

# **CANADIANA**



## **Portrait of a Prairie Grain Elevator**

**Snowflake, Manitoba**

**Artist: Christopher Walker**

**Researcher: Edward M. Ledohowski**

**Editor: George Sayers Bain**



Figure 1: *Canadiana*. Snowflake, Manitoba by Christopher Walker.

## FOREWORD

I was born, raised and educated in Winnipeg. After attending the University of Manitoba, I won a scholarship to Oxford for what I thought would be a three-year stay studying for my doctorate. But, after pursuing an academic career that has taken me from Oxford to Manchester, Warwick, London and Belfast, fifty years later I am still in the United Kingdom; and I am likely to remain there until I die, when my ashes will be returned to the family plot in Winnipeg.

For some time, I have been looking for a painting that would remind me of Manitoba and, more generally, of the Canadian prairies, where I spent the first twenty-four years of my life. On one of my frequent visits to Winnipeg, in May 2013, I visited Mayberry Fine Art on McDermot Avenue, as I often do, and saw two paintings by Christopher Walker, each depicting a grain elevator. These slope-shouldered sentinels of the prairies are perhaps the most iconic symbol of prairie landscape and lifestyle, and I decided that I wanted to commission a painting of a grain elevator.

Mayberry arranged for me, and my wife Gwynneth, to meet Chris. After finding that we had similar ideas about art, the prairies, and grain elevators, Chris suggested that he take as the subject of our painting the old wooden, and now derelict, Federal Grain Limited elevator in Snowflake, Manitoba, which from 1972 until its closure in 1981 was known as the Snowflake Pool B Elevator. He explains below his reasons for choosing this elevator. An additional reason for choosing it subsequently became apparent. Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald (1890-1956) – a member of Canada’s Group of Seven and a founding member of its successor, the Canadian Group of Painters – had a connection to Snowflake, and the town often featured in his paintings. Although he spent most of his life in Winnipeg and died there, his ashes were scattered over a field on his grandmother Belle Hicks’s farm near Snowflake (NW15-1-9WPM), where he had spent his childhood summers and developed a deep love for Canada’s prairies.

In addition to knowing something about the artist and his approach to the painting I am buying, I like to have some information on the context in which it was painted. In any case, as Chris explains below, he can conceive his pictures only from the historical experience of the subject. Hence we asked Ed Ledohowski, a Municipal Heritage Consultant with the Manitoba Government, to help us. What was initially envisaged as an attempt merely to obtain some background information,



Figure 2: From left to right: Ed Ledohowski, George Bain, Chris Walker, and Gwynneth Bain at the unveiling of “Canadiana” at Mayberry Fine Art, Winnipeg, 8 August 2013.

however, became – thanks to Ed’s enthusiasm, energy and meticulous professionalism – a major research project in its own right. And the result, as is demonstrated below, is a definitive history of Snowflake and its grain elevators.

What follows, therefore, are some thoughts from Chris Walker on how he began to paint grain elevators and, in particular, the Federal Elevator in Snowflake. Then, a brief biographical note on Chris is presented, followed by a history of Snowflake and its grain elevators. We decided not to burden the text with footnotes, but the narrative concludes with a note on the sources that Ed consulted in undertaking his research.

George Bain  
15 December 2013

## THE PAINTING

In 2005 Bill and Shaun Mayberry asked me if I would be interested in painting the vanishing grain elevators of Canada and produce a series of formal, large-scale paintings depicting these structures. I have since completed 17 of these paintings and visited over 42 prairie towns and grain elevators, and I will continue to paint and document these dwindling cathedrals of the prairies. Thanks to the assistance of Ed Ledohowski I was able to obtain the historical background of each grain elevator, which lent integrity to the paintings.

I first visited the town of Snowflake in 2005, and I recently had some photos of the current condition of the Federal Grain elevator sent to me by two local farmers, Landon Friesen and Rob Harms. Noticeably weathered in appearance, this distinctive wooden crib structure still stands boldly on the prairie landscape, attesting to a former time when this nearly abandoned town was bustling with activity and cultural diversity.

Knowing that L.L. Fitzgerald of the Group of Seven painted the region of Snowflake and had his ashes scattered there after his death, adds a sense of commemoration and enables me to honour his legacy by painting the Federal Grain elevator, which I am sure he knew well.

## THE ARTIST

Christopher Walker was born in Montreal, Quebec. As a child, his oil paintings depicting Quebec's rural landscape gave birth to his love of and dedication to art and the environment. He obtained his formal artistic education from 1983 to 1987 at the Ontario College of Art, where he began experimenting in different media and compositional forms.

Having many scientific interests, Chris developed the ability to blend his artistic distinction with his respect for scientific accuracy. He worked as an art director of illustrated science books; was commissioned by museums; and was art director for the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary in Victoria, B.C. But he left expository illustration so that his artistic talents could face new challenges.



Chris's artistic influences range from the renaissance and Flemish masters to contemporary realists, impressionists, and abstract expressionists. Having experimented in these particular styles, he has refined his technique and composition to blend a traditional approach with a distinctive, contemporary style stemming from his poetic observations of the human condition and the environment. His art is best described as perceptual realism. This complex method of analysing form and composition can be derived only from the actual experience of the subject. The artist attempts to convey a unique interpretation of the subject based on personal associations and intellectual perspectives.

On 22 August 1994, the C.C.G.S. *Louis S. St. Laurent* and the U.S.C.G.S. *Polar Sea* icebreakers entered history as the first North American surface vessels to reach the North Pole. Chris was the expedition's artist, and his work depicting the expedition has been featured on the A & E Television

Network. It has also been shown at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, the Vancouver Maritime Museum, the Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa, the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History, Halifax, the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, Northwest Territories, and the Freshwater Institute, Winnipeg.

