



Grain Dust Dreams (Excelsior Editions)

David W. Tarbet

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Explores the history and present-day reality of grain elevators on the Great Lakes.

Grain Dust Dreams tells the story of terminal grain elevators—concrete colossi that stand in the middle of a deep river of grain that they lift, sort, and send on. From their invention in Buffalo, New York, through their present-day operation in Thunder Bay, Ontario, David W. Tarbet examines the difficulties and dangers of working in a grain elevator—showing how they operate and describing the effects that the grain trade has on the lives of individuals and cities.

As Tarbet shows, the impact of these impressive concrete structures even extends beyond their working lives. Buildings that were created for a commercial purpose had a surprising and unintended cultural consequence. European modernist architects were taken by the size and elegance of American concrete elevators and used them as models for a revolution in architecture. When the St. Lawrence Seaway made it possible for large ships to bypass Buffalo, many Buffalo elevators were abandoned. Tarbet describes how these empty elevators are now being transformed into centers for artistic and athletic performance, and into a hub for technical innovation. Buffalo has found a way to incorporate its unused elevators into the life of the city long after the grain dust from them has ceased to fly.

“Grain Dust Dreams is a miniaturist masterpiece. David Tarbet was raised in a Canadian grain shipping hub, and takes us on a fond and fascinating tour of the history, the culture, and the technology of North American grain elevators. Beautifully written and rigorously researched, Grain Dust Dreams is an unusually charming addition to industrial history.” — Charles R. Morris, author of *The Dawn of Innovation: The First American Industrial Revolution*

“Drawing on personal experience, David Tarbet writes with authority. This is an important subject presented in a manner that’s accessible to all.” — Thorold Tronrud, Director, Thunder Bay Historical Museum

“Grain Dust Dreams is an intimate and personal account of the impact of the grain industry on two North American communities. The reader will be transported into the inner workings of a grain elevator, and uncover the significance the elevators had on the communities in which they reside. Readers will also enjoy the personal accounts from workers in these engineering marvels along with the hazards encountered by their operators. Tarbet also explores the perplexing question many communities face: how to repurpose these majestic structures so that they last for posterity.” — Tim Bohan, author of *Against the Grain: The History of Buffalo’s First Ward*

David W. Tarbet is a retired attorney who lives in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

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