

CHAPTER 1

**The Stampede in Historical Context**

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A view of Stampede Park from Scotsman's Hill, ca. 1908.

*“The Stampede is by and of the citizens of Calgary. It is for the world.”*

Calgary Herald, 5 July 1967

Like many events of its kind, the Calgary Stampede evokes widely divergent reactions. Some embrace the annual Stampede as “the greatest outdoor show on earth,” a festive celebratory tribute to a bygone era. To others it is no more than Coney Island with a hokey cowboy flavour.<sup>1</sup> It seems fair to say that both viewpoints lack the understanding and appreciation necessary for a more realistic and reasoned assessment. It is the intent of this introductory discussion to touch on the composition of the Calgary Stampede as well as the formative forces and evolutionary trends that have helped define its essence over more than a century. This discussion also sets the stage for the more tightly focused articles to follow.

### **Composition and Structure**

The Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, as it was known until 2007, occupies and operates several facilities on 55 hectares (137 acres) of land in Victoria Park a few blocks south of Calgary’s downtown. Its operations, which generated revenues of over \$85 million in 2004, fall loosely into three areas. Most notable is the Stampede itself, an annual ten-day festival built around a world-class rodeo, a modern midway, and a frontier western theme that spills beyond the grounds to the city itself. These ingredients absorb the bulk of media attention and inspire intermittent but persistent public debate over the merits or deficiencies of what has been popularly described as “ten mad days in July.” Lost in these perceptions is the Exhibition. Thousands of visitors, after a day spent visiting the midway, watching rodeo, listening to rock bands, or playing blackjack, remain oblivious to the show ring where premier livestock compete for prestigious honours, the impressive art exhibition, or the hundreds of free educational opportunities afforded by diverse and sophisticated exhibits throughout the Exhibition grounds. Finally, the Calgary Stampede organization is a year-round operation. Indeed, in terms of annual attendance, the Stampede itself is not as pivotal as one might imagine. In 1975, for example, of the over three million people who visited the grounds, the Stampede itself accounted for fewer than nine hundred

thousand. Over the years, the Exhibition and Stampede has hosted a variety of livestock shows and sales, sports events, trade shows, concerts, and public meetings, making it the undisputed entertainment and gathering centre for the City of Calgary.

The structure of the Stampede organization is a mystery to those who assume it is a private for-profit company. This misconception is understandable, since the Stampede in many ways does function like a private company. It is composed of shareholders who elect a governing board of directors that in turn decides on a president. In addition to the annual Stampede, the board of directors and permanent staff, plus over two thousand volunteers, manage and operate year-round activities and events in Victoria Park. What is not readily understood is the fact that the Stampede has always been a non-profit company. All senior positions are predicated on long tenure in lesser volunteer capacities. The board of directors receives no remuneration. No dividends are paid to shareholders, whose holdings are limited to twenty-five shares that originally sold for a dollar a share and now cost five dollars each. All surplus monies are redirected to operations and capital investment. The Stampede operates under a free lease and pays no taxes, an arrangement that means all buildings and property covered by the lease are under city title. The city protects its interests by including aldermen on the board of directors; two of them sit on the powerful executive committee. As will be indicated later in this volume, the relationship between the Stampede and the City of Calgary, though close, is very much a partnership of unequals.

## Origins

The attention given to the Stampede component of the Exhibition and Stampede Inc., as it is legally known, has led to misconceptions about the organization's origins. Even some of the more knowledgeable people would cite the inaugural Stampede of 1912, although the real historical foundations lie in the Exhibition and a series of events that led to the amalgamation of the two components in 1923.

The Exhibition dates from 1886. A cornucopia of agricultural, sporting, and other festive activities, the Calgary Exhibition, like hundreds of others across the country, was designed to advertise district wealth, promote settlement, bring business to the host town, and provide an infrequent opportunity for social interaction and entertainment. Except for a brief period in the 1890s, the Exhibition was held every year, originally in the fall and after 1902 in July. By 1911, the year before the first Stampede, it had a home

on city-owned land in Victoria Park, a capable permanent manager in the person of Ernie Richardson, and a free five-year renegotiable lease. More significantly, it had become a huge event in the rapidly growing city.