Chris's paintings are held in the collections of the Department of Fisheries & Oceans in Canada and the National Science Foundation in the United States, as well as in private and corporate collections in several countries, including England, Germany, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, and the United States.

Chris continues his conceptual development and painting at his studio on Denman Island, British Columbia. See [www.christopherwalkerart.ca](http://www.christopherwalkerart.ca) for more information about him and his artwork.

## THE CONTEXT



Figure 3: An aerial view of Snowflake, Manitoba with the Pembina River Valley visible in the distant background. This image appeared in the 1991 issue of the annual Manitoba Pool Elevator Company calendar.

### Snowflake's History

What is today referred to as the Snowflake area just south of the Pembina River Valley in south-central Manitoba near the border with the United States – Township 1, Range 9 West of the Rural Municipality of Pembina – was well known in earlier times to the Aboriginal and Métis population and Hudson Bay Company traders as “Lower Pembina Crossing”. It was a river ford and camp site, where the Old Missouri Trail – a major buffalo hunting and exploration track – traversed the wide expanse of the forested Pembina Valley. The trail then continued in a south-westerly direction across the open plains to Nebogwawin Butte, later known as Star Mound – a native effigy-earthwork and burial site, a lookout for buffalo herds, and the last major landmark along the trail before it crossed into American territory. “Pembina Crossing”, where the east-west route of the Boundary Commission Trail forded the Pembina River, was located about six miles north of Lower Pembina Crossing, and was also a well-known camp site and stopping place prior to agricultural settlement.

The first European settlers came to the Snowflake area in the latter half of the 1870s, just prior to the completion of the Dominion Land Survey in that part of Manitoba; but the bulk of the district's original settlers arrived during the great southern Manitoba settlement boom of 1880-85, attracted by the fertile, heavy, black loam of the area. In 1881 the settlers built a timber bridge at Lower

Pembina Crossing, now known as Conner's Crossing because Archie Conner homesteaded there and operated a stopping house and ferry service across the Pembina River. Soon after a forty-five acre town site was surveyed where the Missouri Trail exited the valley on its southern lip. The community was given the name Hamilton, and from its location at the top of the escarpment it commanded a sweeping view of the Pembina Valley. The town thrived and by the latter half of the 1880s it had, among other businesses: a general store, a post office, a blacksmith, an agricultural depot, a grist and shingle mill, a Methodist Church, an Orange Hall, a boarding and stopping house, and a short-lived newspaper called the *Hamilton Advertiser*.

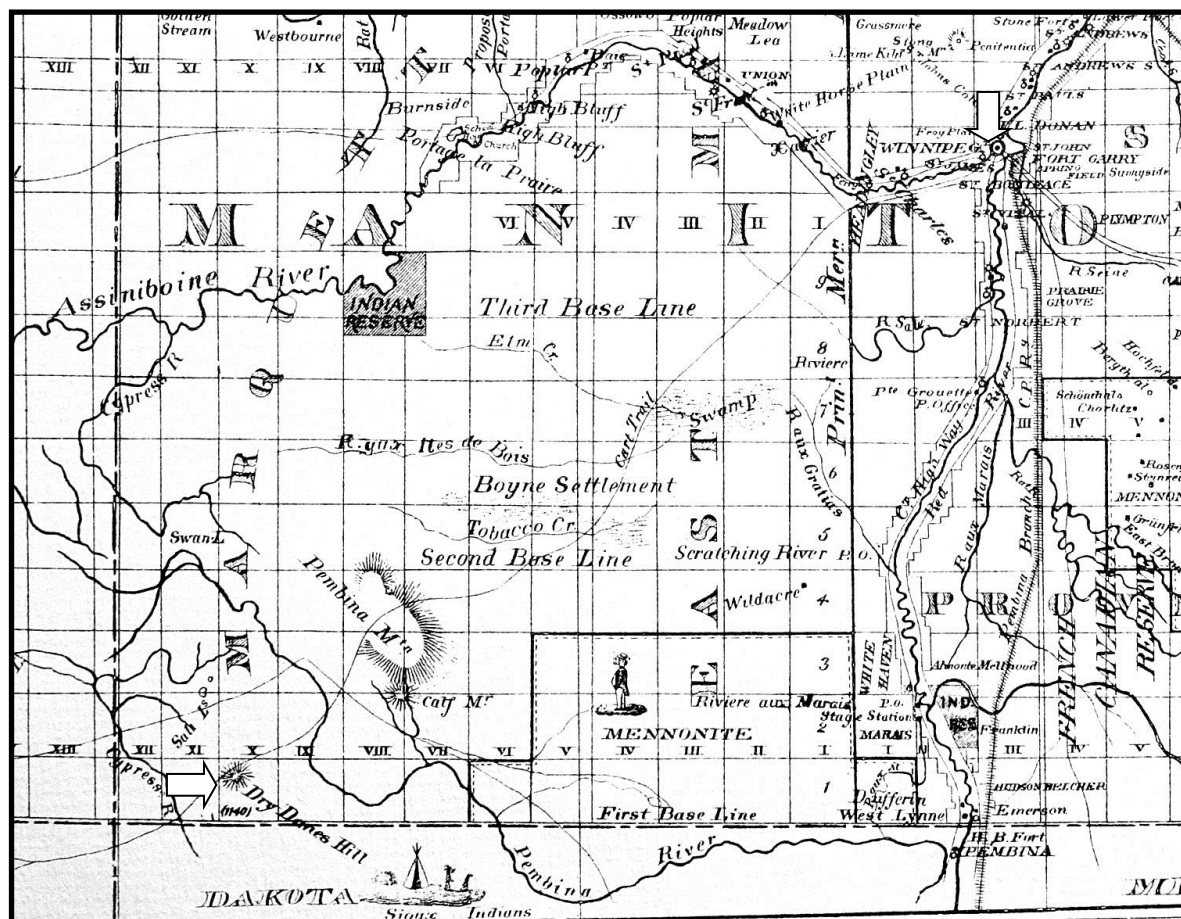


Figure 4: *Southern Manitoba, 1878*. Detail from an early map of Manitoba, showing some of the province's earliest farm settlements and first railway line. The district that would soon come to be known as Snowflake – located in Township 1, Range 9 West (arrow at map lower-left,) and near the butte noted on this map as Dry Dance Hill – is situated approximately 90 miles (140 km) southwest of the then newly incorporated City of Winnipeg (map upper-right) and immediately north of the Canada-United States border.

