

# Quaker Oats Mill in Saskatoon

## Statement of Significance

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### Description of Historic Place

The Quaker Oats Flour mill is a complex of concrete and brick structures occupying a 2.4 hectare site at 515 Avenue N in the city of Saskatoon. The site features a six storey brick building used for flour milling, four concrete grain bins five storey high built circa 1909; an 40 metre high (13 stories) rectangular concrete and brick structure built in 1912 that serves as the main elevating house and a concrete structure featuring sixteen cylindrical grain storage bins 28 metres high constructed in 1912. The property also contains a concrete structure featuring 24 cylindrical grain bins that are 28 metres high constructed in 1923; and metal sheeted warehouse and storage buildings constructed between 1910 and 1913.

### Heritage Value

The heritage value of the Quaker Oats Mill lies in its architectural design. The initial 1910 facility featured a 1000 barrel capacity five story brick flour mill building, a large warehouse and four concrete storage silos. The flour mill and four silo bins were the first grain storage facilities in the Prairie Provinces constructed using slipform reinforced concrete. First employed in 1903 in Port Arthur (Thunder Bay) Ontario in the construction of the King Elevator, reinforced concrete slipform construction was a state-of-the-art technology in Canada during the early 1900s. The use of slip form construction in Saskatchewan at such an early date reflects the strong competition between elevator engineering companies and their efforts to improve construction and grain handling technology. The design of the elevator and annex of the Mill also represent of a new phase in large elevator design- the separation of the main workhouse structure from the storage annex. This new innovative design first appeared in the early 1900s and had become an accepted method for grain terminal construction by 1910. This design replaced pre-1900 first-generation large elevator design in which a single structure contained the storage bins with the workhouse built on top. These architectural changes reflected changing technology for grain handling in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The heritage significance of the Quaker Oats Mill lies in its historic role as one of the earliest and largest processing facility for cereal grain in Saskatchewan. During the early years of agricultural settlement, flour mills were cornerstone industries that attracted new settlers and economic development to communities. Farmers hauled wheat to mills, exchanging a portion for flour and selling the remainder. By 1915, at least 37 flour mills and 23 thrashing mills were in operation in Saskatchewan. Large centralized grain processing facilities were established in towns and cities as rail networks increased and communities such as Saskatoon emerged as key distribution centres in the province. When it was built in 1910, the Quaker Oats Mill was the largest milling and storage facility in Western Canada. In 1912, the facility was expanded with the addition of both a large elevator building with a storage capacity of 100,000 bushels and an annex consisting of 16 concrete storage silos with a capacity of 430,000 bushels. In 1913, a warehouse was constructed for the storage of flour from the mill. In 1918, a five story oat mill and three storey packing plant were added. Two warehouses serving this structure were added in 1925 and 1936, a large office building was built in 1922, and a feed mill also operated in the buildings. South of the existing storage silos, a cluster of 24 concrete storage silos were built in 1927 which added an additional 600,000 bushels of storage capacity to the Quaker Oats mill facility. Although the production and storage capacity of the Quaker Oats mill was surpassed by the 1912 Robin Hood Mill in Moose Jaw and the 1927 Robin Hood Mill in 1927 in

Saskatoon, the Quaker Oats Mill in Saskatoon retained its status as one of the largest mills on the Prairies until its closure in 1972.

The heritage significance of the Quaker Oats Mill also lies in its status as a prominent and early business in the City of Saskatoon. During its history, the Quaker Oats facility in Saskatoon produced approximately 50% of all of the Quaker Oats, Muffets and Aunt Jemima Pancake Mix products in Canada. Today, the complex remains an imposing landmark which has symbolized the modernity and success of agriculture and the local community since 1910.

### **Character Defining Elements**

The heritage value of the Quaker Oats Mill resides in the following character-defining elements:

- Those elements reflecting building technology and architectural style that was considered state-of-the-art in the early 1900s such as: the four concrete storage silos attached to the flour mill building that were constructed in 1910 using slip-formed reinforced concrete; the elevator main house constructed in 1912 using brick and reinforced concrete; the new design of the elevator that saw the separation of the main elevating workhouse from the storage bin annexes; the elevator annex consisting of 16 silo storage bins and 9 interstice bins constructed in 1912 using slip-formed reinforced concrete; the expansion to the annex consisting of 24 silo storage bins and 14 interstice bins added in 1927 built using slip-formed reinforced concrete.
- The visual elements which indicate the structures slip form construction using slip, including the exposed concrete surface of the 1910 cylindrical towers.
- Those elements which reflect the property's function as a grain elevator and use of grain handling, storage and processing technology. These include the elements in the elevator (or whatever building these elements are in), such as the five elevating legs and associated motors and equipment, the grain cleaning machinery; the large bins in the main house which provide storage and transfer of grain to cleaners, scales, the annexes and trains as well as associated chutes, levers, pulleys; four original hopper (garner) bins, the original scale bins that weigh grain for transfer, and the original ornate scale with characteristic pedestal legs. Other equipment of significance to grain handling technology includes: the conveyor belt equipment that carry grain in tunnels under the annexes from the annex silos to the elevating leg; the conveyor belt equipment that carry grain from the top of the elevator into the annex via the steel enclosed conveyor bridges into the cupola on the top of the annex; the circa 1912 "trips" or mechanical devices which are powered by the conveyor belt and travel along its length and serve to divert grain from the conveyor into the bins; various ladders, the stairs and railings, and fire proof strong metal clad doors inside the building and on the exterior. Other equipment reflects the era of industrial technology from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century including: several remaining pieces of drive line and flywheels bolted to the ceiling in the annex cupola, remnants of drive lines in the flour mill building; the strong cast iron hatches allowing access to the bins on the west side of the elevator.
- Those elements which relate to the use of the building by the Quaker Oats Company, including manlift operation and non-smoking signs.
- Those elements that relate to the prominent and landmark status of the Mill within the city, including the form of the individual structures, the special relationship between the individual structures and the location of the complex on its original site.

**SOURCES:**

Jeff O'Brien , Saskatoon City Archivist,

Barb Sprigings, Heritage Coordinator, City of Saskatoon

Industrial Building in the West: The Dominion Government Elevators at Saskatoon, Moose Jaw and Calgary. Sept. 1991 (16:3), p. 60-71. SSAC-SEAC journal.

Ambrosi, Raymond. "Milling" Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan. Canadian Plains Research Centre 2005.

Interviews with Mr. Walter Graham, former manager and with Mr Robert Drury, former chief miller and superintendent of the Quaker Oats mill.