Calgary's Exhibition became big business in 1908 when the federal government as part of its national program to promote various areas of local government advanced \$50,000 for a Dominion Exhibition in Calgary. When this was augmented by a provincial grant of \$35,000 and a city donation of \$25,000, organizers had an unprecedented budget with which to stage the biggest and best exhibition in western Canada. It lived up to its promise, drawing wide accolades and over one hundred thousand people. A year later, the Alberta Provincial Fair, dubbed as such to reflect government financial backing, drew praise as "the greatest spectacle in the history of the West," with special kudos reserved for the four-mile-long parade.<sup>2</sup> Again in 1911, the year before the first Stampede, the Exhibition was described as "the finest fair ever held in the city."<sup>3</sup> It appears, then, that the inaugural Stampede of 1912 should be looked upon not as a groundbreaking extravaganza, but as a variation in a sequence of highly successful fairs that reflected the city's rapid growth, rural prosperity, and disposable farm income.



During the Dominion Exhibition in 1908, people came to see the Strobel's airship. The hydrogen-filled, propeller-driven balloon made five successful flights over Victoria Park, but it exploded and burned on its sixth attempt.

The Stampede had its individual genesis at the Dominion Exhibition of 1908 in the unlikely person of an American-born former cowboy and showman, Guy Weadick. As part of the one-day event staged by Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Wild West Show, Weadick saw more potential in the vibrant young city than he did in his own future as a trick roper. He perceived that Calgary was ready for a different kind of Old West re-creation, a frontier celebration that replaced the fantasy and tricks of the Wild West show with authenticity and real cowboy skills presented via a rodeo. Record has it that he was dissuaded by H.C. McMullen, general livestock agent for the Canadian Pacific Railway, who felt that the time was not yet ripe for such an event.<sup>4</sup> Given the success of the Exhibitions at the time, one wonders at McMullen's caution. However, evidence suggests that public acceptance of rodeo may not have been as strong as one might expect. According to the *Morning Albertan* in 1910, rodeo was obsolete. In referring to a dismal rodeo in the city, the newspaper editorialized that "such entertainment is a thing of the past," and its elements of bull baiting and cruelty made it neither "elevating nor desirable."<sup>5</sup> The editorial was supported by a letter to the editor and a tongue-in-cheek article in the *Calgary Herald* that derided the contestants' amateurishness and lack of ability.<sup>6</sup>

So why was Weadick successful when he returned to the city in the winter of 1911–12 to follow his vision? The fact that rodeo had remained popular in smaller centres was only a partial reason, as was Weadick's considerable power of persuasion. Nostalgia was the key to the Stampede of 1912, nostalgia on the part of four cattlemen who had experienced the old days, who had lived through the horrendous winter of 1906–07, who had seen the open range give way to fences and wheat fields, and, most important, who had money. These four men, enshrined in the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame as the Big Four, had their own agenda when they backed Weadick's dream with a credit line of \$100,000. While Weadick may have hoped that the Stampede of 1912 would blossom into an annual event anchored by a world-class rodeo, the Big Four saw it as a one-time party, a farewell gesture to a dying way of life. It is ironic that the Stampede with its vigour and unquestioned permanence should have been perceived as "a last hurrah" by the four men who enabled its birth.

In the inaugural Stampede held in September 1912, Weadick succeeded in moving the traditional Wild West performance in a new direction. His idea of re-creating the Canadian frontier experience, as opposed to the exaggerated U.S. model, and wedding it to a major professional rodeo competition was a highly successful innovation, one that he repeated seven years later in

the Victory Stampede of 1919. As a postscript, it is unfortunate that in spite of Donna Livingstone's solid study, Guy Weadick remains underappreciated and understudied by scholars of history and popular culture.<sup>7</sup>

