

CHAPTER 10

**“Cowtown It Ain’t”:
The Stampede and Calgary’s Public Monuments**

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Life-size bronze sculpture (1980) by Rick Roenisch is displayed at one of the west entrances of the Stampede Park

[S]paces of public display and ritual... teach us about our national heritage and our public responsibilities ... [T]he urban landscape itself is the emblematic embodiment of power and memory ... [P]ublic monuments [are not]... innocent aesthetic embellishments of the public sphere.¹

Nuala C. Johnson, quoted above, is one of many authorities engaged in the study of public monuments and how they both reflect and shape public space and cultural identities.² She emphatically agrees with Paul Connerton, the author of *How Societies Remember*, that community elites invent spaces and rituals that claim continuity with their past in order to legitimize their present hegemony.³ Is Calgary’s useable past evidenced in the urban landscape and particularly in its public monuments? Does the Calgary Stampede, considered by many to be a major contributor to the city’s identity, fit into its public discourse? If it doesn’t, what does that signify?

James Howard Kunstler, in *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape*, would agree with Johnson and Connerton, but argues that the North American man-made landscape is unremarkable, homogeneous, and lacking in the particularism of community.⁴ He claims that the acres of shopping centres, warehouses, and small businesses, distinguishable only by their signage and neon, are the new public art. If that is the case, is it true of Calgary? What of the past is used to legitimize or “decorate” the present? When searching for a public expression of “hegemonic” art in Calgary, a city that may be the ultimate in post-modern urbanism, we need to look at urban hegemonic expressions in a number of forms, including public monuments, urban commercial signage, and urban toponymy. The urban names imposed by city leaders reflect aspirational values that dominate public signs and life.

Robert J. Belton, author of *Sights of Resistance: Approaches to Canadian Visual Culture*, offers a methodology that might be used to determine whether the claims of Kunstler, Johnson, and Connerton apply to Calgary.⁵ What do Calgary’s public art, commercial signage, and place names reveal about the city and its values and, perhaps as important, about the elite and their values? Belton suggests that context, form, and history are key to deconstructing and understanding any image. By context, he means the surroundings of

an object. How does context reinforce or change meaning? A monument in front of the University of Calgary library might carry different meaning than the same monument in front of a downtown bar. Does the placement of the majority of public art relating to a single theme in one location say anything about the values of a community? The form of any monument matters even more. What, if anything, does the consistent choice of realism versus modernism say about a community? The history of any public art is important because it indicates conceptions and beliefs at the time of its placement. However, context can negate historical purpose and time and time again create new meaning. Has this happened in Calgary?

Taking this methodology and applying it to Calgary is by no means easy. However, by taking one theme, the Calgary Stampede and its public presence in monuments, signage, and toponymy, it might be possible to come closer to the real mental or psychological space the Stampede occupies in the Calgary mind. Why are public monuments that have a connection to the Stampede for the most part confined to the Stampede grounds, the rural hinterland, and the airport? What does this say about the cultural values of Calgary and its elites? What does the fact that Calgary's official subdivision names and street names have little reference to the Stampede or its heritage say about Calgary? What does the fact that commercial signage is the key public manifestation of the Stampede signify? Has the Stampede been rejected because it lacks the dignity for formal public places? Has the Stampede been rejected in subdivision names until recently because it lacked the ability to drive real estate values? Why, then, has it become so common a choice in commercial establishments?

First, what are the physical images in Calgary's public spaces? Who is responsible for these images, who actually made the images, and how are they perceived by the public? Within the city several key areas contain sculptures: City Hall and its environs, Eighth Avenue Mall, Memorial Park Library, the University of Calgary, Fort Calgary, and the Stampede grounds. All are key symbolic areas that reflect and shape the city's identity. Except for the images on the Stampede grounds, few nod in the direction of the ranching or cowboy culture that is celebrated so enthusiastically every July.

What themes were considered "Stampede" in the writing of this essay? Anything involving cowboys and their horses or directly relating to cowboy culture was included, as well as anything commissioned by the Calgary Stampede, since the latter might reveal the values critical to its understanding of Calgary's heritage. Cowboy images definitely include "8 Seconds to Glory" (fig. 1) by Shane R. Sutherland, at Third Street SW, although its modern

form may obscure its muse, and "Break Away" (fig. 2) by Robert Keith Spaith at the Calgary International Airport international exit. Both definitely were intended to exude the Stampede theme and the Stampede's perception of the spirit of the West – a wild freedom that must be tamed, but only to a point at which it might become useful.