In 1885 the much-anticipated construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway's Pembina Mountain Branch Line reached what was then called the Rock Lake District. The route traversed the northern part of the region – spawning the new communities of Manitou, Pilot Mound, and Crystal City – and left the more southerly communities of Hamilton and Mowbray twelve to sixteen miles from the nearest siding, a two-day return journey by horse and wagon. It was not until 1899 that a spur line was begun to provide railway service to the communities and rural districts south of the Pembina Mountain Branch Line and north of the border with the United States. Starting from a siding known as Wood Bay, the route initially surveyed ran to Hamilton; but it was deemed too expensive to build and a new route was laid out that bypassed the community about three miles to the south-west. In November 1899 a siding was built at the end of the track – on Section 19-1-9WPM – and named Snowflake after a nearby creek and an existing local school and postal district. Hence the residents



of Hamilton were forced to relocate, along with most of their buildings, to the new town site – thereby trading a picturesque town overlooking the Pembina Valley for a railway town they described as being in the middle of a “prairie slough”.

Snowflake was the “end of the line” until 1902, when the spur line was extended an additional ten miles south-east into the Mowbray district, where a siding and town site were established adjacent to the border with the United States; and in 1910 this spur line was extended another six miles east to the Windygates district. In 1913 a second spur line was constructed – starting from a point just south of Snowflake and running west about a dozen miles – producing the “siding” communities of Hebb and Fallison.

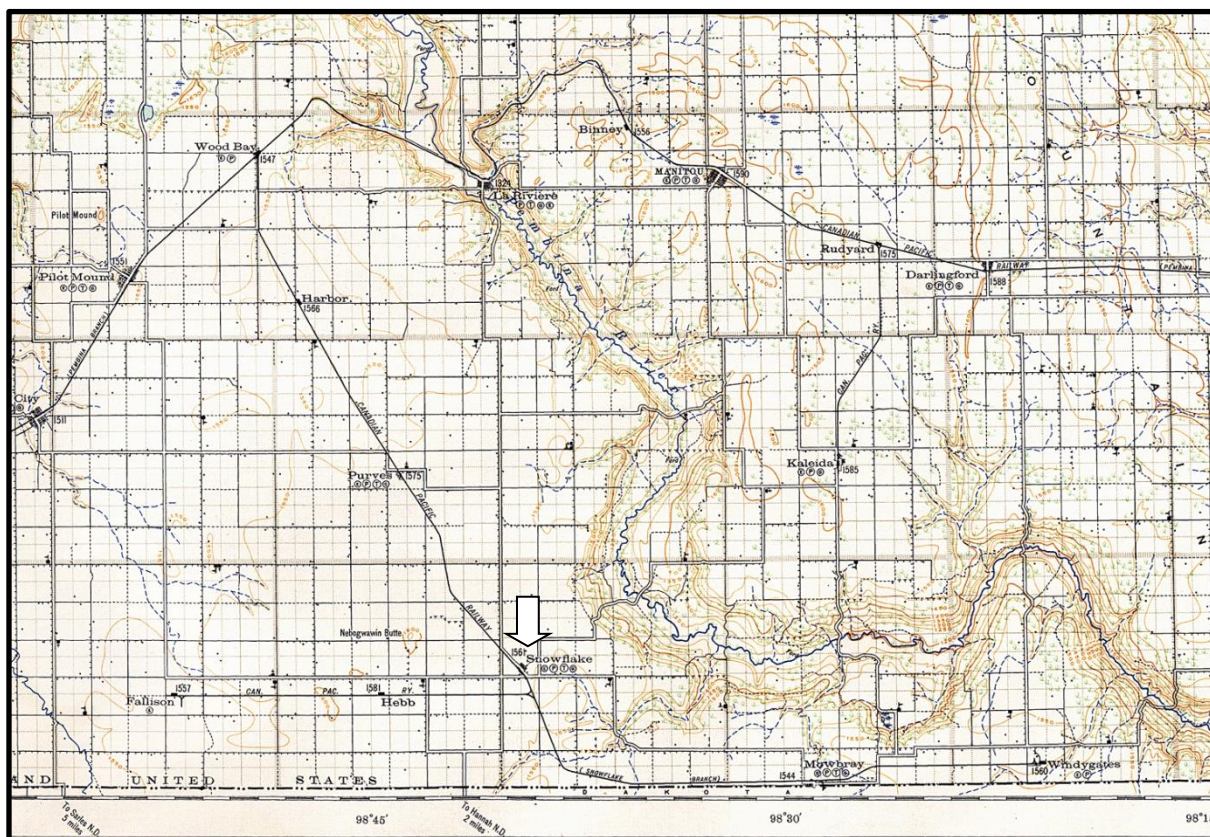


Figure 5: *Snowflake and District, 1922*. Detail from a Dominion Sectional Map, showing the location of Snowflake and its neighbours. At this time both “Pembina Crossing” and the “Lower Pembina Crossing” (northeast of Snowflake) were still functioning river crossings and part of the fledgling municipal road system.