While the first bold move in creating the Stampede component is attributed to Guy Weadick, credit for blending it with the Exhibition is due to Ernie Richardson. As he continued to stage annual Exhibitions after 1913, Richardson found himself wrestling with two problems. By the end of 1922 both had become insurmountable. The first was economic and beyond his control. The collapse of the land settlement boom made staging the wartime Exhibitions expensive and risky. Effects of the collapse were compounded by enduring drought conditions after 1916 and a lingering post-war depression that sent hundreds of farmers and ranchers into bankruptcy. After incurring significant financial losses in 1921 and 1922, the Exhibition teetered on the brink of survival. The second problem Richardson faced concerned the Exhibition itself. Put simply, the traditional format of a fair built primarily around agriculture and augmented by Wild West travelling shows was losing its appeal to increasingly sophisticated urban audiences. In 1921 the *Albertan* summed up Richardson's problems succinctly when in reference to the failure of the recent Exhibition to attract crowds it noted, "There is real difficulty in discovering what the people want just now, and having decided on that the next difficulty is to get it."<sup>8</sup>

In desperation, Richardson opted for the tried and true by contacting Weadick and offering the travelling entrepreneur a proposal. Would he accept a contract to stage a Stampede in conjunction with the 1923 Exhibition? Weadick did so willingly and gave Richardson more than he expected. In the 1923 Exhibition and Stampede, Weadick added two ingredients that in time defined its uniqueness. First, the addition of the exciting and potentially dangerous chuckwagon races was inspired by the increasing popularity of high-speed auto racing. Second, Weadick's idea to have the whole city go western for the event put the Exhibition and Stampede in a wider urban festival context. The success and profitability of the inaugural Exhibition and Stampede led to public calls for its continuance. In September 1923 Richardson seemed to answer the *Albertan's* 1921 query when he told the board of directors, "Calgary has found something the people want, something peculiarly appropriate to our environment, and we only have to use our unique opportunities to the best advantage."<sup>9</sup>

In summary, the first Exhibition was in 1886, the first Stampedes in 1912 and 1919. The Calgary Exhibition and Stampede began in 1923. Weadick

continued to return every year to stage the Stampede component until the organization dispensed with his services in 1932 and began operating both events as the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Limited, a non-profit company incorporated in 1933.

### **Characteristics of the Calgary Stampede**

The evolution of the Stampede is best explained by examining enduring features that have defined its purpose and operations. While other articles in this volume explore some of these, this discussion focuses on the Stampede's heritage dimension, its ongoing popularity, its agricultural component, and its role in bringing matters of wider concern and interest to the general public.

### **The Western Heritage Dimension**

It would be foolish to deny that this dimension of modern Stampedes reflects hype and myth far more than any awareness of or conscious desire to replicate Canada's frontier heritage. The reason why has more to do with the absence of living embodiments of western Canadian history than with slick marketing or promotional campaigns. When the original characters passed from the scene, Stampede organizers looked for their replacements. Arguably, they chose unwisely. From another and more positive perspective, although here too there are critics who would affirm otherwise, the Stampede has managed to preserve many festival-type traditions commensurate with its origins and, indeed, the western Canadian experience.

Guy Weadick set the precedent for frontier authenticity in 1912 when he put together "the greatest gathering of men who participated in the laying of the foundation of the present great Western development."<sup>10</sup> They included Hudson's Bay Company factors, cowboys, whisky traders, buffalo hunters, and some frontiersmen who predated them. These individuals were given high priority both in the parade and on the grounds. During the 1923 Stampede, people who had lived in the settlement that became the town of Calgary in 1884 conducted tours of the city. The 1925 Stampede featured Mounted Policemen who had taken part in the great march west in 1873–74. When the Stampede decided to re-enact the history of the West in 1930, three of the Big Four were alive to share in it. In 1945 when the Exhibition and Stampede outlined its fourfold mandate, the first was "to perpetuate our frontier tradition,"<sup>11</sup> yet by the time the Stampede decided to celebrate



Guy Weadick, ca. 1912

its fortieth anniversary seven years later with an old timers' reunion, few remained who represented the founding days or the vigour and mystique associated with them.

The buoyant decade 1955–65 marked a significant change in the Stampede, one in which the authenticity of the Canadian frontier experience disappeared and was replaced by Hollywood's "Wild West." In this decade the American western myth took hold, especially among the younger generations due to the enormous popularity of westerns on television. Leading cowboy stars became high-profile drawing cards, presenting the Stampede with an opportunity that was just too good to pass up. Between 1958 and 1967, the Stampede hosted such western television heroes as the Cisco Kid (Duncan Renaldo), Bat Masterson (Gene Barry), Tonto (Jay Silverheels) of *The Lone Ranger*, Marshall Dan Troop (John Russell), *The Virginian* (James Drury), and Peter Brown of *Laredo*. They were feted and honoured for being what they represented: a mythologized embodiment of a West that never existed in Canada or, according to American scholars, in the United States.

