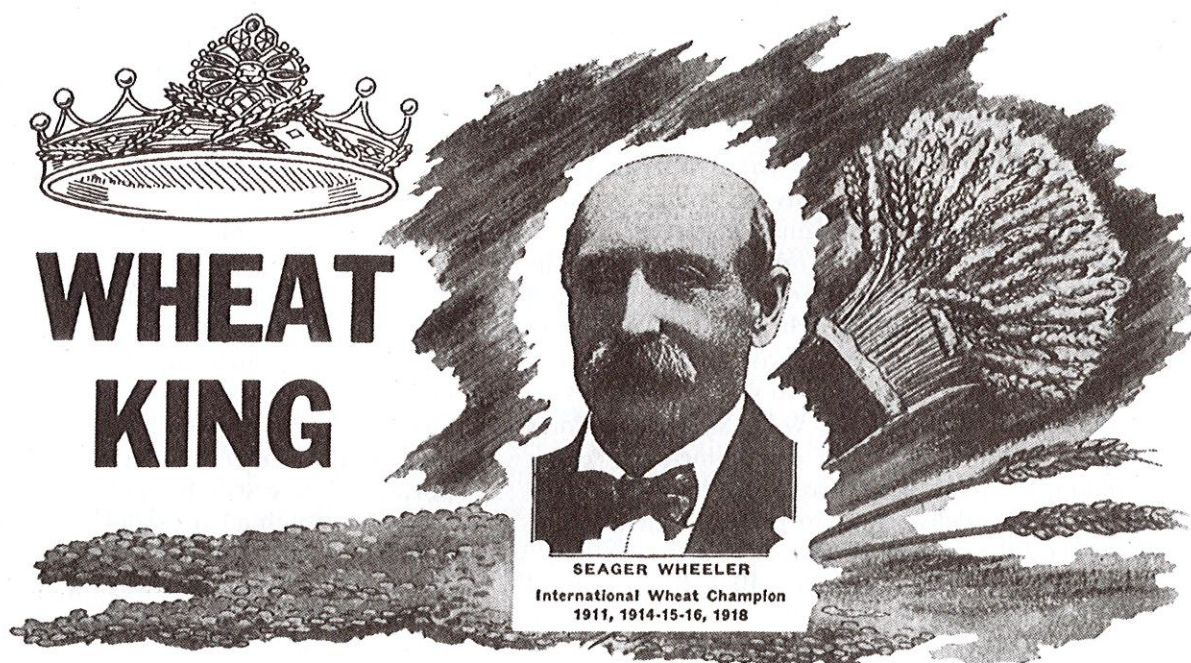


Seager Wheeler, Wheat King

by Victor Carl Friesen

PIONEERS *in* AGRICULTURE



Western Producer, June 9, 1955.

A metal plaque marks the farm of a world wheat king at Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Erected by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, it states that he moved there in 1897. The area was still a part of the frontier—in the same year the poplar-bush hideout of Almighty Voice, the famous North-West Mounted Police escapee, had been shelled by cannon but fifteen miles away.¹

Had the future wheat king, then a young man, wiry but small of stature, heard the cannonading, he would have known it was not just a roll of thunder to the northeast. For he had grown up on the Isle of Wight, also about fifteen miles from a similar source of “thunder,” the notable British naval center of Portsmouth on the mainland of Britain. In fact, this future farmer’s

youthful ambition had been to go to sea because of his absorbing love of the ocean. His forefathers had all been men of the sea, fishermen and salvagers of wrecks, daring lifesavers who risked their own lives to rescue others when passing ships were in peril.

How this young man came to be a mid-continent farmer in the Saskatchewan Valley (where the two Saskatchewan Rivers run parallel to each other) is as interesting a tale as any spun by shipmates over their mess, or recounted about Almighty Voice himself. The man’s name was Seager Wheeler.²

Wheeler was born January 3, 1868, in a fisherman’s cottage on the Isle of Wight’s rockbound coast. The place was named Blackgang after a band of smugglers who once lived in the area, working at their trade on dark nights, to the ocean’s heaving, and stowing contraband in secret caves. In young Seager’s day, there was still treasure to be found, not smuggler’s loot, but relics washed ashore from sunken ships of long ago. Once his brother found a coin dating back to Cromwell, and Seager himself saved other coins which were of Spanish ori-

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gin, possibly from one of the galleons of the Great Armada of 1588 which had foundered off that coast.

