

Seager Wheeler and his Work

How the master workman produces wheat, oats and barley, that have won World's highest honors

By George F. Chipman

The best known grain grower in the world today is Seager Wheeler, of Rosthern, Saskatchewan. He is worth millions of dollars to Western Canada and the province of Saskatchewan in particular as an advertisement alone. Four times in open competition with the world he has captured the sweepstakes prize for the best wheat while he has secured literally hundreds of prizes at the International Soil Products Exposition in competition with the world and in his own province of Saskatchewan. Although he is best known as the producer of prize-winning wheat, Seager Wheeler has done equally good work with a number of other grains and other crops. This year he came out in a new role and captured the world's first prize for the production of the finest potatoes. Seager Wheeler's great work is done by selection of choice seed and by the very best method of cultivation. He has never done any plant breeding. Readers of The Grain Growers' Guide are familiar with the methods by which Mr. Wheeler produces his famous results. They do not know so much about the man himself.

Town Bred Boy

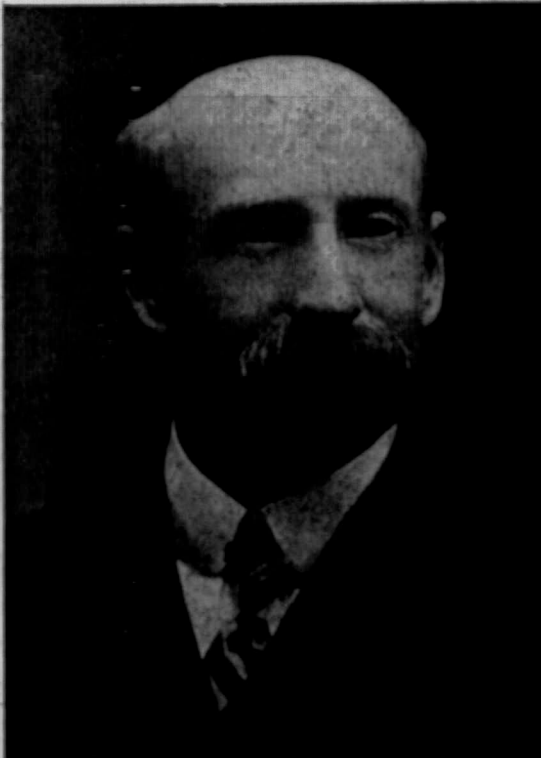
Seager Wheeler is a native of the Isle of Wight. He came out to Canada in 1885, a sixteen-year old boy and went first to his uncle's farm at Clark's Crossing, north of Saskatoon and something over two hundred miles from the nearest railway. Mr. Wheeler was a town bred boy and had no experience in farming. He helped his uncle for a part of the time and also clerked in stores and worked on construction gangs until 1889 when he homesteaded alongside his uncle at Clark's Crossing. Here he lived until 1897. Even in these early days on the homestead, although Mr. Wheeler had no training as an agriculturist, he conceived the idea of selecting choice oats from his plots in the fall in order to improve his seed for the following year.

He was not satisfied with the quality of the soil at Clark's Crossing and after investigating, he purchased from the C.P.R. at \$3.00 an acre a quarter-section at Rosthern where he is now living and has been living for the past twenty years. The year that he moved on to his new farm at Rosthern was the year in which the Long Lake and Saskatchewan Valley railway went through to Prince Albert and passed within four miles of his farm. This railway is now operated as part of the Canadian Northern and is the property of the Dominion government. Mr. Wheeler has been living on his present farm for twenty years and this last year he has produced better wheat than he ever did in the years before.

Frozen Crops

In the early days, Mr. Wheeler grew Red Fife Wheat only and was frozen out two years out of three. Nevertheless he was always selecting the best from his fields each fall and was continually changing his seed in an effort to find something that would ripen earlier. About fifteen years ago he got ten pounds of Preston from Dr. William Saunders, of the Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa. This wheat produced sixty bushels per acre and ripened very much earlier than Red Fife. Mr. Wheeler stopped growing Red Fife and from that time on he selected his seed every year and was steadily improving it until he worked out what he believed to be the purest strain of Preston Wheat in the country. He has since stopped growing it, preferring Marquis and his new wheats, Kitchener and Red Hops. Preston is too much inclined to shatter and does not grade so high. His brother who is one of his neighbors at Rosthern, is still growing the same strain of Preston Wheat.

Although Mr. Wheeler was selecting his wheat and his oats in the early days, he had worked out a system of his own which was not exactly in accord with the best methods now in use. About ten years ago, however, he received a call from L. H. Newman, secretary of the Canadian Feed Growers' Association. Mr. Newman showed him how to select wheat



SEAGER WHEELER

and other grain to secure the best results and gave him his first lesson on his own farm. Mr. Wheeler got the idea quickly and has been following it. In 1911 Dr. Charles Saunders sent to Mr. Wheeler a five pound sample of pedigreed Marquis Wheat and from this five pound sample Mr. Wheeler produced four bushels and thirty-five pounds. The same year he procured a five pound sample of Marquis Wheat from the Experimental Farm at Rosthern and one bushel from a seed house at a cost of five dollars per bushel. After he threshed this wheat he mixed it all together and selected the best two bushels that he could produce. It was these two bushels that he sent to New York to the Land Show at Madison



Seager Wheeler's Prize-winning Exhibit at Seattle. The exhibits included Wheat, Barley, Oats, Spring Grass, Western Rye and Potatoes, as well as Green and Rye Grass Seed.

