

Introduction

Calgary’s urban forest is a remarkable achievement given that the city is located in an arid climate that doesn’t naturally support trees. The urban forest we have today is much closer to the “city of trees” envisioned by William Pearce in the 1890s. It is the result of the commitment of successive generations of Calgarians to planning, caring for, and protecting the forest. Today, The Calgary Parks Urban Forestry provides leadership, both within the Corporation and to the public, on the stewardship and long-term sustainability of Calgary’s urban forest. See below a timeline on how Calgary’s urban forest developed.

Timeline of Trees in Calgary

Pre-Settlement	Trees have always been and continue to be a priority for people living in the Calgary area. Prior to even the idea of European settlement the Piikani, Siksika, Kainaiwa (the Blackfoot Nations of the Peigan, Siksika and Blood), the Tsuut’ina (Sarcee Nation) and the ȩyāǰhé Nakoda, Chiniquay and Sioux (the Stoney Nations of the Bearspaw, Chiniki and Wesley/Goodstoney) used the tall, straight, trunks of the Lodge Pole Pine trees to provide a structure for their homes, the tee pee. They also used material from Willow trees for sweat lodges and the Birch tree is associated with a Napi story.
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1880s	In the 1880s, during the European settlement of North America, both the environmental and aesthetic benefits of planting trees were the subject of considerable discussion in developing cities. For early Calgarians living in the essentially treeless, wind-swept landscape, practicality and trees used for wind breaks was likely the primary motive.
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1884

The Bow and Elbow rivers that surrounded Fort Calgary, with their fresh running mountain water and small wooded islands, provided a stark contrast to the parched prairie land surrounding the rivers. But civic leaders dreamed that the barren Calgary landscape could be transformed into a “city of trees”. Once The Town of Calgary was incorporated in May 1884 it started to distributed spruce trees to taxpayers upon request for a small fee.

Calgary owes much of the early beginnings of its urban forest to William Pearce. Pearce was heavily influence by the City Beautiful Movement which supported beautification and formality to encourage order and harmony within society. Pearce envisioned Calgary as a city with grand boulevards connecting a series of park spaces. In 1884 Pearce used his position as an inspector for the Dominion Land Agencies in Ottawa to reserve land along the north side of the Bow River. Today it is the city’s landmark boulevard — Memorial Drive.



Glenbow Archives NA-235-2



Glenbow Archives NA-4099-5



1889

In 1889 Pearce purchased his homestead from the CPR, known today as Pearce Estate Park. The federal government’s Forestry Branch credits Pearce with having established the first tree farm in Western Canada. It was in the 1890s that Pearce developed his experimental farm, testing a variety of trees to encourage Calgarians to improve the appearance of the city by planting trees around their homes.



In 1889, the Town of Calgary and the CPR resolved a dispute over unpaid property taxes by the CPR turning over a tract of its lands to the city, with the stipulation that it be used as a park. One of that “park’s” earliest functions was as the first civic tree nursery. Today that park is known as Central Memorial Park.



1895

In 1895, The City of Calgary introduced a boulevard tree-planting program that saw trees going in along Calgary’s main roads.

1899

In 1899 The City of Calgary Council passed the first tree protection bylaw and started actively promoting tree planting.



1913

In 1913 William Reader became Calgary's third Superintendent of Parks and Cemeteries. One of his first priorities was the development of the new civic nursery, located at the bottom of Union Cemetery hill. Reader also noted in his 1913 annual report that he "devoted a considerable part of my energies during the past season to the construction of new boulevards, and have prepared a big program for the future, as I very much doubt if any other public improvement will tend to create and foster a civic pride in Calgary to the same extent as will the making of boulevards, and planting of trees on our streets, nor will any other feature of our city impress visitors so favorably."

Glenbow Archives NA-3423-4



1913-1942

Reader continued to plant trees within Calgary Streetscapes until his tenure ended in 1942. Some of those streetscapes still exist today and were mentioned specifically in annual reports. Ones that still exist and were also noted in an annual report have been evaluated by the Calgary Heritage Authority and added to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources.



Street without Boulevard Space.