Seager loved exploring the coastline, rowing a small boat amid rocks from headland to headland and landing for a picnic lunch, eaten before a driftwood fire. One time a heavy sea was running, and the cresting waves swamped the boat so that he and his companion were swept up the shingle like flotsam. But it was not a bad spot for their picnic, and a bit of salt water gave zest to the soaked biscuits.³

His whole boyhood was really a grand adventure, whether he was looking out to sea where his fisherfolk were netting a mackerel run (telescopes mounted on the cliffs were used to locate the schools, and as many as ten thousand of the silvery-blue fish were caught in a single haul), or he was roving inland, where birds nested and wild flowers grew (farther inland was the celebrated Carrisbrooke Castle, where Charles I was once imprisoned). There were always things to do to keep his body agile, and his imagination stirred.

At age eleven he finished his formal schooling on the Isle of Wight at the National School in Ventnor and started to work in that town. He began as an errand boy in a shoe store, and later worked in a fancy goods store from seven in the morning to six at night. More to his liking was working for W.H. Smith and Son's bookstall. He had a great love of reading—his education would never really stop throughout his entire life—and he stayed on, delivering papers in the surrounding countryside till the autumn of 1883.⁴

Finally, he was of an age to follow his boyhood dream of joining the navy and seeing the world, despite his having witnessed a training vessel go by, all sails set, only to capsize and sink in a sudden squall with all but three of its five hundred young men drowned. But countless other ships sailed by too, from exotic ports, and the romance of the sea was ever with him. So he set off to Portsmouth to enlist. Upon examination, he was told he was one inch too short!

Now fate played its hand. A distant relative wrote from an exotic corner of the far-flung British Empire, the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. He had taken up a homestead there.⁵ Would Seager come out too? He offered to pay the young man's homestead fee in time if Seager would help him out doing chores—although he warned there were wild beasts about, bears in the backyard and devouring wolves on the plains. These admonishments were but enticements to the once-disappointed, adventure-seeking Seager. He would give up thoughts of the sea and seek his fortune on the Canadian prairie.

Wheeler did not know that his destination was part of what geographer Henry Youle Hind and explorer John Palliser had called the Fertile Belt.⁶ Nor was he aware that Presbyterian minister James Nisbet had started a successful mission farm on the North Saskatchewan,⁷ or that Métis leader Gabriel Dumont

had once requested a land survey so that his people at St. Laurent on the South Branch could leave their migratory life of buffalo hunting to take up farming.⁸ Several men had written of this land's agricultural potential: military officer William Francis Butler had described the country as rich and "fair to the [farmer's] eye;"⁹ botanist John Macoun had said its parts were excellent for agriculture;¹⁰ Member of Parliament James Trow had called it a land where all husbandmen, "by industry, thrift, and economy," might prosper.¹¹ Wheeler was to prove their forecasts true.

But first he had to secure money for his ocean passage. He worked the winter of 1884-85 at odd jobs, including the salvaging of cargo from a French schooner wrecked off his native island, from which he carried the goods in bags up the precipitous cliffs. On May 5, 1885, the seventeen-year-old set sail for Canada with his mother and sister, who had decided to accompany him. Once on this continent, they boarded the new transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), which took them as far as Moose Jaw.

There they had to stay for the time being. A "war" had been going on, the last stages of the North-West Rebellion/Resistance, and the site of his relative's farm, near Clark's Crossing, was on the route which Major-General Frederick Middleton's troops had taken along the South Saskatchewan River to Batoche. Later, transportation there was booked for military supplies. So Wheeler remained in Moose Jaw for the rest of the summer, earning more money at odd jobs—another day, another dollar: that was the standard wage.

It was not till the following spring that he, on his own, travelled the 180 miles north by cart to his relative's homestead on the South Saskatchewan. The ice had not gone out of the river, and crossing it marked the end of the long journey. Over the next days Wheeler had a few narrow escapes traversing the rotting ice. The winter sleigh road over the river began to shred into long slivers even under the weight of one travelling on foot. Thus Wheeler was plunged into the icy water and, islander though he was, he had to struggle to avoid being swept away by the rapid current. On one occasion he was carrying groceries back to the homestead when he broke through. Foremost on his mind was saving a package of sugar, for it had cost a whole dollar. He held it over his head and made his way successfully to shore.¹²

Now came his first experience at farming. His relative had prepared thirty acres for seeding. Together, they broadcast some wheat and dragged willow brush across the planting to cover the seed. While it was growing, Wheeler harvested hay, first cutting it with a scythe, then raking it by hand. All this hard work brought him no nearer to owning his own homestead, however. So after two years he returned to Moose Jaw to earn some hard cash.¹³ He did construction work for the CPR, stacked buffalo bones for shipment and beat

carpets. In his leisure moments he tended a little garden of his own in what would later become Moose Jaw Park.