By 1910 Snowflake’s population was 150 and still growing. By the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the town’s building stock included, in addition to a number of new frame houses that had replaced the initial log and sod structures: a CPR depot and section house; a row of four grain elevators; a lumber business, two general stores, a hardware store, a drug store, a butcher shop, a barber shop, a pool room, and a bank; Presbyterian, Methodist, and Anglican churches; two hotels; a livery barn and a blacksmith; a veterinarian and a medical doctor; a post office and telephone exchange; a three-storey, brick Consolidated School offering Grades I through XI, with students being brought from the surrounding area in horse-drawn vans; a Customs House and a Royal Canadian Mounted Police Detachment that, among other things, patrolled the border on a daily basis; a band and a bandstand for community performances; and a newspaper called the *Snowflake Herald*. All these businesses and services made Snowflake a busy commercial centre, and on shopping days Railway Avenue was lined with cars, with some forced to park on side streets.

The first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was for most prairie towns, including Snowflake, a golden age. Each year, thousands of individuals from eastern Canada, almost all of them young men, boarded special “Harvester Trains” to provide western grain farmers with hired help during the annual grain harvest. The Snowflake area attracted hundreds of them, prompting the RCMP to station additional officers there each year until after the harvesters had left. A new building housing curling and skating rinks was constructed in 1921; a new picnic ground was established in 1922; and a garage and oil business as well as Massey-Harris and John Deere farm-implement dealerships were set up in 1925. In 1928 a new set of lumber storage sheds was built, and the Snowflake Co-operative Elevator Association, the local subsidiary of the newly established Manitoba Pool Elevator Company Limited, constructed a new elevator, which eventually became known as Snowflake Pool A, with a grain storage capacity of 40,000 bushels.



Figure 6: *Snowflake, circa 1912.* Top: View from the Farmer’s Elevator looking northwest towards the intersection of Railway Avenue and Shilson Street. Among the many town buildings visible are the Weston Hotel at far right and the town scales at centre left. Above right: A photograph of the newly erected Snowflake Consolidated School, constructed in 1910. Above left: Snowflake Methodist Church which, after “Union” in 1925 functioned as the community’s United Church.

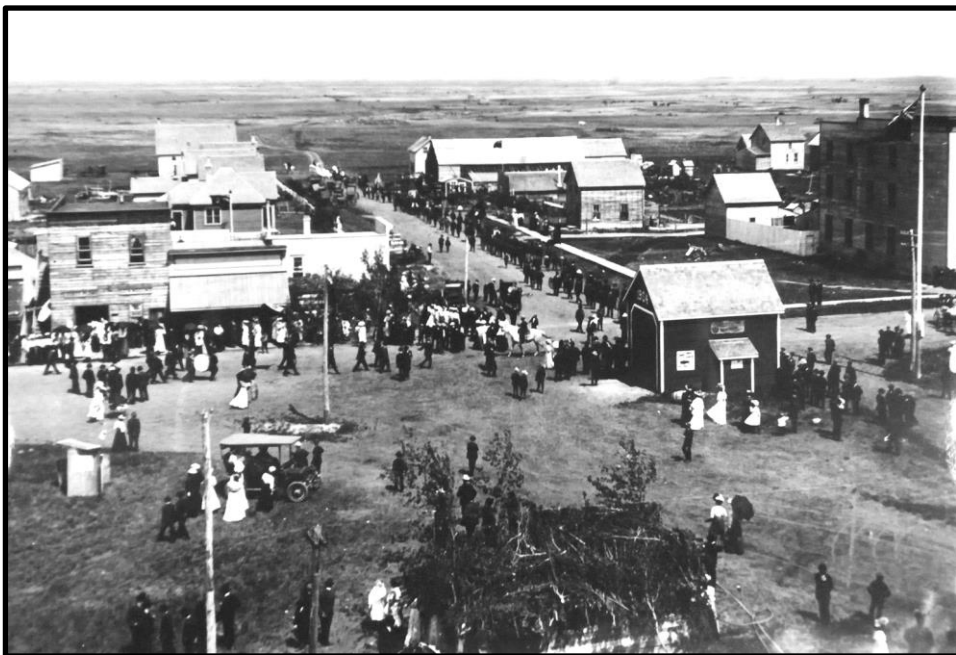
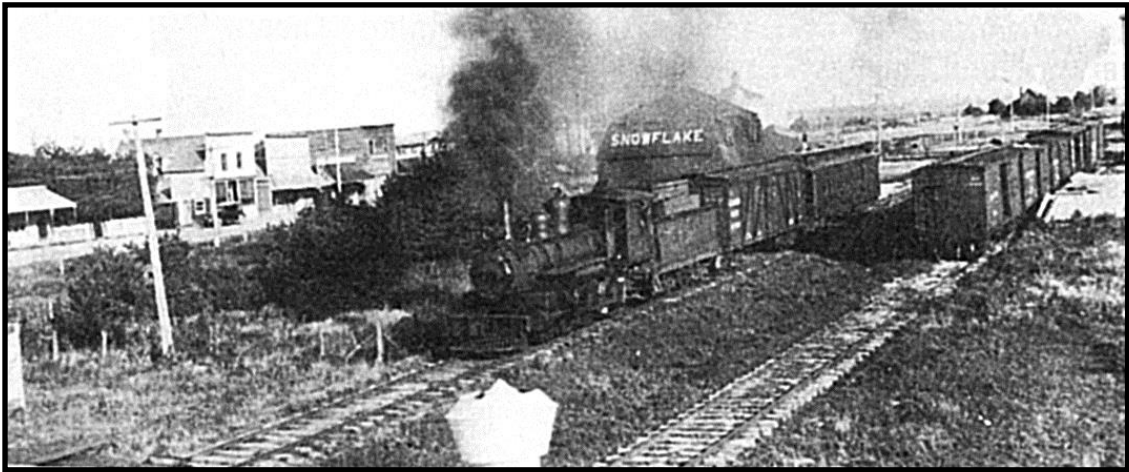
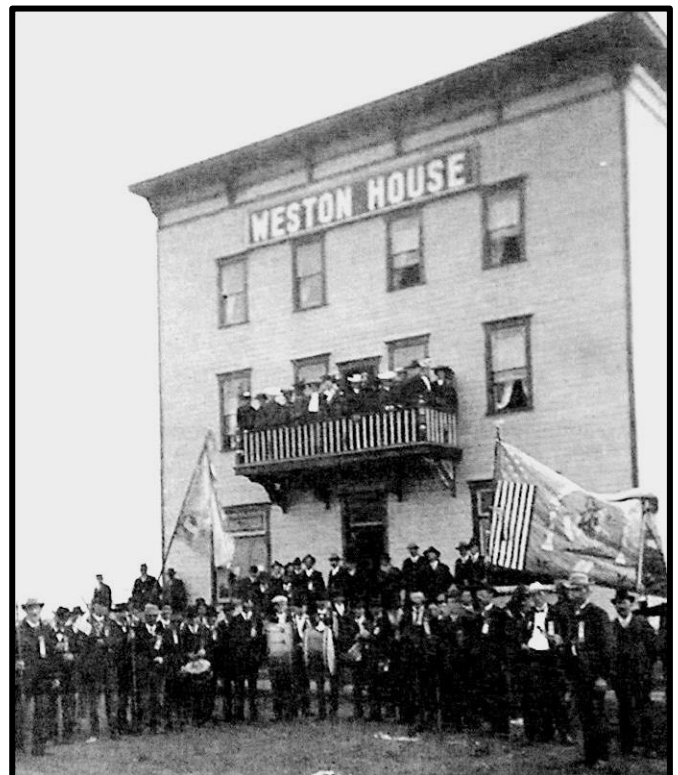


