

# Back to the FARM

## Farmers are claiming Central Alberta's doomed pioneer wooden grain elevators

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When Red Deer's last pioneer wooden grain elevator was topped in the downtown core in 1992, it was viewed as an end of an era.

Gone was a vital component of local history, it was thought.

Nearly 14 years later, the demolition derby of the classic pioneer prairie sentinels across Alberta has continued to the point where there are now only about 150 left in the entire province.

But lost in the public consciousness is one elevator, an original Alberta Wheat Pool model, that still stands just three kilometres east of the Red Deer city limits.

The structure, once located on elevator row at 5225 51 St., was saved by local farming legend Jim Morrisroe in 1962. At the time Morrisroe did not consider the historical significance of the elevator, which was originally built in the mid-1920s. He wanted the structure for extra grain storage at his farm.

However, to claim his elevator and move it back to his farm Morrisroe did not simply do it the conventional way by hiring a hauling crew to transport the entire elevator on a flatbed truck.

Morrisroe dismantled the entire structure board by board over the winter.

He relied on the expertise of elevator legend Joe Bourque and his son Ralph. The elder Bourque, who was Morrisroe's close friend and neighbour, was responsible for building hundreds of grain elevators across western Canada.

"My first job was to climb to the top and remove the copper wire," said Ralph, who now lives in Pincher Creek. "It was a make-work project. It was a fun experience but dad knew what to do because of all the elevators he had built."

Morrisroe and the Bourques took the winter of 1962 and 1963 to dismantle the elevator and haul all the materials back to the farm. It then took the trio another two years to rebuild it, slightly modified to provide extra strength and capacity.

Morrisroe passed away in 1995, but the elevator still stands on the farm.

His daughter, Gail Morrisroe-Wyman, says the elevator is still being used for storage.

"It was a gargantuan task," said Morrisroe-Wyman, adding she hopes the elevator will never be torn down.

"Dad was a builder and was always trying to build things. At the age of 80 he was building a cabin at the lake."

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