In 1890, he filed a homestead in the Clark's Crossing area about eighteen miles north of Saskatoon. The land was right on the west bank of the South Saskatchewan, and one corner of the farm ran right into the river itself. Perhaps that was why, in moving there, he travelled by means of a most unusual conveyance. His older brother Percy had come out from England the year before, and it was he who had constructed an eighteen-foot boat. This was mounted on a regular wagon, in place of a box, and loaded with supplies: flour, utensils, cook stove, carpentry tools, clothing, two tents, and one chair. Pulled by a pair of oxen, the boat-wagon left Moose Jaw for the distant homestead, Seager walking alongside, his mother, with him now, riding "midship" (his sister had her own work; Percy decided to go to Brandon). The boat would come in handy for river crossings.

Seager had previously made a trip out to the farm, so the young homesteader, twenty-two years old, probably knew the best place for a provisional home. It was right in the side of the river bank in a dugout with upright poles for walls and a sod roof. Next summer he could build something better, a real log house with willow lathes and mud plaster. In the meantime there was plenty to do, build a stable, cut and stack hay, haul firewood and plow land for seeding. After all, he was a real farmer now, on his own, and the success of his undertaking was up to him alone.

Wheeler realized that progress was, as he later wrote, "a gradual, step-by-step process."¹⁴ Having ready cash for improvements was still a problem. Although he had initially borrowed two hundred dollars from the Temperance Colony at Saskatoon to get under way and later another fifty dollars to buy a cow,¹⁵ he needed yet more money for staples and farm machinery. It was for this reason that he undertook to ride, by horseback, the seventy-five miles to Humboldt in a single day in order to work on a broken telegraph line. Sitting in a saddle, he found, was not his *forté* (remember he had *walked* from Moose Jaw), and he thought he might never be able to sit again.

A better cash job was the old standby of gathering buffalo bones. The railroad had reached Saskatoon that year, facilitating the shipment of bones to processing plants. They were bought up at eight dollars a ton. The coming of the rail also meant that grain could be shipped east. Grant MacEwan in his book *The Sod-busters*, says that Wheeler hauled his first load of wheat to Saskatoon in midwinter, with the temperature at thirty-five below, Fahrenheit, and sold it for twenty-five cents a bushel.¹⁶ At that rate dry bones were the better crop.

Still, farming had its rewards. When one wheat crop was harvested, the threshers from another district

stayed the night, and stayed up all night, for Seager and his brother Percy, who was now there as well, had got out their concertina and banjo respectively and played till dawn. "We never went to bed," Seager later recalled.¹⁷

Although Wheeler "proved up" on his homestead (that is, met the requirements for obtaining full title to it) and remained there seven years, he was not entirely satisfied with its location. In the spring of 1897, Percy secured an abandoned homestead five miles east of Rosethorn, and Seager, along with his mother, decided to head that way too. There was a 190-acre farm nearby, one mile closer to town, which he could buy from the CPR for three dollars an acre. He took another loan, made the deal and settled on the southwest quarter of Section 3, Township 43A, Range 2, west of the Third Meridian.¹⁸ It was this farm which would make history, producing for its owner the world's best wheat in international competition on five separate occasions.

All that, however, was a few years in the future. Again, he built a sod-roofed house, made stables and plowed fields. He also planted trees, a variety of balsam poplar being his favourite, but he did not neglect the Manitoba maple—his acreage would one day be called "Maple Grove Farm." It would be his permanent home till retirement, and yet at the time he was always in danger of losing it through foreclosure. He took out more loans from the railway agent and the bank in order to keep things afloat. Gradually, "step-by-step," the farmyard took on the look of an oasis as he included an orchard of fruit trees: plums, apples, cherries, and grapes too. Eventually over the years the orchard, which was merely a hobby, was expanded to sixty acres. A hired man who worked there said the sight, when all the trees were in blossom in June, was a pink and white cloud.¹⁹

Wheeler liked growing things—indeed, he had a green thumb—but it was mostly hard work. This effort bore results in the fine crops he was beginning to grow. He picked over all his seed carefully by hand, often at evening and into the night, by the dim light of a coal-oil lamp. He worked till his eyes were sore, but he planted good seed and kept detailed records of his crops. The yields were outstanding when there was not an early frost. He was sowing the Red Fife wheat, which was slow to ripen and subject to freezing. Then he sent for some earlier ripening Preston wheat from the Central Experimental Farm at Ottawa. It went sixty bushels to the acre but shattered easily. There was still room for improvement.

About this time, L.H. Newman, the secretary of the Canadian Seed Growers' Association, paid Wheeler a visit. Wheeler's attempts to grow pure seed were gaining attention. It was a fortuitous meeting, for crops were ready for harvest, and, impressed as Newman was with Wheeler's experimental plots, the secretary could point out advanced techniques in selecting grains for

seed. Wheeler was only too eager to learn and from then on, as a new member of the Association, incorporated the most professional methods in his work.