Figure 7: *Snowflake, circa 1912.*

*Top:* View from the Imperial Elevator, showing town buildings along Railway Avenue and the CPR station, with a steam locomotive and an assortment of boxcars.

*Centre:* View of Railway Avenue from the State Elevator, showing an Orangemen's Parade and crowd of spectators on Shilson Street. The vast majority of the region's early settlers came from southern Ontario, with the balance from the UK. Hence the population was Wasp (white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) in ethnicity, as indicated by the British names of the early settlers and by the presence of an Orange Lodge and several Protestant churches but no Catholic church in Snowflake. By the 1950s, newcomers to the region included many families with Slavic and Mennonite backgrounds.

*Right:* Parade participants gather for a group photograph in front of the Weston Hotel. Local historian, Mrs C. Gosnell, noted in 1968 that "this hotel became one of the finest, cleanest hotels south of Winnipeg."



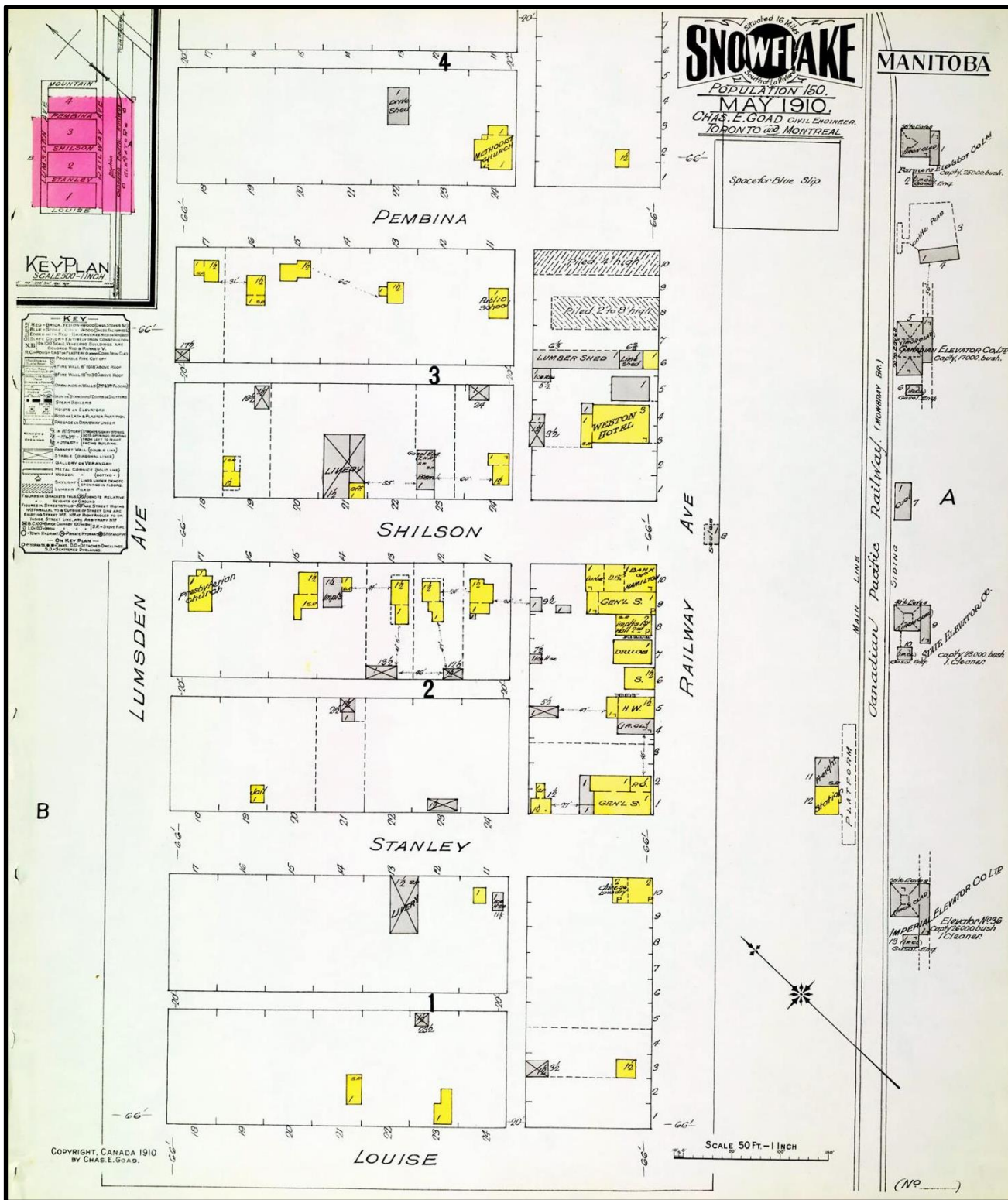


Figure 8: Snowflake Town Plan, 1910. A page from a 1910 Manitoba fire insurance atlas showing “downtown” Snowflake. The title block reads: “SNOWFLAKE – Situated 16 miles south of La Rivière. POPULATION 150. MAY 1910.” The plan shows more than forty of the town’s major structures, including four grain elevators and the CPR railway station. As noted in the Key Plan (upper left), part of the community was excluded from the plan. Mountain Avenue, seen in the Key Plan, was never constructed. Also of interest is the North arrow, which, in error, points east. The railway line in the Snowflake area runs at a forty-five degree angle across the Dominion Survey system. Thus the town’s streets, oriented to the railway, are similarly tilted, frequently causing confusion, as the town’s East end is also the town’s South end.

The golden age of agricultural development in general, and of the “wheat economy” in particular, ended in 1929 with the onset of the Great Depression. Poor crops, low prices, and a general lack of paying work ushered in a period of sustained economic decline. In Snowflake businesses began to close, and farm families sold out or, unable to make a living, simply abandoned their land and moved away. In 1933 the three-storey Weston House Hotel burned down, taking the Corona Lumber Sheds with it. In 1942 both the Leland Hotel and the Presbyterian Church were purchased and torn down for their lumber. In 1947 the lumber yard moved to Pilot Mound. And by 1949 Snowflake’s population was about 100 and declining.

During the early 1960s, Snowflake’s economy stabilised and even rebounded. Improved all-season highways and larger-capacity grain trucks began to undermine the profitability of many elevators. Farmers could now travel longer distances to reach larger elevators at fewer locations, and elevator companies began to construct bigger facilities in regional centres rather than maintaining smaller elevators at every rail-side community. In 1962 the spur lines from Snowflake to Hebb and Fallison and also from Snowflake to Mowbray and Windygates were abandoned and the tracks pulled up. The elevators at these locations were closed and subsequently either torn down or sold to local farmers. The economic loss to these communities was Snowflake’s gain and, with the size of its economic hinterland substantially enlarged, local business improved.



Figure 9: *Snowflake, circa 1960.* An aerial view of Snowflake just prior to the construction of the Federal Grain Elevator (and the related closure of elevators in nearby Fallison, Mowbray, and Windygates). Snowflake would subsequently enjoy roughly two decades of economic stability, even growth, before its final decline began in the early 1980s.