As if to validate the new emphasis, a survey on the Stampede parade taken in 1968 relegated the old timers' section to last place.<sup>12</sup>

Since the 1960s, the Stampede has focused primarily on the generic western myth. Though signage on the grounds and the presence of attractions such as Weadickville pay lip service to a localized identity, little in the Stampede speaks of the western Canadian frontier experience. Allusions to lynchings or even the simulated gunfights have no Canadian precedents. The western lingo often used in the press (especially by Mayor Don Mackay in the 1950s) is hackneyed and inauthentic.<sup>13</sup> Western dress has become a creative statement rooted loosely in romantic perceptions more reminiscent of the American Southwest than the Alberta foothills. Most Canadians visiting the Stampede are more familiar with Dodge City than they are with High River, Longview, or Maple Creek, and they come away no wiser. In short, the Canadian West has largely disappeared from the Stampede.

More authentic statements have been made over time through formal and informal celebratory activities. Since 1925, when it honoured the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the North-West Mounted Police in Calgary, the Stampede has been mindful of the need to make historic statements. Later examples include a celebration of the British Empire in 1939, Western Canadian Old Timers in 1952, Alberta's fiftieth birthday in 1955, the fiftieth anniversary of the world's first military aircraft in 1959, and a March of Time Parade in 1962 to honour the Stampede's fiftieth birthday.

On a more informal level, the willingness to dress and adorn buildings in a particular fashion, to square dance in the street, or to partake in public breakfasts of hearty fare is ritualistic, to a degree transformational, and at the heart of true festival celebrations. The spin-off activities, most of which do not achieve permanence, are variations on the festival theme. Typical would be the buffalo sandwich breakfast (1923), the open-air cowboys' ball (1938), parking lot dances (1942), and, more recently, bar stool races on Second Street (2002) and Meadow Muffler Madness (1994), a raffle type of contest in which cows were encouraged to defecate on numbered squares arranged along Stephen Avenue Mall. The point is that Stampede fever is about a popularized theme that involves the citizenry, and attending the Stampede is perceived by many as "the thing to do." As columnist Peter Burgener noted in 2002, "The Stampede brings out a level of corporate and personal responses that are expressed physically, and that are participatory and responsible."<sup>14</sup> While critics of the Stampede might have no trouble documenting inauthenticity, they would find it much more difficult to prove contrivance rather than willing participation in its several off-grounds activities.

### Ongoing Popularity

The enduring popularity of the Exhibition and Stampede is hard to explain. It offers nothing essentially different from features of other fairs and exhibitions across the country. For example, a visitor from another country might have difficulty discerning between the entertainment opportunities afforded by Klondike Days (Capital EX since 2006) in Edmonton and the Calgary Stampede, yet it has always been wildly popular. Except for a short dip in the early 1930s (and Stampede spokesmen were quick to point out that other fairs of comparative size did much worse), attendance at the Stampede has steadily risen. In the 1950s, for instance, record attendance figures were set every year. Three reasons for this continuing success can be identified. First, the Stampede enjoyed from the outset a media-created mystique. Second, it was promoted aggressively by a coalition of interests dedicated to enhancing business opportunities and tourism revenues. Finally, it was able to widen its overall appeal through non-Stampede activities.

The 1912 Stampede was the first event of its kind. Guy Weadick capitalized on its unique and heady mix of cowboys, Indians, frontiersmen, and thrilling rodeo competitions to attract two motion picture companies. The films they produced, described as the “most complete of any Wild West pictures ever exhibited in the city,” were eventually shown to audiences across Canada, the United States, and Europe.<sup>15</sup> At least five more films were shot before 1950. *The Calgary Stampede* (1925), starring Hoot Gibson, became one of the most profitable movies in North America.<sup>16</sup> The CBC broadcast Stampede events a year after it was founded in 1936 and a year later used short-wave radio to send the same broadcasts to Great Britain. In 1958 CBC carried the first television images of the Stampede to the Canadian public. Over eighteen million Britons watched a fifty-five-minute BBC television special on the Stampede in 1965. Currently, a distinguished award-winning Polish director is interested in exploring the cowboy myth through a Stampede documentary.

