

For thousands of years, I've been here. Near Mountainside, actually. Mostly, I grew grasses and medicines to feed the bison. The roots, under my mixed prairie grasses, were amazing. They went down as deep as 2 meters.

Then, in the late 1800s, humans started dragging sharp, heavy plowshares through me. Turning my beautiful plants upside down; opening me to the sun and wind. These new humans were intent on growing one plant. Wheat. From fence to fence. I did my best to push up other plants. But the more I pushed, the more they plowed.

One of my farmers, though, didn't think only about how much wheat their family could grow. A tall, quiet fella. Fawcett W. Ransom. Came to Canada in 1896, with two brothers. Fawcett was 16 when they arrived in SW Manitoba; when he applied for this land. I was his first love. Coming from Bedford England, where the industrial revolution was creating big cities and displacing farmers, he and his brothers considered Turtle Mountain the land of milk and honey. Once settled, Fawcett married hard working Edna Arde. Together, they created two children and a tangle of grandchildren to work and wander over me.

We grew good crops. Problem was, Fawcett had to deliver the harvested grain straight to an elevator. We owned no storage buildings. The elevators took full advantage, offering low prices; causing families and communities to struggle.

Fawcett wasn't one to complain. He heard Saskatchewan farmers were organizing to challenge the companies; wanting to create their own companies. Keep profits for themselves. Fawcett was all in. While Edna managed the farm, he attended meetings as distant as Calgary. Became the first secretary of Manitoba Pool Elevators. A position he held for 28 years!

Fawcett would pace as he told me stories. About elevator and rail companies; how they worked with governments, against farmers.

And how WWI changed things. More wheat was needed, so the government took over managing the wheat supply. For two years farmers were paid well. But after the war, government stepped away, and prices dropped like a slimy salamander.

Farmers were fed up. Banding together, they started their own elevator companies, in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Fawcett traveled around Manitoba tirelessly, meeting farmers, encouraging them to sign five year contracts with the Pool. He asked each farmer to give 2 cents per bushel to finance new elevators. Soon Manitoba Pool owned two thirds of elevators in Manitoba!

This spirit of cooperation overflowed. Citizens like Fawcett created Credit Unions, Co-op food stores, the National Farmer's Union and eventually the New Democratic Party. It was all about honouring small farm families and building up their rural communities.

One more thing! My Fawcett, also, led a movement to save ME. It pained him to see me blowing in the wind. It seemed important to protect me for future farm families. So he spoke at conferences, on radio and through newspapers, about the importance of soil conservation.

Eventually, Fawcett slowed down. Charming! Watching him lead grandchildren to a big tree beside the creek. The kids'd eagerly find places on a long, horizontal branch, and listen as Grandpa told stories, about his life, about the birds, the small animals; about me! The land of milk and honey.

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