The wood and equipment salvaged from the torn-down Federal Elevators in Fallison and Windygates – which were initially built by the Wiley, Low Grain Company in 1920 – were used to construct a new, larger Federal Elevator in Snowflake that opened in November 1962. At the same time, the Federal Grain agent’s house at Mowbray was relocated to Snowflake to serve the same purpose there. In 1967 the Snowflake Pool A Elevator, initially built in 1928, was renovated and reopened with a new forty-ton scale specifically designed to accommodate large, grain-hauling trucks. In 1965 a new two-sheet curling rink and elementary school were opened, and in 1974 a new skating rink replaced the old 1921 structure. In short, Snowflake was once again bustling with activity, and the town’s population increased to about 100 once again.

But the economic respite was short lived. Passenger service and then freight service on the main CPR line to Snowflake was gradually reduced from six times to once a week, until only an occasional grain train serviced the town. By 1980 the town's population had declined to less than 50, and on 9 January 1981 the residents of Snowflake witnessed the end of an era as the last train pulled slowly out of town. The coming of the railway caused the birth of Snowflake; it's going caused the town's death. The Snowflake branch of the Royal Canadian Legion surrendered its charter in 1986; the Consolidated School closed in 1992; the United Church closed in 1994; and the town's war memorial was moved to La Rivière in 2006. All that remains today of this once-thriving farming community are weathered street signs, unmaintained roads and buildings, a handful of residents (only three houses were occupied in 2007), and two forlorn-looking grain elevators.

### **Snowflake's Grain Elevators**

Grain elevators – variously referred to as prairie icons, prairie cathedrals, and prairie sentinels – are a visual symbol of the prairies. Almost every prairie community had at least one; they were the centre of business in many rural towns; and, for over a century, they dominated the flat landscape for miles around.

As the first step in a grain-trading process that moves grain from producers to global markets, elevators were designed to get grain into railway boxcars. Farmers initially shovelled their grain into two-bushel sacks, which were transported to a loading platform along the rail line, where they were loaded by hand onto railway cars, a back-breaking and inefficient process. The need for a better way of storing and shipping grain brought about the small, one-storey, wood-frame warehouses that farmers erected beside rail lines. But the railways demanded larger, vertical warehouses that could take advantage of gravity to empty the grain. Hence a mechanism known as the “elevating leg” was devised: an endless belt with cups or scoops attached that raised the grain – which was dumped into a pit from the farmer's wagon – to bins from which it could easily be loaded by spouts and gravity into boxcars located alongside the elevator. The “leg” is what gave the name to, and determined the shape of, the grain elevator. The early grain elevators were constructed of framed or cribbed wood, and by 1933 there were almost six thousand of them on the Canadian prairies. But, with the advent of larger super silos made of reinforced concrete or steel, the smaller, older, wooden structures are being closed and demolished at a rapid rate.

