

How the Grain Growers' Guide

THE Grain Growers' Movement in Western Canada will be 17 years old on December 18 next. It had its beginning in the little town of Indian Head, Sask., on December 18, 1901, when a group of farmers from the Northwest Territories headed by W. R. Motherwell, now the Minister of Agriculture for the province of Saskatchewan, met in Indian Head to discuss ways and means of overcoming the abuses and hardships under which they were living and working at that time. The occasion of their meeting was a debate between the Premier of Manitoba, R. P. Roblin, and the leader of the government in the Northwest Territories, P. W. G. Haultain. A large gathering of farmers and townspersons from different parts of Manitoba and the district of Saskatchewan had assembled in the municipal hall in Indian Head to hear the debate, and to learn something about an issue which at that time was agitating the minds of legislators both in Regina and Winnipeg. The speeches of the two debaters were undoubtedly interesting, but the consequences of that verbal contest are neither here nor there. Something else arose out of that gathering in Indian Head which was destined to have a greater effect upon the life of Western Canada than the arguments of the two gentlemen who since have been blotted with knighthoods and relegated to places of peace and quiet far beyond the scene of political strife. After Mr. Roblin and Mr. Haultain had debated their subject until they had no more to say, the crowd broke up and went home—all except a handful of Saskatchewan farmers who remained quietly in one corner of the municipal hall with their chairs drawn together in the form of a little circle. That group of serious-faced men, hardened and determined but not by any accident. They had assembled as the result of a call which had gone forth over the whole countryside, summoning some of the most prominent settlers, to consider previous conditions which they not only affected themselves, but every farmer between Winnipeg and the Rocky mountains. The man who had taken the initiative in organizing the little after-meeting at the conclusion of the Roblin-Haultain debate and who acted as chairman of the group, was W. R. Motherwell, of Abernethy, Sask., now the Minister of Agriculture for that province. When finally the little group of men drawn together at the back of the Indian Head town-hall had stood up and pushed their chairs back, they had started an organization which was later to be known throughout Canada as the Grain Growers' Association.

Conditions Leading to Organization

The conditions at the beginning of the present century which led to the rapid organization of Grain Growers' Associations throughout the West, were characteristic of the circumstances which have stimulated revolutionary movements all through history. For nearly 20 years prior to the meeting which was called at Indian Head by Mr. Motherwell, the farmers of the West had been growing more and more restless and dissatisfied with the conditions under which they were obliged to work. Between the early 80's and 1900 there were no regulations directing or controlling the grain trade. There was no licensing or bonding of grain buyers. Farmers had no rights in the matter of loading their grain upon the railway cars and those cars were not distributed fairly amongst the grain shippers as they are now. Practically the entire western crop in those days was forced through the elevators which, as a result, had a virtual monopoly of the grain business all the way across the plains. The agitation amongst the farmers who were so badly

A Sketch of the Movement from the Time of Its Inception--By Norman Lambert

Secretary Canadian Council of Agriculture

handicapped in disposing of their grain products each year, became so bitter against the prevailing order of things that in 1899 the Dominion government was persuaded to appoint an elevator commission to investigate the situation.

Out of the findings of that commis-

sion, the farmers, shipping their grain, according to an equitable arrangement between the elevator and the farmer. Care were to be distributed with some regard for the principles of equality. But the railways at that time were in league with the elevator interests, and even after the passing of the Manitoba

and won their first big fight and one which is still regarded by the organized farmers of the West as amongst their most treasured possessions. When it was discovered by the farmers that the Grain Act, in some respects at least, was being treated like the now proverbial "scrap of paper," they were astonished and disappointed, but above all, indignant. They were without any means of marketing their grain except through the elevators of capitalistic companies, whose chief aim and purpose was to secure grain for the smallest amount of money that the farmers could be made to accept for it.

An Intolerable Situation

The situation was intolerable. Those were the days of 30 and 40 cent wheat and many a bitter story of hardship and trial may be heard today from many of the men who now occupy managerial positions in the offices of the numerous associations and companies belonging to the Grain Growers' Movement. Mr. Motherwell, speaking of that year, on one occasion described conditions as follows:—

"The harvest of 1901 was very heavy, and as the result of a terrific traffic congestion all over the country, indignation meetings were held everywhere, both by business men in the towns and by the farmers. A deluge of resolutions and protests were showered upon the heads of railway and governmental officials. For two years or more previous to this I had been very much impressed with the necessity of a permanent organization amongst the farmers, to represent the special requirements of the grain growing interests of the country. All branches of agriculture had their distinctive organizations in our various provinces, such as the Livestock Associations, but in the West, or in any part of the Dominion, there was no distinct organized body of farmers to look after the grain interests, which after all were, and are still likely to be, of paramount importance in Saskatchewan.

"With the farmers rightly indignant over their inability to dispose of the 1901 crop, the time seemed to be ripe for the commencement of a movement looking towards a permanent organization whose duty it would be to press persistently and insistently for an improvement in marketing conditions, transportation, warehousing, and for the introduction of new or amended legislation from time to time as the rapidly changing character of the country seemed to warrant it. With this end in view I asked Peter Davman, a farmer neighbor at Abernethy and of the opposite political persuasion, to co-operate with me in calling together a number of farmers from Wolseley, Sintulata, Qu'Appelle and other points to meet in Indian Head on the eighteenth of December. So eager and ready was public sentiment for the betterment of conditions that the meeting was unanimously in favor of a Territorial Grain Growers' Association being organized, and having before it the objects I have indicated. It was decided that local organizations of farmers should be established throughout the country at all points where an interest could be created, and that these locals should send delegates to a convention, where a central executive representing them all should be elected. A campaign to organize local associations was undertaken immediately and entirely by voluntary workers, with the gratifying result that when the first Grain Growers' Convention was held at Indian Head two months later, no less than 38 locals were represented. I was elected as being elected the first president of the association, which was placed on a permanent basis at that first convention in Indian



The First Grain Growers' Delegation to Go to Ottawa

The photograph, which is reproduced herewith, recalls one of the important events in the history of the grain growers' organization of the prairie provinces. It shows the first Grain Growers' delegation that ever went to Ottawa and demanded from the government a redress of grievances for the prairie farmers. The delegates arrived in Ottawa and met the government on May 5, 1902. The delegation consisted only of the four men shown in the photograph. They were: D. W. McNeish, president of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association; W. R. Motherwell, president of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association; now Minister of Agriculture for Saskatchewan; J. W. Gillespie, executive officer of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association; and R. C. Henderson, vice-president of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association.

The delegation impressed upon the government the necessity for legislation amending several of the provisions of the Canada Grain Act, particularly they urged that the distribution clause should be amended to give farmers the right to get cars in turn with the elevators.

sion was evolved the famous Manitoba Grain Act. The farmers, naturally, expected that the protective provisions contained in the new act would bring relief for their grievances. They were especially interested in the clause ordering the railways to provide cars

Grain Act in 1899, the farmers were met with an entire disregard of their demands for cars and shipping facilities. There was a flat refusal to comply with that section of the act dealing with the question of cars—a point, by the way, on which the grain growers waged



Some of the Leading Figures in the Organized Farmers' Movement

Upper Row—The first presidents of the three provincial organizations. Hon. W. R. Motherwell, Minister of Agriculture for Saskatchewan; first president Saskatchewan G.O.A.; J. W. Scallion, first president Manitoba G.O.A.; and D. W. Warner, first A.F.A. president. Lower Row—The present presidents: J. A. Maharg, M.P., of the Saskatchewan G.O.A.; R. W. Wood, of the U.F.A.; and R. C. Henderson, M.P., of the Manitoba G.O.A.