Street with Boulevard Space (unimproved)



Boulevard in the making

Street scenes in Calgary showing effects of Boulevards and no Boulevards also Street Trees and no Street Trees.



Along 14th Avenue, Calgary, 1916



6 Street with Trees - 12th Ave in 1916



6 - 15th Ave in 1916

1915 In 1915 Reader planted Green Ash trees along 5A Street SW (from 17th Avenue to Royal Avenue SW). In 2009 the Calgary Heritage Authority added this streetscape to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources. Reader also planted Lilac shrubs on the median on 11th Street NW in 1919 that were added to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources in 2009.

1922 In 1922 Memorial Drive was established. Memorial Drive is Calgary's Road of Remembrance. Roads of Remembrance were actively promoted by the International Order of the Daughters of the British Empire, and were the result of a desire to create a lasting memorial to fallen soldiers of WWI. The use of trees, instead of statuary, symbolized the triumph of life over death. In 2009 the Calgary Heritage Authority added Memorial Drive to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources.



1929 In 1929 Reader planted Elm trees and Lilac shrubs along 7th Avenue NE (from Centre Street N to 2nd Street NE), Green Ash trees and Lilac and Caraganas shrubs along 8th Avenue NE (from Centre Street N to 2nd Street NE), Elm trees and Lilac and Lilac shrubs along 9th Avenue N (from 1st Street NW to 1st Street NE), Elm trees and Lilac and Caragana shrubs along 9th Street SE (from 17th Avenue to Adelaide Avenue SE), Elm trees and Dogwood shrubs along Frontenac Avenue SW (from Carleton Street SW to Wolfe Street SW), Elm trees and honeysuckle shrubs along Riverdale Avenue SW (from 5A Street SW to Elbow Drive SW and from 9th Street SW to 10 Street SW), and Green Ash trees along Sifton Boulevard SW (from Elbow Drive SW to 7th Street SW). In 2009 the Calgary Heritage Authority added these streetscapes to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources. Reader also planted Lilac shrubs in the medians on 6th Avenue NW in 1929 and in the boulevards on Shelbourne Street SW in 1927 that were added to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources in 2009.

1930 In 1930 Reader planted Poplar trees and Caragana shrubs along 9th Avenue SE (from 21st Street to 22nd Street SE), Elm trees along 11th Avenue N (from 1st Street NW to 1st Street NE), Green Ash trees and Caragana and Honeysuckle shrubs along Montcalm Crescent SW (from Quebec Avenue SW to Frontenac Avenue SW), Elm trees and Lilac and Cotoneaster shrubs along Montreal Avenue SW (from 12th Street SW to Wolfe Street SW), Green Ash trees and Honeysuckle shrubs along Quebec Avenue SW (from Montcalm Crescent SW to Wolfe Street SW) and Poplar trees and Lilac shrubs along Sharon Avenue SW (from 17th Street SW to 18th Street SW). In 2009 the Calgary Heritage Authority added these streetscapes to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources.



Reader also planted Lilac shrubs in the boulevards on 10th Avenue N and Cotoneaster shrubs on Senlac Street SW in 1930 that were added to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources in 2009.

1932 In 1932 Reader planted Elm trees and Lilac shrubs along 4A Street NW (from Alexander Crescent NW to 16th Avenue NW). Green Ash trees and Caragana shrubs along 5th Avenue NE (from Edmonton Trail to 2nd Street NE), Green Ash trees and Caragana and Cotoneaster shrubs along 5th Street NW (from Crescent Road to 16th Avenue NW), and Green Ash trees and Cotoneaster shrubs along 6A Street NW (from Crescent Road to 16th Avenue NW). In 2009 the Calgary Heritage Authority added these streetscapes to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources. Reader also planted Lilac shrubs in the medians on Bowness Road NW and Lilac shrubs in the boulevards on 7th Street NW in 1932 that were added to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources in 2009.

1942 In 1942 Reader planted Elm trees and Lilac and Dogwood shrubs along 8th Street NE (from 1st Avenue to 5th Avenue NE). In 2009 the Calgary Heritage Authority added this streetscape to Calgary's Inventory of Historic Resources.

Tree planting continued after Reader's tenure and continues today.