Several grain elevators were constructed in Snowflake over the years. The first – a long, low warehouse operated by horse power – was built soon after train service to the town began in 1899. Within a decade, this initial warehouse structure was torn down and replaced by four elevators built in a row on the south side of the railway tracks. At the eastern end of the row stood the Farmers Company Elevator, built in 1904 with an initial capacity of 25,000 bushels; next to it to the west was the Canadian Company Elevator, built in 1902, with an initial capacity of 17,000 bushels; next to it was the State Company Elevator, built in 1900 with an initial capacity of 23,000 bushels; and next to it at the western end of the row was the Imperial Company Elevator, built in 1901 with an initial capacity of 26,000 bushels.

Between 1910 and 1912, these four elevators were purchased by the Manitoba Government Elevator Commission as a “farm-service experiment”; but the experiment was a financial failure and in 1913 the Commission began to dispose of them, together with all the other elevators it had acquired, with most of them being leased to the newly formed Grain Growers Grain Company. Two of these elevators were subsequently torn down: the Canadian Elevator in the 1920s and the State Elevator in the 1930s. The Imperial Elevator was sold in 1925 to W. Headrick, who dismantled it and



Figure 10: *Snowflake Elevator Row, circa 1910.* Left to right: the Farmers' Elevator (built in 1904); livestock corral and loading dock; the Canadian Elevator (originally a warehouse built in 1902); a coal storage shed; the State Elevator (built in 1900); and, at the western end of the line, the Imperial Elevator (1901). Partially visible at the far right is the CPR stationhouse and freight shed. By the 1930s all but the Farmers' Elevator had been demolished. In 1928 a Manitoba Pool Elevator was constructed on the former site of the Canadian Elevator, and in 1962, Snowflake's last elevator, the Federal Grain Elevator, was constructed on the former site of the old State Elevator.



Figure 11: *Wagons and Trucks.* Two photographs showing grain being dumped into an elevator "pit" by means of a mechanical front-wheel lifting device. From the pit, the grain would be "elevated", using a "circular belt and bucket" drive referred to as a "leg"; and from the top of the elevator the grain could be directed into storage bins, cleaners, or railway boxcars.

During the horse-and-wagon era, railway-line sidings and grain elevators were constructed at approximately six-mile intervals, the distance a farmer could travel from his farm and return in one day. After World War I, as motor vehicles became more commonplace, grain trucks quickly began to replace horses and wagons, leading to the centralisation of grain and other economic services, and eventually contributing to Snowflake's, and most other rural Manitoba hamlets', demise.



rebuilt it on his farm. The Farmers Elevator was sold in the 1920s to the Lake of the Woods Milling Company, which sold it in 1961 to the Snowflake Co-operative Elevator Association. It then became Snowflake Pool B, Snowflake Pool A having been built in 1928. In 1972 the Snowflake Co-operative sold the Pool B Elevator to John Harms – who in 1979 moved it to his farm about one mile south of Snowflake – and purchased the larger Snowflake Federal Elevator built in 1962; it then became the new Snowflake Pool B Elevator.

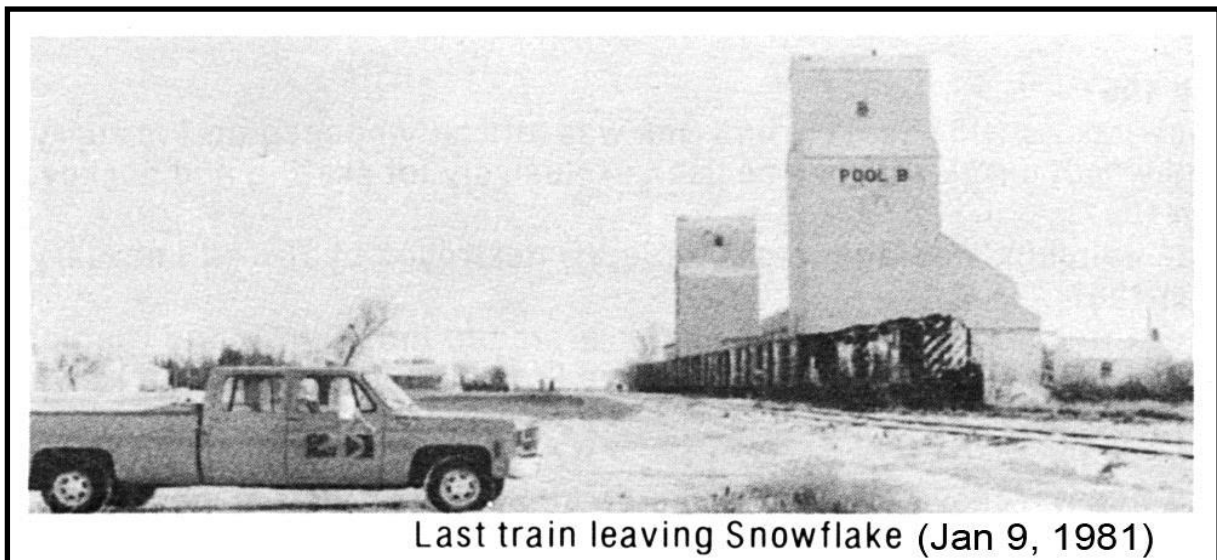


Figure 12: *Last call – End of an Era.* Photograph taken on 9 January 1981, showing the last train to depart Snowflake. Soon afterwards the railway line as far as Wood Bay was removed and all the elevators along that line sold to local farmers. Some were utilised as private grain storage facilities while others were demolished for the salvageable lumber.

