occasionally copied and built grain elevators very similar to those built by the large grain companies.
- Elements that reflect the grain elevator architecture typical of various eras in the evolution of the grain trade. Five of the wood crib elevators have a rectangular design with sloped-shoulder gable roof topped by a narrower cupola; the elevator’s wood-crib construction consisting of dimensional lumber stacked and nailed on its side, strong timber lintels above the crib walls, and exposed structural members. The older elevators have semi-hoppered bins braced with

wood supports while more modern structures are fully-hoppered wood bins braced with steel rods. The elevators feature wood framed cupolas; loading docks beside the railway tracks; and minimum fenestration with several small windows with plain sashes at the ground level and several fixed windows in the elevator's upper sections.

- Elements that reflect the technology of elevator's grain handling equipment including: the revolving gerber spout in the cupola which distributed grain through steel spout receptacles in the cupola floor; wood bins and chutes; various slide valves; the wheel and equipment for controlling the gerber spout distributor; the steel frame counter-weighted manlift system.

ⁱ Everett's work identifies six major styles in elevator design and their associated years of construction. Between the years 1880-1910, the "Pyramidal Roof" design, Hybrid Plan with Offset Roof" design and "Squat Standard Plan" were constructed. Between 1905-1925, the "Medium Height Standard Plan" elevators were constructed and between 1910 to 1965, "Tall Standard Plan Elevators" were constructed. Most elevators built after 1950 were of the "Tall Modern" design. See Everitt, John. A Study of Grain Elevators in Manitoba. Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch 1992.

ⁱⁱ Fulton's work identifies 4 stages in the development of the modern grain handling system. The grain handling system went through four general periods as follows: a period of genesis between 1876 and 1900; a period of expansion between 1900 to 1930; a period of maturity between 1930-1970; and a period of attrition between 1970 to the present. See Fulton, Gordon. "Framework and Criteria for the Evaluation of Country Grain Elevators" Government of Canada, Historical Services Branch 1995.