One of the main reasons the Stampede has maintained a popular and high-profile image has been an incredible level of support from the local press. Newspaper articles on the Stampede were as effusive as they were persistent. Most of the time the local editors sold the myth, lapsing into hackneyed jargon and conjuring up fanciful images of wild and woolly days in the West. Sometimes thoughtful appraisals located the essence of the Stampede’s appeal in local support and pride.<sup>17</sup> Extensive international press coverage also enhanced the Stampede’s widespread appeal. Reporters from twelve countries and fifteen states covered the Stampede in 1954, and by 1973 the

number of accredited photographers had jumped to over two hundred.<sup>18</sup> The Stampede was also featured in many books about western Canada, including several novels. In touting the Stampede's irresistible and universal appeal, the print media took every opportunity to quote luminaries who might not be expected to revel in the earthiness of the Stampede. "I have never seen anything like it," exulted the French ambassador to Canada in 1954.<sup>19</sup> Lord Louis Mountbatten was equally enthusiastic when he said in 1967, "The first time the Stampede comes to Royalty; the second time around Royalty comes to the Stampede."<sup>20</sup> This persistent and ebullient press support is one of the reasons why critics use the term "Sacred Cow" to denote the Stampede's inviolate status within the city.

Popularity was reflected in other ways. Almost from the beginning, the Stampede has been identified with personal statements. Slim Moorhouse chose the Stampede to display his thirty-six-horse team in 1924. Two years later a man walked from Toronto just to attend the Stampede. Another drove his tractor nine hundred miles for the same reason in 1954. As recently as 2004 a cowboy led a group of mounted riders all the way from Bandera, Texas, to the Stampede to make a statement about the faltering economies of small western towns. The Stampede is also a destination event. High school bands work diligently to make money so they can participate in the Stampede parade. California's Contra Costa County Sheriff's Posse dressed in uniform and arrived as a group in 1951. The Stampede has become a sought-after forum for both excellence and eccentricity, having hosted world championship events for blacksmiths and marching bands, an attempt to set a world record for the number of pancakes fed to guests in one hour, and even competitions for the most outlandish costumes.

The Stampede's commercial value was not lost on those who stood to profit by it. Ernie Richardson told civic officials in 1914 that the Exhibition existed to enhance the city.<sup>21</sup> Lindsey Galloway, senior manager of Corporate Communications and Stakeholder Relations, said the same thing in 2005. From the outset, the City of Calgary, the Chamber of Commerce, nearby businesses, livestock associations, and tourist agencies formed a powerful support group that complemented the Stampede by propagating its appeal whenever and wherever possible. One has only to note Mayor Don Mackay's correspondence in the 1950s, when he used his persuasive powers effectively to entice hundreds of Americans, mostly civic officials, to the Stampede.

The Stampede organization was proactive in furthering its appeal. It worked with the Calgary Tourist Bureau to find accommodation in private houses for visitors to the Stampede. It kept track of visitor movement within

the mountain parks and lobbied the provincial government to improve road access to Calgary, particularly by roads that carried American visitors. In later years the Stampede tried to maintain its edge by commissioning studies and preparing long-range plans.

Another key to the Stampede's continuing success lay in its ability to attract prominent people. Usually they came in some official capacity, to open the Stampede, to act as honorary parade marshals, or simply to be guests of honour. From the first Stampede in 1912, when the viceregal guest was the duke of Connaught, Queen Victoria's son and the governor general of Canada, a steady procession of dignitaries has graced the Stampede. They included royalty, prime ministers, governors general, and premiers. In the 1950s, for example, the Stampede was attended in different years by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, and Governors General Vincent Massey and Georges Vanier. The Stampede also successfully courted international celebrities whose presence in some official capacity contributed to crowd appeal. These included Prince Charles, the brother of the emperor of Japan, Lord Louis Mountbatten, Robert Kennedy, Douglas Bader, Walt Disney, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Rocky Marciano, Jack Palance, and Sam Elliott. As has been said on many occasions, "There's always someone to see at the Stampede."

