

OGILVIE FLOUR MILL

1222 Allowance Avenue SE
Medicine Hat, Alberta



Courtesy of Medicine Hat Esplanade Archives, Unknown Date

Prepared for:

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PREPARATORY ASSIGNMENT 1

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INTRODUCTION

Upon thought of selecting an industrial site for this assignment, I realized that my focus and learning of industrial sites over the years had been on the obvious ones as I grew up in Medicine Hat. Industries that had either people I knew working at them or their production being a part of my architectural appreciation for the physical built environment and materials, i.e. brick in buildings, pottery in dishes, crocks and bean pots and even tomatoes and cucumbers from the local greenhouses. The one I seemed to forget about, and the one I have selected, is the city's past vibrant history with the flour mill industry. I haven't been void of an interest in the flour mill industry given my interest growing on things related to food. I recall this from my interest in collecting vintage cookbooks including having purchased at a young age my copies of the Five Roses and Purity cookbooks. Therefore, I am excited that Ogilvie Flour Mill stands out to me as a most worthy community industrial heritage site to research.

BACKGROUND: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT of the MILL

Ogilvie Flour Mill is one of five flour mills that have operated in Medicine Hat since the early 1990's. It is the longest running representation of the flour mill industry in the city given its operation for almost a century until its recent closure in 2013. Construction of the mill began in 1912 on a 2.91ha (7.2ac) site in the South Flats neighbourhood adjacent to Ross Creek. It was located for its access to railway and ultimately as a grouping of dramatic and imposing milling buildings framing the escarpment. The buildings were designed on an east-west axis and intersected by a spur line that connected the buildings to the CPR line to the east.

The Ogilvie site was incorporated with the City on March 28, 1912. Building permit records from July 27, 1912 illustrate the construction as follows:

- A six-storey narrow rectangular brick clad and concrete flour mill structure (mill, engine and boilers) – 320 x 52 feet (\$270,000);
- A six-storey concrete warehouse – 168 x 70 feet (\$51,000); and
- A concrete elevator with a central cupola branded prominently with "Ogilvie's" on the north façade – 140 x 57 feet (\$128,000).

The flour mill and warehouse were connected on the sixth floor. A rail spur line connected the site to the Canadian Pacific Railway. In 1955, a narrow rectangular brick and corrugated metal Warehouse (170 x 70 feet) was later added onto the Flour Bagging Warehouse and in 1961 three huge Butler Bins were installed to the elevator to increase capacity. The site also has several outbuildings such as garages and a gravel parking area on the north side of the buildings. Production began at the mill on July 24, 1913.

When the mill opened, and at its peak during the First World War, the mill and its workers were able to produce up to 4,000 barrels a day of flour as well as poultry feed and bran for British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan including an increase in export to supply the war. The elevator had the capacity to store up to 250,000 bushels of grain. In 1932, No. 1 northern wheat dropped to \$0.42 per bushel, the lowest since the Middle Ages, and production outputs were significantly impacted. Ogilvie mill quickly diversified by shipping product to Europe during the Second World War years, and to the Philippines and Asia in the 1950's. A laboratory was established at the Ogilvie site in 1952. In 1954, Ogilvie acquired Lake of the Woods Milling Company (1887), which brought Five Roses under the Ogilvie name, and at which time the mill began manufacturing baking flours, cake mixes and hot cereals. The increase in production for these various reasons lead to a major expansion and automation in 1955-56. Machinery was

upgraded during this time, and the large one-storey warehouse addition was constructed. The automation reduced staffing which impacted Medicine Hat's economy until 1961 when the three Butler Bins were installed which increased the capacity to 509,200 bushels. The expansion was due, in part, to a contract with the Soviet Union for Canadian mills to provide 575,000 long tons of flour between October 1963 and July 1964. Canadian production increased by 33% with over 30% of this coming from the Medicine Hat Ogilvie Mill. When I asked my dad about his history and stories of the mill, from my uncle having worked there, he initially shared this story of the Soviet Union purchase of flour as for Medicine Hat it was significant to the economy at that time.

The ownership and operations of the Ogilvie mills across the country evolved in various forms including the purchase of related industries, some mills closing and unfortunately some being demolished. In 1991 Ogilvie owned four mills across the country in Montreal, Midland and Strathroy, Ontario and Medicine Hat. Ogilvie Mill's company was purchased in 1993 by ADM Mills (Chicago). Medicine Hat continued to operate until its closure by Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) Mills in 2013 as a means to consolidate their operations.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The mill was established by Archibald Ogilvie and his three sons, immigrants from Scotland, their first gristmill being erected at Jacques Cartier, Quebec in 1801. Shortly after this the company moved to Montreal to compete with Minneapolis mills, operating as A.W. Ogilvie & Company for over 40 years. By 1895, the Ogilvie's were the biggest flour miller in the world. In 1902, a Montreal syndicate purchased the company and it was renamed The Ogilvie Flour Mill Co. Ltd.

In the 1910's, Ogilvie looked to expand to the prosperous wheat belt in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. The mill's inception and existence in Medicine Hat is due to the agricultural base (ranching and farming economies) along with the trans-continental railway and abundance of inexpensive gas and power. These assets provided the foundation for the flour mill industry to flourish in the early 1900's and Medicine Hat being the leading mill centre in Western Canada. As one of the country's earliest and most successful mills, it is also one of the best-preserved historic mills in western Canada.