The final Pool A and Pool B elevators are shown in the photograph taken in 1981 (Figure 12). They are the only two elevators remaining in Snowflake today. Neither is operating commercially – having been closed after the last train departed in 1981 – but they were, and for the moment remain, Snowflake’s most prominent buildings.

The elevator in the background of the photograph is the Snowflake Pool A Elevator, initially built in 1928 on the former site of the 1902 Canadian Elevator, and renovated and enlarged in 1967. It is owned today by Ken Lyne, a local farmer.

The elevator in the foreground of the photograph – the subject of Christopher Walker’s painting – is the Federal Elevator constructed in 1962 from wood and equipment reclaimed from the torn-down Federal Elevators in Fallison and Windygates that were built forty years earlier. It occupies the former site of the 1900 State Elevator, and became the new Snowflake Pool B Elevator in 1972 when the original Pool B Elevator was sold to John Harms. It is owned today by Grant Didowski, a local farmer.

## **Conclusion**

The former Federal grain elevator in Snowflake, Manitoba is a rare surviving example of the iconic slope-shouldered wooden elevators that, for well over a century, dominated the rural skyline of the Canadian prairies. It was the last grain elevator to be erected in Snowflake and, significantly, one of the last “standard-design” grain elevators to be built in western Canada, featuring the traditional wooden crib-wall bin construction technique and exterior wooden drop-siding. By the mid-1960s,



new elevator designs and construction materials quickly began to be adopted by grain companies, initially with tin exterior-siding and flat-topped roofs with exposed metal elevating-legs and grain chutes, and soon thereafter with massive poured-concrete silos replacing the old wood-frame bin construction technique. Moreover, those few communities fortunate enough to be located along a still-active railway branch line and have a functioning grain elevator found that the new modern elevators were usually erected at some distance outside the local community to take advantage of lower property taxes and cheaper fire and liability insurance rates. Hence Snowflake's surviving "downtown" wooden grain elevators provide a rare and rapidly vanishing image of the significant physical and economic role these landmark structures played in the development, and eventual decline, of small prairie communities.

Small town and farm lifestyles also began to be transformed in the late 1940s by farm-power mechanisation, rural electrification, and the advent of all-season, all-weather highway transportation. These developments allowed individual farm operations to manage increasingly larger acreages, resulting in fewer farm families on the land. Rural depopulation eventually led to the demise of the small, local, service centre, such as Snowflake and neighbouring hamlets, in favour of the larger, centralised, regional service centre such as nearby Manitou.

Almost six thousand wooden grain elevators stood on the Canadian prairies by 1930; today, fewer than three hundred remain. When travelling the prairie highways and byways in years past, the grain elevator enabled the location of the next community to be spotted from miles away. Today, one can drive past these same communities and not realise they are even there; hidden by planted tree shelterbelts, they often appear from the highway much the same as an individual farm site. The old slope-shouldered, wooden, prairie grain elevators, like the old lighthouses erected along Canada's east and west coasts, were much more than simple commercial or architectural landmarks; they were also much-loved cultural landmarks. They were a community's most dominant structure and, when demolished, often attracted large crowds of local residents to witness the end of an era and the loss of a significant part of the town's heritage.

Hence the former Federal elevator in Snowflake is highly deserving of being immortalised in a painting. Because it was relatively recently constructed (1962), it continues, unlike many of its extant peers, to stand tall, straight and proud, and to dominate the local skyline for miles around despite both it and the community it served long since having "closed shop".

But it is not only a rare surviving example of the quintessential "standard-design" wooden grain elevator. By virtue of the material used in its construction and of the ground upon which it is situated, it possesses close ties with virtually the entire spectrum of historical companies in the Canadian grain trade. The wood used in its construction was salvaged from elevators built in nearby Fallison and Windygates in 1920 by Manitoba businessmen who established the Wily, Low Grain Company. It was subsequently owned by Federal Grain, a large corporate entity and major player in the Canadian grain trade, before being sold to the farmer-owned and operated Snowflake Co-operative Elevator Association. The place where it was constructed was formerly the site of the State Elevator, built in 1900 by an American grain company, and then sold around 1910 to the Manitoba Government Elevator Commission, before eventually being demolished during the Great Depression of the 1930s. And after a decade as a Federal Elevator and another decade as a Snowflake Co-operative Elevator Association Pool Elevator, it was sold into private hands and is used today as a granary by local farmer Grant Didowski.

Finally, and possibly most significantly, like most small prairie towns, Snowflake and its grain elevators came into being with the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1899, and their demise was caused by its departure in 1981, when the Snowflake branch line was closed and removed.

Hence Snowflake's own history represents the story of the initial formation, later growth and prosperity, and eventual demise of hundreds of similar small, prairie, rail-side towns. And while the elevators, and what remains of the town itself, may soon disappear entirely from the landscape, their history and their memory will continue to live on in Chris Walker's evocative *Canadians*.



Figure 13: *Vanishing Sentinels*.

*Above:* A photograph, looking south-east, taken in 2007 of the former Snowflake Pool A Elevator (left) and former Federal Elevator, later Pool B (right).

*Right:* A view, looking south, of the former Federal Elevator/Pool B, still tall and majestic, but abandoned and rapidly deteriorating. The Pool B wooden lettering, long since removed, and fading white paint, reveal the elevator's original "Federal Grain" corporate lettering and logo.



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- Manitoba Legislative Library, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Vertical files: Local History – Snowflake.

Most of the documents consulted in compiling the history of Snowflake and its grain elevators, including maps and photographs, are contained on CD ROM discs, copies of which are available at the office of the Rural Municipality of Pembina, Manitou, Manitoba. Phone: (204) 242 2838; email: [admin@rmofpembina.com](mailto:admin@rmofpembina.com). They are also available from Ed Ledohowski, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Phone: (204) 799 0714; email: [edled@shaw.ca](mailto:edled@shaw.ca).