Though the Stampede hosts many events on a year-round basis, the most popular are those related to sports. Nevertheless, the important role played by the Stampede in furthering sport in the City of Calgary has gone largely unrecognized.<sup>22</sup> For years the Stampede operated a hockey franchise; it was perhaps the pivotal agency promoting and staging the sport in Calgary. Between 1950 and 1981 the Corral and the Big Four Building were the largest facilities of their kind in the city. The Brier, the Canadian Men's Curling Championship, was held in the Big Four Building in 1961. Four years later the Corral hosted the Dominion Figure Skating Championship.

The Stampede's success in bringing increasing numbers of people to its grounds poses a significant dilemma for contemporary senior management. Larger audiences want more varied fare, but catering to all age and interest groups and trying to provide something for everyone may dilute features the rest of the world associates with the Stampede. As it seeks to become a major year-round venue, its western roots may well become just one element in a package of entertainment options. And largely mythical though they may be, these western connotations have been used to advertise and promote Calgary and the Stampede for almost a century. The Stampede will have to weigh popularity and the dollars that accompany it with the image it

has historically conveyed. The two may prove to be more incompatible than present optimism suggests.

### **Agriculture**

From its beginnings in 1886, agriculture and especially livestock have been of central importance to the Calgary Exhibition. Ernie Richardson was determined to maintain agriculture's priority after the Exhibition merged with the more entertainment-oriented Stampede in 1923. In 1942 the board of directors took special pride in the fact that the organization was making exceptional progress in "building up a plant for livestock and exhibition purposes second to none in Canada."<sup>23</sup> When the Exhibition and Stampede Limited published its four goals in 1945, the second was to foster the livestock industry. In 1977 a \$30,000 commissioned study by Stanford Research Institute, a California-based entertainment consulting company, recommended that the future of the Exhibition and Stampede be vitally linked to its agricultural component. As late as 2002 the press noted that agriculture continues to be the backbone of the Exhibition and Stampede, yet changes have taken place. Though agriculture remains a component of Exhibition and Stampede activity, it has receded from its previous prominence.

An emphasis on agriculture is still a visible part of the Stampede. The barns, the show pavilions, and the concentration of educational agricultural activities still afford plenty of opportunities for visitors to acquaint themselves with purebred stock, to view agriculture-related performances, and to learn more about agribusiness. Today, the Calgary Stampede Agriculture Department presents over forty-five international stock show events during the Stampede. The Stampede is also important for sales. For example, in 1996 local company Alta Genetics sold \$1.35 million worth of bull semen and embryo stock to buyers from fourteen countries.<sup>24</sup> In the same year, the chair of the Stampede Promotions Committee dealt with international buyers from twenty-nine countries who were interested in purchasing quality stock in order to rebuild their herds.<sup>25</sup>

The Stampede also enhanced Calgary's importance as a livestock centre. In 1927 it persuaded the Canadian Livestock Association to hold its annual convention in Calgary. After 1955 the breed associations were encouraged to hold their annual conventions around Stampede time through a policy that honoured a single breed annually. This succession of conventions was doubtless a factor in securing the World Charolais Federation meeting in 1967, which, according to the *Calgary Herald*, was attended by over one

hundred international millionaires worth five billion dollars.<sup>26</sup> Two more world livestock congresses were held in conjunction with the Stampede in 1975 and 1978.

Most of the agricultural activity that occurs on a regular basis on the grounds throughout the year is organized and operated by the Stampede. Perhaps the most notable is the Calgary Bull Sale, which dates to 1901. Often described as the premier sale of its kind in North America, the Calgary Bull Sale grossed over two million dollars in 1994. The Stampede has also operated horse shows, sheep and swine sales, and seed fairs, and in the 1950s it promoted the sale of purebred stock to the United States.

The Stampede's association with agricultural education began when it hosted groups of farm boys in the 1930s. In the 1940s the Stampede's agricultural revue was designed to make children more aware of the attributes of prime livestock. Later emphasis was placed on promoting 4-H activity and, more recently, Aggie Days. Spokespersons for the Stampede now say their primary mandate is to find ways by which agriculture's message can be carried to an urban society. They are currently trying to develop innovative programs that will link consumers to the food they eat.

