

R.J. Ackley—Garden City Co-op Founder



R. J. Ackley is known as the father of cooperatives in Finney County. He was instrumental in forming the Garden City Cooperative Equity Exchange in 1919. He also helped organize the Garden City Co-op Oil Company, a subsidiary of the Equity Exchange. He retired from the Board of Directors of the Co-op in 1958, after serving on its Board from the beginning until 1958. He served as Chairman the majority of those years.

In 1929, R. J. ("Bob") met Mr. Howard Cowden who had conceived of a regional wholesale cooperative. The Garden City Co-op along with five other Co-ops joined together to form Union Oil Company. The original membership was \$100. By 1930, there were 40 more Co-op members. In 1936, the name was changed to Consumers Cooperative Association (CCA). Mr. Ackley served continuously on the Board of Directors of C.C.A. for 28 years, at which time he was then designated an honorary lifetime director of that organization. (On September 1, 1966,

Consumers Cooperative Association became Farmland Industries, Inc.)

Mr. Ackley was one of the leading promoters of the Southwest Kansas Community Hospitals and a clinic was constructed in 1950. He was county commissioner for many years and his accomplishments there were too well known to require enumeration. It was during his administration that a new court house was built. "Bob" was listed as a republican, but he was very independent and all who knew him knew that no one did his thinking for him.

Robert Johnson Ackley was born on October 10, 1873 near Winchester, Kansas. His father, Uriah "Pete" Sanford Ackley, was a Civil War veteran and did scout work along the Santa Fe Trail. His mother, Margaret (Varner) Ackley, died when he was seven years old. Around that time he had become acquainted with a sixteen year old boy named John Noffsinger. John told his parents, Peter Noffsinger, Jr and Margaret (Martin) Noffsinger, "Bob Ackley is a good kid, but he is going to get in trouble running around without any supervision." At his urging, the Noffsingers took him in at the age of seven as a foster child. Robert "Bob" Ackley was raised around Effingham. After graduating from Effingham High School in 1894, he soon began farming, first in northeast Kansas in Nemaha County, then in Osborne County.

In February 22, 1898, R. J. Ackley married Adelia May Grable. They had one son, Floyd. In March 1906, the Ackley's moved to Finney County by covered wagon and two years later bought a tract of land 12 miles northwest of Garden City which he developed into a shorthorn cattle ranch.

In 1915, a group of farmers organized to form The Garden City Cooperative Equity Exchange. Key organizers were R. J. Ackley, T. M. Jones, and C. E. Adams. The charter was granted on July 6, 1915 containing the names of 20 stockholders. They purchased a little wooden elevator with no storage capacity but equipped to handle grain. Times were rough, and in 1917, the group voted to disband (all but R. J. Ackley and T. M. Jones). But, in 1919, the farmers realized the importance of the cooperative, and came back to R. J. Ackley and T. M. Jones asking them to reorganize the cooperative. A new charter was granted on August 16, 1919.

Among his other activities, Mr. Ackley served many years as a director of National Cooperative Refinery Association at McPherson, Kansas and of the Farmers Commission Company, a grain terminal co-op, at Hutchinson, Kansas.

After serving on the Board of Directors for the Garden City Co-op for 39 years, he retired from the Board at the Co-op's 39th Annual Meeting in May 1958. At the Annual Meeting, he was made an honorary lifetime Board Member. The Co-op also honored him as a "farmer, stockman, and Co-op Philosopher".

Robert J. Ackley passed away on November 3, 1958 following a brief illness. He was 85.

R. J. Ackley's hobbies included writing, and many of his articles have appeared in print. Click on the links below to view some of the articles he wrote over the years or for articles written about Mr. Ackley and his accomplishments over the years. There is also an article on T. M. Jones, a strong ally of Mr. Ackley's in organizing the Garden City Co-op.

RJ'S WRITINGS

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.)

Cooperative Buying Makes Farm Dollars Go Farther (The original publication is not known but looks to be a newspaper article written by R. J. Ackley which was dated 1931. The first page of the article is missing, but it is still an interesting article.)

The Contest of the Age - Cooperation versus Competition (The original publication is not known but is believed to have been published in March 1933 according to a note on the document.)

Why We Need Co-ops (The publication and date are not known but looks to have been published by Consumers Cooperative Association.)

When in the course of human events... (What this article was written for is unknown but it was written by R. J. Ackley on November 28, 1948.)

Co-operation {Not Politicians} Will Solve the Farm Problem (The publication and date are not known but it was written by R.J. Ackley.)

"Mr. Co-operative" in Our Section Lived on Farm All His Life (Published in the High Plains Journal - Volume 12 Number 28 on Oct. 31, 1957. Looks to be an interview with R. J. Ackley about his life and the start up of the Garden City Co-op.)

R. J. Ackley, "Farmer and Co-op Philosopher" Dies (Published in the Cooperative Consumer newspaper, Vol. 25, No. 21, Dated November 15, 1958.)

Friend and Counselor (Published in the Cooperative Consumer newspaper, Vol. 25, No. 21, Dated November 15, 1958, written by Howard Cowden about R. J. Ackley.)

Letter of Recognition and Accomplishments (Written to Delia and Floyd Ackley by W. G. Hopkins (a former Garden City Co-op manager) on November 8, 1958 upon the death of R. J. Ackley.)

R.J. Ackley (Write-up in "Yearbook and Biographical Sketches: Garden City, Kansas - 1936")