He hand-selected heads from his plots twice, first to eliminate rogues or sports, then to obtain those heads which were both long (with many rows of spikelets) and broad (with many grains in each of the spikelets). The ripened heads were threshed in a sack with a stick, and the kernels themselves pored over to make a further selection, always the best of the best. It was painstaking work but with good dividends. Wheeler estimated that if only selected seed was used, the yield per acre could well be increased by five bushels.

or “useful,” the practice of growing the best crops in order to feed a hungry world. Wheeler himself was a “small” farmer, tilling only a quarter section of land at first, then eventually two and three quarters, but never a whole section. He felt this acreage was all a conscientious farmer could really husband, tend and care for with efficiency and affection.²⁰ Many passages in his book bear out this philosophy:

One may be cropping more acres than can be cropped profitably. What is wanted...is not more acres in crop, but better producing acres.

Simply to make the land black and put the seed into



Courtesy of the Saskatoon Public Library - Local History Room, PH 93-171.

Seager Wheeler atop a towering haystack.

What was particularly valuable about Wheeler's research was that he first published his findings in selected journals, then in 1919 in a complete volume—*Seager Wheeler's Book on Profitable Grain Growing*. Others might gain from his quarter century of hard work and careful study. The title, however, should not be misconstrued. He was not advocating better farming practices so that individual farmers could make more money; the “profitable” of his title meant “beneficial”

the soil indiscriminately without any well-defined method and purpose will not do.

The soil is ours to make or mar, and we should aim to leave it...in as good or better condition than when it first came under our hand.²¹

Always there is the Biblical injunction that as we sow so shall we reap.

The book also contains a great deal of practical

advice about sound farming procedures not generally known at the time. For pioneer farmers breaking new land, Wheeler advised them to do so in spring when the moist sod would cause the fibres to rot. The sods should be four to five inches deep so that, when overturned, they would leave the necessary two inches of soil at the surface, which was all that was needed for recommended shallow seeding.

While some of Wheeler's methods became outdated with the manufacture of specialized machinery, the principles underlying them did not. For example, he devoted a chapter to the use of a plank drag, drawn behind slow-moving horses.²² But the principle that cultivated land needs packing, however it be done, in order to bring moisture in direct contact with the seed to ensure germination, is as valid as ever. And whether the seed be grain or weed, the principle holds true.

Wheeler's views on summer fallowing as a means of weed control are of special interest in these days when more and more farmers are practising zero tillage through use of modern equipment and herbicides. Without these aids, Wheeler sowed only summer fallow fields. He felt that having a field lie fallow every other year helped to restore nutrients taken out by crops in the intervening years (decomposing fibre and bacterial action in its natural cycle would see to that, although intertillage crops could play a role too).²³ His summer fallowing was not a matter "simply to make the land black." The purpose of the operation was to conserve moisture (by not growing a regular crop) and to kill weeds. Really, the two complemented each other since the weeds used up moisture.

To fight weeds, Wheeler found that the secret was to make them germinate well first (thus, a packer was indispensable too in summer fallowing) and then destroy them through timely cultivation. Should rain fall, the freshly cultivated land would soak up the moisture, and a new crop of weeds would be germinated and could again be dispensed with. Following this reasoning, he stated that there would be no point in a late fall cultivation. Rather, he recommended an earlier tillage that was both deep and surface-ridged to collect snow and prevent springtime erosion while providing a seed bed and a root bed for next year's crop. The process would "make" the soil, not "mar" it.

Wheeler was enunciating what he called the "Gospel of Good Farming": "One cannot force nature, but one can work hand-in-hand with her, and he who reads her aright cannot fail."²⁴ He practised what he preached, and his success was manifold.

In 1911, he exhibited his first wheat. That year he had secured a newly developed variety, Marquis, from Charles Saunders, the Dominion Cerealists. It ripened earlier than Red Fife and, unlike Preston, did not shatter when cut down. His small sample produced more than fifty-fold, and, combining it with other samples he had grown, he selected the best two bushels and entered the

product in the New York Land Show. At stake was the citation of "Wheat King."

There was a story behind the prizes offered. The president of the Great Northern Railway was providing a thousand-dollar gold cup for the best spring wheat grown in the United States. This stipulation eliminated any chance of a Canadian winning the spoils, so the CPR countered with a prize of its own—a thousand dollars in gold coins for the best spring wheat grown on the continent. Since newspapers widely reported the story, the competition was highly publicized, bringing singular honour to whoever should win the international prize. And win Seager Wheeler, whose Christian name meant Victor, did.²⁵

There have been many wheat kings since that time, but to win on this fêted occasion was a special honour. And the award had added significance. It showed that the best wheat anywhere could be grown on the Canadian prairies, and this fact could be advertised by governments and railways to draw immigrants world-wide to settle there. It was just what the Canadian government in Ottawa needed to promote its policy of opening up the West. Wheeler was a hero locally, nationally and internationally, and reporters came out for interviews and pictures, while telegrams and letters of congratulations poured in. Unassuming, Wheeler took it all in stride: with the thousand dollars in prize money he could now pay off the mortgage on his farm and continue with his experiments for better grains.²⁶

The two following years were not good ones for raising any kind of crop, let alone prize wheat. The first, 1912, was marked by drought; 1913 brought hail. Then in 1914 Wheeler was crowned world wheat king again at the International Farm Congress in Wichita, Kansas, with a sample of Marquis. Marquis won for him once more the next year at the Congress in Denver, Colorado.