Square Gardens in 1911 and captured the \$1,000 in gold offered by the C.P.R. for the best hard spring wheat grown on the American continent.

Wheeler Advertised Canada

The story of that prize is interesting. The late James J. Hill, of the Great Northern Railway had offered a \$1,000 gold cup for the best hard red spring wheat grown in the United States. Sir Thomas Shaughnessy (now Lord Shaughnessy), president of the Canadian Pacific Railway, challenged him to open up this prize for Canada but Mr. Hill declined to do so. Sir Thomas then, on behalf of the C.P.R., put up \$1,000 in gold for the best hard red spring-grown on the continent of North America. The result of the competition was that Mr. Wheeler carried off the sweepstakes prize but there were two other Canadians who were ahead of any American exhibit that was put up at the show. It was one of the greatest advertisements that Canada ever received. From that time on Mr. Wheeler has acquired the habit of capturing world prizes. In 1912 at the International Dry Farming Congress at Lethbridge, he was beaten by Henry Holmes. The season in Northern Saskatchewan was rainy and the sample which Mr. Wheeler sent was not very good. In 1913 he was completely haled out and had no sample to exhibit. In 1914 the International Dry Farming Congress was held at Wichita, Kansas, and Mr. Wheeler won the sweepstakes prize on Marquis. In 1915 the show was held at Denver, Colorado, where Mr. Wheeler won sweepstakes prize for his Marquis as well as first prize for sheaf Marquis, sheaf Kitchener, sheaf Victory, sheaf Canadian Thorpe barley, sheaf of winter wheat and sheaf of soft spring wheat.

Prizes Fall Fast

In 1916 the International Show was held at El Paso, Texas, where Mr. Wheeler won sweepstakes on his Kitchener wheat as well as first prize and sweepstakes on Canadian Thorpe barley, first prize on O.A.C. 21 barley, first prize on Arthur field peas and a number of other prizes. All of Mr. Wheeler's exhibits at the 1916 show were from his 1915 crop as he was entirely haled out in 1916 and had nothing from that year to show. At the 1916 exhibition where Mr. Wheeler took the sweepstakes prize on his wheat, the first prize was taken by W. D. Lang of Indian Head on Marquis. Particularly the two wheats did not enter into open competition with each other. They were both very beautiful samples of wheat and had they been judged together it is difficult to say where the prize would have gone. In 1917 Mr. Wheeler won sweepstakes on potatoes and on his wheat sheaf but was beaten on his threshed wheat.

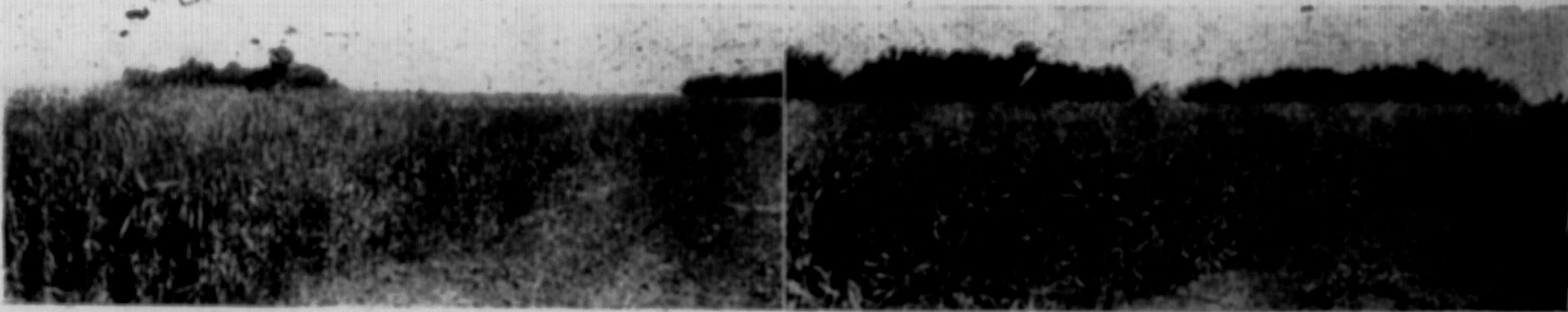
If Mr. Wheeler were to make a list of all the prizes that he has captured for the different work that he has done on his farm, it would require a small sized catalogue to show them all.

As stated above, Mr. Wheeler is not a plant breeder. He has selected the best year by year and has employed the very best cultivation methods and by that means has produced exceedingly high quality of crops at various times. In the twenty years in which he has been farming at Rosthern he has never had a crop failure. The methods of cultivation which he employs give him a good crop in dry years as well as in wet. In 1914 at Rosthern the rain-fall was only three inches and the same in 1915, which is less than one-half the normal rain fall. The secret of his success Mr. Wheeler attributes to good seed and proper tillage.

Mr. Wheeler left the public school in his native land when he was eleven years of age. Since that time he has had no education outside of that acquired by himself. He is, as Elbert Hubbard used to say, a graduate of the university of hard knocks.

The method of selection in growing grain which has been employed by Mr. Wheeler is known as the

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Seager Wheeler at Selection work. Left—Marquis Wheat, 1917. Right—1st Generation Victory Oats