

**In the Year of our Lord, 1915... ( a graphic account written in 1949 by R. J. Ackley on how the Garden City Co-op began. It was also printed in the History of Finney County, Kansas - Volume II published by the Finney County Kansas Historical Society, Inc.)**



In the year of our Lord 1915, after years of dissatisfaction as to margins charged by grain merchants in our city, a small group of farmers got their heads together and applied for a state charter. This application was signed by A.R. Towles, T.M. Jones, D.D. Moore, C.P. Hamilton, and R.J. Ackley. The charter was granted July 6, 1915. It contained the names of 20 stockholders, and among other things, gave them permission to merchandise their own grain.

Our capital was limited, but we proceeded to do business as best we could. Even the farmers themselves were suspicious and doubtful, and a few even refused to pay their notes given for stock. As a result, we were under-financed and moved slowly indeed. However, a few maintained faith, even to the extent of signing personal notes for operating purposes.

Now at a time when the going was hard, there came upon the scene, a chain store promoter, one Dr. Ball, who preyed upon our membership and led them to believe he had something so much better, that he gathered up about \$4,000 in one day. Our association had been able to collect less than \$2,000.00 in two years. Things became so discouraging, that I, as Chairman called a stockholders meeting, laid the facts on the table and asked if they wished to pay their notes or disband. They voted to disband, except one man, T.M. Jones, who voted no. Jones and I had signed the note. The Ball promoters sold stock enough to pay the \$13,000 note and as much more to stock a few groceries in the little cement block house. In less than 60 days, the promoter disappeared with the balance. So much for the first attempt.

After two years of exploitation while the Co-ops were sleeping, there came a jolt that opened their eyes. Crops were not too good those days. However, we raised a

lot of cane seed. This was during World War I. The manager of our old line elevator learned early that cane seed had found a new use, being worth \$7.00 cwt. for dye stuff. The manager stepped out and contracted all the cane seed at \$1.50 cwt. Farmers' eyes being jarred open, they went into huddle again and obtained another charter on August 16, 1919. Incorporators were: T.L. Crabb, C.E. Adams, R.J. Ackley, Henry Meyer and T.M. Jones.

Our sleep and punishment had taught us a vivid lesson. We all seemed to have new vigor and willingness to put in more money. Instead of having \$2,000.00, we soon gathered \$12,000.00. We bought our same elevator and started again. Business picked up and we were on the march.

Notwithstanding bank failures, we moved on. During the dust years, our savings were light, but with the return of production, our savings have been much more than worth while.

During those years, we became interested in forming regionals, all of which have been a wonderful help in both buying and selling. The Hutchinson Co-op Commission Company, where we market our grain, and in which we have earned a working interest, has returned to us several hundred thousand dollars in cash. Our last year's earnings there were \$85,000; our original and only investment being \$100.00.

We are also a member of, and have an interest in, the Consumers Co-op Association of Kansas City, Missouri, having been a member since it was organized. With others, we own five oil refineries, also lumber mills, canning plants, fertilizer plants, and 1,000 producing oil wells with thousands of acres of leases. This organization last year did \$54,000,000 worth of business and had a savings of \$8,300,000.

My idea of the Co-op's place in business is to provide a balance wheel for industry. It is not to put anybody out of business, but to hold those in line who would profiteer. All we hope for is to make good old democratic competition function.

The managers over the years have been: Howard Everly, Frank Beaty, Walter Hopkins, Eugene Kelley, Elbert Anderson, and Herb Johnson.

We now have here at home 1,500,000 bushels of grain storage. The future looks bright in spite of much unfair opposition. Our success in the future depends not so much on how hard others fight us, as how well we conduct our own business and the type of service we render to our membership. - R. J. Ackley