The year 1916 brought Wheeler his fourth world championship, this time at the Farm Congress in El Paso, Texas. In a way it was as remarkable a win as his first. There was one of the most widespread and devastating hailstorms on record in the Rosthern area that August. Windows of houses were splintered to bits, chimneys blown down, barns flattened, and farm crops destroyed utterly. So Wheeler exhibited wheat threshed the previous year, a variety he had developed himself that he called Kitchener. To win in this manner was a double achievement, and the new grain's development was yet another story.

Wheeler had found his "Kitchener" wheat growing as a single-plant mutant in a field of Marquis in 1911. He saved the head, curious to see how it would produce, and, through husbanding and further selection over the next years, developed a seed that ripened just as early as Marquis but produced at least some half dozen bushels more per acre. Further, it stood up well (it did not lean over and so had a better chance to escape minor hail),

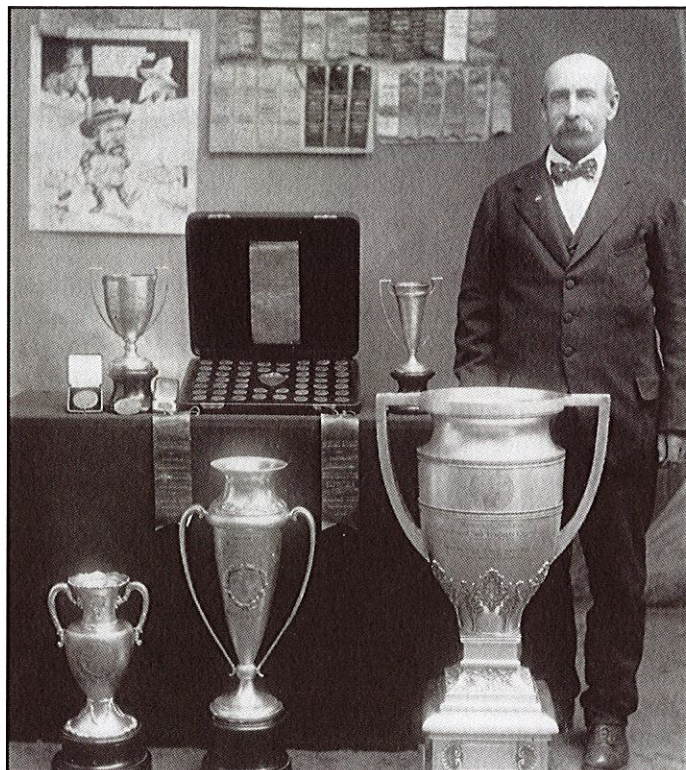
and, when mature, the stalks took on a rich purple colouring below the heads and also just above the ground—the “rainbow” banding that farmers like to see along the edge of a grain field. When harvested, Kitchener wheat threshed out more easily than Marquis, yielding plump, smooth kernels.

In 1918, Wheeler repeated his “double” achievement of 1916 with his fifth world wheat title, won at the International Soil Products Exposition in Kansas City, Missouri, when he exhibited another variety of his own development, Red Bobs, originated out of Bobs, a white wheat which came from Australia. Wheeler had secured a sample a decade earlier, and, in growing it a few times, noticed some red grains, the result of a natural cross between the original Bobs and other wheats growing on his farm. That was in 1910. As usual, he made a series of careful selections over the years (the hail in fact did some culling of its own) and in time developed a strain that not only ripened two weeks earlier than Marquis (and Kitchener) but also out yielded it. The secret, apparently, to its high yield was its being free of “tip burn,” the absence of grain in the very tip of each head. In Marquis the tip was somewhat injured in pushing out of its sheath so that the top dried up, producing no seed there. This defect did not occur in Red Bobs, Wheeler discovered.

Along with Kitchener and Red Bobs, Wheeler also in those same years isolated a strain of Marquis, called 10B, which proved productive as well. His winning of five world wheat championships not only brought personal honour to him, it also led settlers to the Canadian prairies and provided them with varieties of grain to plant in order to make their farming “profitable” (Kitchener and Red Bobs were used extensively throughout the West, and 10B at one time represented most of the wheat grown). In doing so, he helped to make Western Canada the bread basket of the world. Indeed, had his grains been rust resistant in addition to their other excellent qualities, they might well have remained the ideal wheats.