Ogilvie Flour Mill's historic significance is that of stability and prosperity at the height of the Edwardian boom period in the 1910's. The mill's high capacity production provided employment, stability and the development of the South and River Flats surrounding the mill. The mill was constructed in an efficiently short period of time therefore, provided an instant source of local economy to the community.

The mill is valued for its innovative and progressive design for high efficiency grain production at the turn of the century and was constructed by the Canadian Stewart Company who also built mills in Chicago, New York and Montreal.

The original site plan consists of several powerful vertical masses arranged on an east-west axis: a six-storey mill with a two-storey extension to the east, a towering concrete elevator, and a brick clad warehouse separated from the other two buildings by a central spur line. The rectangular plan of the mill features an innovative reinforced steel and concrete structural system with brick cladding that is detailed with recessed vertical structural bays and symmetrical fenestration featuring lugsills. The interior of the mill is fitted with heavy timber floors and was powered by steam heat. The dramatic concrete elevator, emphasizing a vertical form, has 24 circular concrete tanks and 16 interspersed bins, internally equipped with machinery for cleaning

grain. The warehouse, situated to the north of the elevator and mill, originally featured brick cladding and has since been covered with corrugated metal cladding.

Ogilvie Flour Mill is also valued as a landmark for its highly prominent, intact massing, and its distinctive, industrial historic design in the South Flats neighbourhood. It stands boldly yet integrated with the surrounding escarpment.

Historic significance for me comes equally from the stories of people who worked in the mill. Short of being able to access the interior of the building, my dad shared his observations of it at the time he toured it with my uncle. One can only be taken back to a site and buildings historical significance through such stories therefore, reinforcing its heritage value. The functional components of the interiors construction at that time left me with historic significance that I would not have learned outside of a story. My dad shares of how, with no elevators at that time, an elevator was created as a pulley system that had wood planks every so often. One would stand on one of those planks as they came around and be taken to the upper storeys. I later read an article in 2012, which celebrated the industries 100 years, and where a fellow was telling the same story of the pulley elevator system called a "Humphries". It was little slot to stand on and it didn't stop when you hit your floor rather you had to jump off of it. I guess a few people did get killed on it. Obviously, that and walking across wooden narrow paths over operating machinery, were not the safest methods of designing the building, yet they certainly achieved the production and enthusiasm of the workers towards contributing to the economy a product that would have been deemed an essential item at the time.

CURRENT ISSUES & PROPOSALS

Unfortunately, shortly after I read the article in 2012 on its 100 years in operation, it was announced the mill would be closing in 2013 to consolidate ADM's operations in other places for efficiency. Interestingly, despite some modernization over the years, the article spoke of how the mill still looks and smells as it did when it opened and even with hardwood floors and wooden elevator legs, its clean and noticeable that people took pride in taking care of it.

The closure of the Ogilvie Mill in 2013 prompted the Heritage Resources Committee to include it in the package of buildings to Inventory that year and it is therefore, on the City's Heritage Inventory. The current issue of the Ogilvie Mill is similar to many industrial sites no longer operating and that is the question of "what is to become of the site and its buildings". How will the building be maintained and conserved while not being used and what are the options for its usage over time? Ultimately, what is to become of its industrial heritage value to the city both in its economic role, stories, and physical structure? The integrity of the structures is high given that the mill had remained operational for 100 years. The Statement of Integrity identifies the following applicable Significance Criteria:

Managing Growth in Medicine Hat

"As one of the country's most successful mills, the Ogilvie Flour Mill in Medicine Hat is extremely significant as a legacy of one of Canada's earliest and most successful industries and stresses the importance of wheat and agriculture industries in Alberta. Erected as the headquarters for Western Canada, Medicine Hat's mill opened in 1913, representing an important period of growth for the company."

City Development in Medicine Hat

"Ogilvie Flour Mill is further significant as a symbol of stability and prosperity of Medicine Hat at the height of the Edwardian boom period in the 1910's. The promise of a large

4,000-barrell capacity mill was highly desirable for the community as it provided employment, stability, and, prompted a surge of settlement in the working class neighbourhood of the South Flats surrounding the mill."

Built in Medicine Hat

"Ogilvie Flour Mill is highly valued for its innovative and progressive design for high efficiency grain production at the turn of the 20th century. Based on the design of a mill in Fort William, Ontario, except larger, the mill was designed and constructed by the Canadian Stewart Company, who were responsible for the construction of mills in Chicago, New York and Montreal."

Landmark Value

"Ogilvie Flour Mill is valued as a landmark for its highly prominent, intact massing, and its distinctive industrial, historic design in the South Flats neighbourhood."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At this time, the future of Ogilvie Flour Mill for Medicine Hat is an unknown. The structures themselves are intact, evaluated, and on the City's Heritage Inventory. These are aspects that I am grateful for in hopes that, in a timely manner, a future purpose (including operating again as a mill) may present itself. This may be through sale or conservation of the site in the meantime by the current owners. When the inventory was done, the HRC was not able to access the interior nor learn from the owners the future intent. Industrial Heritage sites conservation, such as Ogilvie, requires a new purpose, function and means (financial and heritage value appreciation) in order to provide direction for the site. This may need the heritage community's initiative in creative ideas, as the owner may not appreciate the historical significance in the same manner.



Courtesy of Sam Boisvert, Donald Luxton & Associates, Inc. 2013

Research Review included: Statement of Significance, Background SoS Materials (newspaper articles, 1947 Chamber of Commerce Marketing Brochure, Uof Manitoba Archive Collections for Company Dates, Building Permit Records, Fire Maps).