To maintain its status as an agricultural fair and its eligibility for government grants and concessions, the Stampede must include activities related to agriculture. In this sense it is no different from any small-town fair in Alberta. One could argue that the current annual provincial grant of ten million dollars in lottery monies had its historical roots in the allocation of horse racing and gambling privileges to agricultural fairs. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that agriculture figures less prominently in the Stampede's plans for the future. One could discern this in the late 1970s when its management opted for an all-purpose Round-Up Centre instead of the new Agricultural Building originally envisaged. To those directing the Stampede in the new millennium, promoting Calgary as a major entertainment and tourist centre seems to be a greater priority than showcasing or advertising agriculture.

### **A Wider Voice**

Over the years the Stampede has incorporated issues of social interest and concern into its activities. First, it showcased modern technology in an age when people had few opportunities to attend trade shows or learn about inventions and innovations. Second, it drew public attention to larger

national issues. Third, it has increasingly become associated with the wider concept of carnival itself.

The Stampede has been a vehicle for the display of technological advances. The 1935 parade, for example, was announced as the birth of the industrial era. In the same decade, the Stampede featured a robot that answered questions, a giant television twenty years before it was commercialized, car radios, wringerless washing machines, and the latest in automobile technology. Also in the 1930s, the Stampede's emphasis on automobile displays and the educational opportunities offered to viewers quite likely influenced buyer judgement and choice. Over the years, the Big Four Building and later the Round-Up Centre have continued to attract exhibits that feature state-of-the-art products.

The Stampede has also functioned as a catalyst for bringing public attention to contemporary events and issues. While the themed activities at Flare Square and the promotion of Canada's Centennial in 1967, the Commonwealth Games in 1978, and the Olympic Games in 1988 provide excellent examples, the most sustained demonstration of the Stampede's involvement in contemporary issues came during Second World War. In 1942 armed forces personnel opened the Grandstand Show, "On to Victory." Tanks were included in the parade that year, which concluded with a large float named The Float of Victory. The 1943 Stampede included demonstrations on commando tactics and parachute packing. The 1944 Grandstand Show was titled "Let Freedom Ring," and in the victory year, 1945, over five thousand troops led the parade. In the same year the chutes in the infield were adorned with flags of the allied countries, with the Hammer and Sickle right there in the centre beside the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack. In conjunction with Canada's centennial in 1967, the Stampede hosted one of the first interdenominational church services in Calgary.

In more modern times, given the fractured interests of audiences and the sheer number of events competing for them, the Stampede has lost its capacity to be the catalyst it once was. This is unfortunate, especially given the Stampede's increasing focus on pure entertainment with all the shallowness and self-gratification it embodies.

The Calgary Exhibition and Stampede has always offered rodeo, exhibits, and entertainment. In this it is no different from a host of fairs across the North American continent. Its uniqueness, however, lies in several areas. One is the way it is organized and the relationship it enjoys with the City of Calgary. Also, while it is true that the Stampede has embraced a generic western

mythology, it can also claim roots in the historic western Canadian ranching experience and a commitment to maintaining a strong focus on livestock.

A third important achievement concerns the way the modern Stampede has managed to capture the essence of carnival. In its rituals, messages, symbolic representations, and even in the language used to articulate the latter, the Stampede represents a merging of disparate values, of collective identities and individual statements. It has spilled beyond the grounds not just to events in shopping mall parking lots and Stampede breakfasts, but also to counter-cultural statements and parodies. For example, western clothing denotes participation and identification with a cultural tradition and therefore the status quo; the open disdain for Stetsons and boots evidenced by many young people is an implicit rejection of these same values. Other individuals and groups capitalize on the Stampede's popularity by promoting alternative activities and celebrations.

The Stampede adopts carnival traditions in other ways. Like Mardi Gras in New Orleans and ANZAC Day in Australia, the Stampede allows for a brief suspension of the constraints of everyday life. Role reversals in which dignitaries do ordinary things or suffer contrived humiliation are mockeries of accepted power relations. A suspension of the rules allows party-goers young and old ready access to situations in which marginal illegal activity is tacitly accepted. As Glen Mikkelsen points out, the rodeo clowns freely violate accepted social norms in their repartee with the spectators.