Wheeler won awards for other crops as well: barley, oats, field peas, and potatoes. His orchard became a nursery in which he developed hardy fruits suitable to Saskatchewan’s climate, including crabapples and cherry-plum hybrids.²⁷ The Dominion Government appreciated the value of his work and awarded him a subsidy to continue.²⁸

Unfortunately, Wheeler’s mother did not live to see him win his international awards and championships. She died in 1906, after living almost a decade on the farm at Rosthern. Two years later, Wheeler, an older bachelor by then, married, and he and his wife had a family of four daughters.²⁹ It was while raising this family that Wheeler won his many citations, and pictures of him standing beside his prize-winning crops sometimes show the young girls gleefully standing there too.



Courtesy of the Saskatoon Public Library - Local History Room, LH 1089.

Wheeler with his many awards at the International Soil Products Exposition, 1918.

These were happy years for Wheeler, lovingly engrossed in his life’s work, a growing family about him and recognition of his achievements continuing. In 1920, Queen’s University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree; in 1935, the CPR gave him and Mrs. Wheeler a complimentary trip back to England to see his old birthplace; in 1943, King George VI made him a member of the Order of the British Empire. He was also esteemed in his own community, a largely Mennonite settlement of traditional farming stock begun just six years before he arrived. The town of Rosthern named its hockey and baseball teams the “Wheat Kings” (the hockey team was a champion too, winning the Intermediate A Provincial title in 1938, with Wheeler, the club president, cheering them through each round of playoffs).

When it was time to retire, in 1947, in his eightieth year, Wheeler held the usual farm auction sale. It is here that I wish to bring in a personal note, for the much-honoured man raised his world-acclaimed wheat in the same rural school district in which our family lived.³⁰ My mother’s father had harvested on his farm as a custom thresherman and is pictured doing so in *Profitable Grain Growing*.³¹ My father suffered the same complete devastation to his crop during the 1916 hailstorm that Wheeler did on his farm just two miles away. And years later when a sudden death among our kinfolk made it necessary for my mother to go to Prince Albert, it was Wheeler who kindly arranged that she be



Photograph by Leonard A. Hillyard.

Courtesy of the Saskatoon Public Library - Local History Room, LH 4472.

The Wheat Kings baseball team with Wheeler (far right).

driven there in his own Studebaker (as a preschooler, I was taken along).

So it was that after classes on the day of the auction I walked over to the Wheeler farmstead knowing that my parents would be there. Newspapermen from the city were also there to record the event. What I remember are the last items being sold, including a scrapbook of old funny papers which Wheeler had collected and put together. It was part of his humour to do so, and binding things into books was a hobby of his. He was never idle. He read a lot, discussed with others what he read,



Saskatchewan Archives Board, Star-Phoenix Collection, S-SP-b 3392-5.

The Wheat King inspects his subjects.

and took pictures of what he saw, developing and printing them himself. Even with the sale and retirement, his time would be occupied by his many interests.³²

Wheeler moved with his wife to Victoria on Vancouver Island to spend his last days.³³ He wanted to be an islander once more, close to the sea he had loved as a boy. There, in a white-stuccoed house, he lived to be almost ninety-four, tending a fine flower garden while hearing the waves roar and the gulls cry. With his death in 1961, his body was returned to Rosthern for burial in a little rural cemetery, open and free, with long grass stirring in the wind every summer, less than half mile from his farm home.³⁴

Over the years his name has not died. In the centennial year, 1967, his picture was hung in the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame in Toronto and some time later in Saskatchewan's Hall of Fame in Saskatoon. A University of Saskatchewan residence was named for him. Then, in 1990, a renovated railway station in Rosthern became the Station Arts Centre/Seager Wheeler Place, a facility for promoting music, painting, crafts, and arts generally, sometimes with a wheat theme. Its first major production was the specially commissioned drama *Harvest Moon*, based on Wheeler's farming legacy, which played to packed houses for several summers.³⁵

Finally, in 1992, a "friends of the farm" organization, under the chairmanship of Larry Janzen of Rosthern, was formed to restore and preserve the original Wheeler farm site. Called the Seager Wheeler Farm Historic Society Inc., it already has accomplished much, including the annual staging of a Seeding Trends demonstration day. It is hoped that the site, officially opened on June 15, 1996, will become an international educational and tourism attraction. That it was designated a National Historic Site on August 3, 1966, means that the farm will be preserved forever.

