

Stewart Sheaf Loader

In the fall of 2014, Mr. Bruce Black of the Brandon area let the Museum copy negatives of photographs taken around 1920 on the farms operated by the Black Family in the Brandon area. The Museum was able to digitize the images taken from the negatives. Photos in this period are not common as cameras and film was expensive. They were saved for special occasions which resulted in the photos from this time period being largely of people and family events. Photos of day to day agricultural activities are somewhat rare. The image here comes from this collection and shows the ladies visiting a Stewart sheaf loader working on one of the farms sometime around World War One.

The Stewart Sheaf Loader Company Ltd. owned an office and plant at 470 Martin Avenue in Winnipeg and appears to have operated between 1910 and sometime in the mid-1920s. Most of the company's output was sold in Western Canada and it appears sheaf loaders were not used to any great extent in the US.

The handling of sheaves was a sufficiently large enough problem that a number of pieces of equipment were developed to ease the problem. The Stewart Sheaf Loader was one such machine and offered the ability to load sheaves on a wagon faster and with less physical labor. The Stewart Sheaf Loader was a fairly simple machine as can be seen here. The machine was ground driven and operated with a four horse team. The machine had a slatted chain pickup that gathered the sheaves off the ground and carried them up to a cross elevator that was also fitted with a slatted chain. This cross elevator carried the sheaves higher and dropped them into a sheaf wagon. The frame of Stewart Sheaf Loaders was made of square steel tubing. Galvanized steel sheet formed the floors of the elevators with wooden boards forming the sides. There is some indication that the machines sold for \$500 a piece in 1913.

More than likely most farmers using a sheaf loader used a sheaf wagon design that featured a wooden basket type body. The right side of the basket was higher than the left side in an effort to maximize capacity and reduce the chances of sheaves being thrown over the wagon. The wagon was parked so the low side was beside the threshing machine. The low side lessened the job of pitching the sheaves into the thresher as the low side was usually parked against the threshing machine's feeder.

In the photo here, it appears the upper part of the high side of the sheaf wagon was made of page wire rather than wooden boards. This may have been done to reduce the weight of the body.

It has been suggested to the Museum that many veteran sheaf pitchers who loaded sheaf wagons by hand did so in a pattern so that the pitcher knew where to stand when pitching sheaves into the thresher and not be attempting to pitch a sheaf that he was standing on. Obviously with a wagon loaded by a Stewart, the sheaves were loaded helter-skelter onto the wagon so the pitcher could have more work unloading the wagon.

There are ads showing other pieces of labor saving sheaf handling equipment such as end dump sheaf wagons. There were three companies advertising end dump wagons in the 1913 Canadian Thresherman and Farmer magazine; Perfection, Maytag and Hart. As well, there is an ad for a threshing machine feeder with an feeder apron that dropped onto the ground. If a farmer had a loader, end dump wagons and a dropped feeder apron then handling sheaves would have reduced significantly the physical labor of handling sheaves.

The Museum has three Stewart Sheaf Loaders in the collection including one early machine which features a wooden deck on the pickup elevator. The Stewart machines were built with a frame of square steel tubing and flat iron so they would have been a very handy source of useful steel for repairs when the machine was no longer needed. So for three machines to have survived intact for donation to the Museum indicates Stewart Sheaf Loaders were sold in respectable numbers.

On Sunday July 31, 2016 the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and the Manitoba Agricultural Museum will host Harvesting Hope: a World Record to Help the Hungry. To help end global hunger, over 500 volunteers from 100 communities across Canada will operate 125 early 20th century threshing machines to harvest a 100 acre crop of wheat. When in operation, the equipment will require over four football fields of space. For more information on attending or how to participate please visit <http://www.harvestinghope.ca/> or follow us on twitter @harvesthope2016

The Manitoba Agricultural Museum is open year round and operates a website at <http://ag-museum.mb.ca/> which can provide visitors with information on Museum including location and hours of operation.