As a spectacle or celebration, as a ritual or performance, the Stampede is truly a carnival. The parade, fireworks display, midway, stage shows, and rodeo provide the best visual cornucopia of its kind in the country. United by contrived clothing and lingo and by the relaxation of norms, visitors to the Stampede, whether they be international or local, are suspended in a cultural vacuum, "pardners" in an unreal and temporary experience. Off the grounds beyond the Stampede statements, the pervading ethos of the myth reaches into other domains, carrying diverse messages and evoking different reactions. In this context, the Stampede is as much a time as it is an event.

Recently the Stampede has been trying to design an image that speaks of the past but which will resonate with larger and more diverse audiences. The two building blocks appear to be "community" and "western values." In 2006 the Calgary Stampede Board unveiled its plans for the redevelopment of Stampede Park to the north, where the inner-city suburb of East Victoria Park used to be. In a colourful brochure titled *Mapping Our Future*, the Stampede associated its plans for the future with "great development of surrounding inner-city neighbourhoods" that "will help build community at

a time when community building is vitally important to Calgary.”<sup>27</sup> In early 2007 Stampede President Steve Allan told a gathering at the Calgary Chamber of Commerce that community involvement is a universal responsibility. In announcing the Stampede’s new brand in spring 2007, Stampede General Manager Vern Kimball noted that it is more than a logo: “It represents our commitment to preserve and promote the unique values of the Stampede and our community – western hospitality, integrity, commitment to community and pride of place.”<sup>28</sup> It will be interesting to see how these grand plans unfold.

## Notes

1. For contrasting views on the Exhibition and Stampede see James H. Gray, *A Brand of Its Own: The 100 Year History of the Stampede* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985); Colin S. Campbell, "The Stampede: Cowtown's Sacred Cow," in *Stampede City: Power and Politics in the West*, ed. Chuck Reasons (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984), 103–120.
2. *Calgary Herald*, 5 July 1909.
3. *Calgary Herald*, 30 June 1911.
4. Gray, *Brand of Its Own*, 35.
5. *Morning Albertan* (Calgary), 30 July 1910.
6. *Calgary Herald*, 30 July 1910.
7. Donna Livingstone, *The Cowboy Spirit: Guy Weadick and the Calgary Stampede* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1996).
8. *Albertan* (Calgary), 8 July 1921.
9. Minutes of the Calgary Industrial Exhibition Co. Ltd., Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Papers, box 1, 26 September 1923, Glenbow Museum Archives.
10. Guy Weadick to Mayor J. Mitchell, 13 June 1912, City Clerk Correspondence, Box 50, file folder 403, City of Calgary Archives (hereafter cited as CCA).
11. Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Annual Report, 1945.
12. City Commissioners Papers, series V, box 104, file folder 4737, CCA.
13. The following extract from a letter written to the mayor of Vancouver is typical: "You can bet your dad-durned tootin' six shootin' guns and yore best little old spurs that you Vancouver cowboys and cowgals would have a wonderful time." He closes the letter with "yers trooly." See letter dated 11 May 1951, City Commissioners Papers, series IV, box 48, file folder E-1, CCA.
14. Peter Burgener, "Mixing Stampede into Perception," *Calgary Herald*, 3 July 2002.
15. News Telegram (Calgary), 17 September 1912.
16. Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Annual Report, 1925.
17. See editorial, "The Spirit of the Stampede," *Calgary Herald*, 13 July 1954.
18. Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Annual Reports, 1954, 1973.
19. *Calgary Herald*, 9 July 1946.
20. *Calgary Herald*, 7 July 1967.
21. E.L. Richardson to mayor, 28 February 1914, City Commissioners Papers, series I, box 50, file folder General Correspondence, January–June 1914, CCA.
22. For good discussion see "Hockey and Horses," *Calgary Herald Neighbors*, 13–19 July 1994.
23. Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, Annual Report, 1942.
24. *Calgary Herald*, 14 July 1996.
25. *Ibid.*

26. *Calgary Herald*, 7 July 1967.
27. *Mapping Our Future: A Gathering Place for Calgary and the World* (Calgary: Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, 2006).
28. "Brand Identity Built on Values," *Saddle Bag* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2007). The brand no longer contains the word "Exhibition." It consists of the words "Calgary Stampede" below a "C" and a "lazy S," the latter in recognition of the organization's agricultural roots.