If Seager Wheeler was once an inch too short for the British Navy, he obtained great stature as a farmer and plant breeder in the Saskatchewan Valley. A gentle man, he worked hard with a twinkle in his eye. He earned the respect of all who knew him, not only by his widespread achievements in agriculture but also by his everyday life of simple honesty, integrity and dedication. He was a pioneer.

Endnotes

1. The event took place on May 30, 1977, two miles south of St. Isidore-de-Bellevue, in the Minichinas Hills. The Almighty Voice story, a year-and-a-half manhunt which resulted in seven deaths, has been told by several writers, including Frank W. Anderson, *Almighty Voice* (Calgary: Frontier Publishing, 1971); and Pierre Berton, *The Wild Frontier* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), 209-33.
2. For details on the life of Wheeler, I gained much first hand information from family and friends since we were all members of the same community. My older brother and sister attended the same rural school with his daughters, while I was a fellow student there with his grandson. (During the 1950s, the present chairman of the Seager Wheeler Farm Historic Society Inc., now a seed grower himself, was my student at Rosthern.) A further personal note is found in the main text towards the end of the article. Thus, pertinent information was supplied by two of Wheeler's daughters, Isabelle Blatz of Rosthern and Elizabeth R. Wheeler of Saskatoon, as well as by Rodney Blatz and former hired man John Martens, both of Rosthern. Elizabeth provided a written account in "Seager Wheeler," *Old and New Furrows: The Story of Rosthern*, comp. Rosthern Historical Society (Rosthern, Sk: Rosthern Historical Society, n.d.). Further details were gleaned from the Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Dr. Seager Wheeler Papers, which include correspondence, miscellaneous documents, addresses, articles and four chapters of clippings. A second SAB source, a seventy-three-page document entitled "The Memoirs of Dr. Seager Wheeler: An Autobiography," proved invaluable. Most Western Canadian histories devote at most a paragraph or two to Wheeler's achievements, while some histories neglect to mention him at all. The longest account is a thirty-nine page biographical sketch by Hopkins Moorhouse, "Seager Wheeler: Champion Grower of Grain," which serves as an introduction to Wheeler's own book *Seager Wheeler's Book of Profitable Grain Growing* (Winnipeg: Grain Grower's Guide, 1919). Historian Grant MacEwan, a personal friend of Wheeler, included a short chapter on the wheat king in two of his books: *The Sodbusters* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948) and *Fifty Mighty Men* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1982). A third book by MacEwan, *Harvest of Bread* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1969), provides three pages on Wheeler's place in agricultural history, while C.V. Faulkner, *Pen and Plow* (Winnipeg: Public Press, 1976) includes a captioned photograph concerning Wheeler in this context. Farm journals, of course, have paid tribute to Wheeler with articles: for example, John R. McMahon, "The Wheat Wizard of Canada," *The Country Gentleman*, 6 November 1920; R.D. Colquette, "A Grain Grower's Pilgrimage," *The Country Guide and Nor'-West Farmer*, August 1937; and Rupert Ramsay, "World Wheat Champion: the Story of Seager Wheeler," *Free Press Weekly Prairie Farmer*, 15 November 1961. These written accounts were also general sources of information.
3. Moorhouse, "Seager Wheeler," 9-10. Most of the particulars of Wheeler's boyhood were obtained from Moorhouse's account.
4. A memorandum from the employer states that Wheeler "has been in our employ during the past fifteen months and that we have found him to be honest, attentive, & willing in his duties." See SAB, Wheeler Papers, "W.H. Smith & Son to whomever it may concern," 13 October 1883.
5. Elizabeth R. Wheeler, "Seager Wheeler," 599. The man's name was Gus Lamonde. He was a cousin of Wheeler's mother.
6. Henry Youle Hind, *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Edition of 1858*, 2 vols. (1860; reprint, Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig, 1971), xiii; John Palliser, *The Papers of the Palliser Expedition 1857-1860*, ed. Irene M. Spry (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1968), 18. Both Hind and Palliser made official surveys of the area.
7. Nisbet's mission was the beginnings of Prince Albert in 1866. See Gary William David Abrams, *Prince Albert: The First Century 1866-1966* (Prince Albert: Council of the City of Prince Albert, 1966), 2-10.
8. Dumont made the request in 1878. See George Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and His Lost World* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1975), 121.
9. William Francis Butler, *The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure through Canada in 1872* (1873; reprint, Edmonton: M.G. Hurtig, 1967), 231.
10. John Macoun, *Manitoba and the Great North-West* (Guelph, On: World Publishing, 1882), 91.
11. James Trow, *Manitoba and North West Territories* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1878), 78.
12. SAB, "Memoirs," 70.
13. On his arrival in Moose Jaw, his mother did not recognize him because he was so bitten by mosquitoes and his face "was black from the smoke of camp fire and dust of the trail." See SAB, "Memoirs," 28.
14. Elizabeth R. Wheeler, "Seager Wheeler," 601.
15. The cow, named Bossie, was purchased for forty dollars from W. Bate, Saskatoon, and the remaining ten dollars used to buy a single walking plow. See SAB, Wheeler Papers, "Loan from Temperance Colonization Company, 1890-1903," and "Memoirs," 34.
16. MacEwan, *Sodbusters*, 175.
17. Elizabeth R. Wheeler, "Seager Wheeler," 601.
18. They arrived at Percy's farm during the evening of May 30, 1897, the very day that cannon fire ended the Almighty Voice affair in a poplar bluff to the northeast. Wheeler did not enter into a formal agreement to purchase his land till 1898. See SAB, Wheeler Papers, "Address Given by Dr. Wheeler at Complimentary banquet on His Seventieth Birthday," 6 January 1938 [Rosthern, Sk], 1.
19. John Martens, pers. comm. Martens worked for Wheeler in the mid-1940s.
20. Tim Castle, "John Martens Recalls Seager Wheeler Memories," *The Saskatchewan Valley News*, 31 October 1990.
21. Seager Wheeler, *Profitable Grain Growing*, 47-48, 42, 46.
22. Note that Wheeler also had a government contract to plank drag the highway from his farm to Rosthern for a period of about six years. See SAB, Wheeler Papers, "Address ... at Complimentary Banquet," 2.
23. Seager Wheeler, *Profitable Grain Growing*, 102-3.
24. *Ibid.*, 141.
25. Wheeler's great-grandmother's surname was Seager. Cf. variant spellings of "victory" in several languages: *sigor* (Anglo-Saxon), *seger* (Swedish), *Sejr* (Danish), and *der Sieg* (German).
26. MacEwan, *Harvest of Bread*, 84, describes Wheeler's reception of the prize money at a banquet in Calgary: "With twinkles in his eyes, the man from Rosthern then passed the money back to the railway official, saying: 'Thank you for the thousand dollars. Now you take it as the final payment on my farm which I bought from the C.P.R.'" Wheeler's gesture, of course, was symbolic -- the payment was made later. the prize money, in fifty twenty-dollar gold coins, came in a velvet-lined, morocco-bound case, and his immediate concern was how to get the money home safely. With the publicity of the presentation, it might well have been stolen by thieves along the way. Wheeler obtained a small cotton bag, stuffed the coins into it and hung it inside his waistband for the trip back. See SAB, Wheeler Papers, "Address ... at Complimentary Banquet," 3.
27. Wheeler shipped out fruit tree seedlings across the prairies, and this letter of thanks from the daughter of well-known Saskatchewan artist Gus Kenderdine is typical:
Some sixteen years ago we sent to you for some apple tree seedlings -- you sent them -- and also a Linda crab and a very nice letter, telling us that we would have to wait many years for our apples but in the meantime the Linda crab, which you sent with your compliments, would provide us with plenty of crabapples. How many crabapples it has produced, no-one could imagine -- no matter how often the others fail to produce, the Linda always gave us our winter jelly supply -- the yields have increased -- until it now supplies

