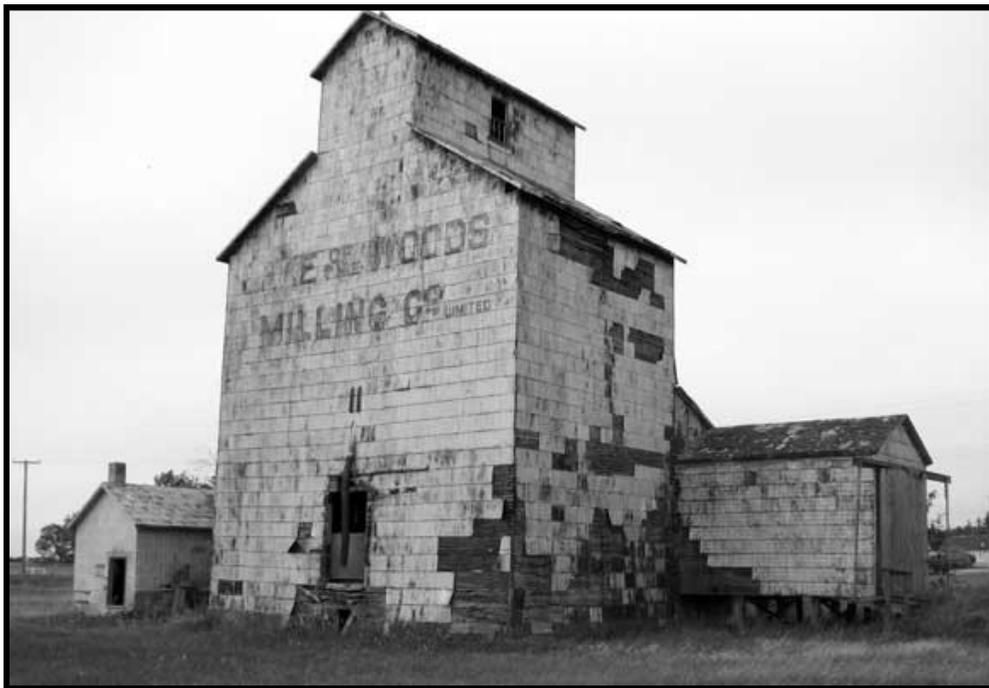


Elva Elevator

~1892—Present

The oldest remaining elevator in Canada!



▲ The elevator in Elva still stands after being built over a century ago.

Grain elevators are an age-old symbol of western Canada – they stand like sentinels over ghost towns, communities and endless acres of farmland. The grain elevator was, and still is, the link between the farmer and the market, providing storage and serving as a shipping centre for bulk grain.

However, the old-style wooden elevator does not have a secure future. Today super silos have taken over the job previously done by small, in-town elevators. Many of the old, and by comparison smaller, elevators

are being torn down – in Manitoba the rate is roughly one elevator every two months.

In this light, it is ever so much more impressive that one specific elevator has managed to survive to the present day. After the destruction of the Fleming elevator in Saskatchewan in 2010, the site of the oldest elevator in Canada became the small hamlet community of Elva, Manitoba. Elva is located halfway between Melita and Pierson

on the Canadian Pacific Railway line.

The elevator's construction dates sometime between 1892 and 1899 and displays a characteristic squat style which was used prior to 1910. This design sets it apart from other prairie elevators. It was built by the Lake of the Woods Milling Company of Winnipeg, which was incorporated in 1887 with the intention of building and operating a network of grain elevators throughout western Canada. Before the turn of the century, the Lake of the Woods Milling Co was one of Manitoba's top companies in the grain industry. The Lake of the Woods Elevator shared the business from the community of Elva with three other elevators, all built near the turn of the century and operated by different companies.

Since the 1890s there have been a few improvements to the building. A new foundation was built for the elevator sometime around 1950 and a new scale installed. Some suspect that the entire building was rebuilt at this time; however its historic squat design makes this

Currently there is an effort to preserve the Elva elevator

Left: The Elva Elevator, with the new Cargill Elevator in the distance.

Right: Matt Pedden served as the Lake of the Woods agent in Elva in 1912.



unlikely. Soon after, it became managed by the Ogilvie Milling Co when that company merged with Lake of the Woods Co in 1954. In 1959 it was purchased by Manitoba Pool Elevators, which closed the elevator in the late 1960s. The building was then sold to a private farmer. Despite its changing of hands several times, the title on the side of the building still reflects its original ownership by Lake of the Woods.

Today the old Lake of the Woods elevator shares its seat beside the railway with a United Grain Growers Elevator which is also inactive. The elevators, though now dormant, sit alongside an active Canadian Pacific Railway line. Elva continues to be a major grain-handling centre: in 2000 a large Agricore elevator was built near Elva with 14,500 metric tonnes of storage space. This facility was purchased by Cargill in 2007. In 2012 Cargill announced its intention of expanding the facility in order to accommodate storage capacity for 24,500 tonnes.

Currently there is an effort to preserve the Elva elevator, though exactly what its future will look like is unclear.

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The Growth of Elva

One of the first homesteaders in what came to be known as the district of Elva was H. J. Archibald and his family. They came from the east in 1882 and settled northwest of where Elva was later built. Archibald established a post office out of his home, which received the mail once a week from Brandon.

In 1891 James Skelton agreed to sell some of his land to the Canadian Pacific Railway, which was looking to continue the line west from Melita. An unincorporated village grew on a corner of Skelton's land. The community was later named after the first baby to be born in the district: Elva, the daughter of James Modeland and his wife.

Elva continued to grow, and by 1904 the community boasted a population of 100 people. Four years later the numbers had grown to 150 people, causing basis for a rumour that the community was at one time bigger than Melita. Elva seemed to be on the road to becoming a very important town—its elevators serviced farmers as far south as the international boundary. But the community's prosperity was not long-lived. Passenger service on the rail was terminated in 1959. In 1962 the stock yards by the tracks were demolished as it became more effective to ship cattle by road than rail. The railway continues to run

through Elva, however the town is but a shadow of what it was a hundred years ago. Today the village is home to a handful of buildings and eight residents.

The school in Elva is significant because it managed to survive consolidation. Built originally northwest of Elva, the school building was moved into Elva in 1898 where it was quickly outgrown. Rebuilt several times to provide more space, the school served as an Elementary school after 1965 until closing finally in 1974.

In 1989 the Women's institute of Elva put up a memorial cairn and flagpole to commemorate both the community and the school. The unveiling was attended by a large crowd of local people, former pupils and residents.

The community was named after the first baby born in the district

Top: Looking down Elva's main street in 1940
Bottom: The community of Elva, from the air looking west.