jelly and fruit for all our neighbours -- this year the boughs are bent to the ground with their weight of fruit -- it has truly been a wonderful tree.

I often thought through the years, that I would write and thank you but somehow never got it done -- though I never miss a fall without thinking of your kindness to perfect strangers.

See SAB, Wheeler Papers, Mrs. May Beamish to Seager Wheeler, 20 August, 1995.

28. Wheeler was appointed to a specially created position of Experimental Sub-Station Superintendent in the federal government's experimental farm system, his farm, in effect, becoming a sub-station in the system. The appointment began 21 March 1932, with a starting remuneration of \$2220.00 a year. See Wheeler Papers, Robert Weir (Minister of Agriculture, Ottawa) to Seager

Wheeler, 14 December 1931.

29. Wheeler married Agnes Lily Martin of Maymont, Saskatchewan, originally of Leicester, England. The daughters born to them were May Wheeler and Ella Rempel, both deceased, and Isabelle Blatz and Elizabeth Wheeler.
30. This was Bergthal School District No. 466.
31. Seager Wheeler, *Profitable Grain Growing*, 349.
32. Elizabeth Wheeler recalls her father's "many interests" in Bernadette Harman, "Mover and Shaker: Seager Wheeler," *The Saskatchewan Valley News*, 6 October 1988.
33. Sheila McIvor, "Grain King Takes It Easy," *Family Herald and Weekly Star*, 20 August 1947. His address in Victoria was 316 Linden Avenue.
34. This is Bergthal Cemetery on Provincial Highway No. 312.
35. The play, subtitled "The Spirit of Seager Wheeler," was written by Rod McIntyre.