It is interesting that both "8 Seconds to Glory" and "Break Away" are products of the new millennium. Dixie Jewett's controversial "Metal Horse" (fig. 3) at the Saltlik Restaurant (101 Eighth Avenue SW) is arguably Stampede-related. It is ironic, however, that this presentation of a Clydesdale, a good farm horse, is built from old tractor parts in a genre appropriately known as "steampunk." The juxtaposition of the horse with the bones of its technological replacement – both more farm than ranch – is a puzzle that post-modernists will take great delight in analyzing.⁶ This is about it for public sculpture related to the Stampede in public venues outside the Stampede grounds.

There are other horse sculptures; for example, "Family of Horses" (fig. 4) by Harry O'Hanlon (1989) was presented by Spruce Meadows to the city and is located in front of the new City Hall. But these are dressage horses, the gift of the Southern family, hardly symbolic of the rough and ready Stampede. These are as far from the wild broncs at the airport as can be. The other western animal championed in public places is the buffalo, which is found in at least three locations: on the Centre Street Bridge (fig. 5 and 5a), in front of the Shaw building ("Bison," fig. 6), and at Fort Calgary ("The Mighty and Once Many Symbol of the Great Plains," by Don Toney, fig. 6a). But these are historic and symbolize the lost West. They are monuments to sadness and the end of a free animal that represented an unrestrained, yet tamed, Alberta.

The bulk of public sculptures, like those in other Alberta cities, relate to history: the first European Calgarians and the First Nations peoples who, like the buffalo, are depicted as "noble" symbols of "yesterday." Probably the most important public monument of this type is the statue of Sitting Eagle (John Hunt), a respected Stoney who was a key participant in the Calgary Stampede (fig. 7). The 3.6 metre (11 foot, 11 inch), 1,075 kilogram (2,370 pound) statue is located at Cascade Towers on Sixth Street and Seventh Avenue. It was unveiled by Mayor Ralph Klein, Chief John Snow, Elder Lazarus Wesley, its sculptor Don Begg, and Grant MacEwan. But does the representation have anything to do with the Stampede?

The origin of "Sitting Eagle" is ironic at best. The cynic might observe that a people dispossessed of their lands were now celebrated so the developer could add even more square metres to his building. A City of Calgary policy allows higher densities if developers include public art in their

projects. “Sitting Eagle,” for which the developer paid \$250,000, was in effect traded for a one-and-a-half-floor addition to Cascade Towers. Cascade’s president at the time was a fan of Nicolas de Grandmaison, one of the great painters of Indians, and so a First Nations theme was chosen. Like the buffalo, Sitting Eagle is part of a Wild West now tamed, a Wild West for show. It could be argued that this monument relates to the Stampede in that the Stampede contains the Indian Village, initially as a symbol of the old captured West. Urban development was dear to the hearts of many of the Stampede’s founders.

At the International Airport, Alan Henderson’s “Big Head,” a bust of Sam Livingston, described under the plaque as Calgary’s first citizen, might also be construed to relate to the “wildness” and ranching culture that many historians consider to be part of early Calgary (fig. 8). Henderson himself feels that “Big Head” supports Calgary’s western heritage, its openness, its friendliness, and its gregariousness. To him, “Big Head” represents the city’s American and European connections. However, that would be a stretch. Sam Livingston was a prospector, farmer, and fur trader; he welcomed the North-West Mounted Police to the city, and now welcomes its visitors. Looking more like a Klondike Gold Rush miner, which he was, than a cowboy, which he was not, he helped found the Alberta Settlers’ Rights Association, a group not beloved by the ranching elite – indeed, the antithesis of much of what the Stampede spirit symbolizes.⁷

At Fort Calgary, a statue of North-West Mounted Police Commissioner James Macleod, designed and cast by Don and Shirley Begg in 2005, could also be assigned to the Stampede or at least the western hero genre (fig. 9). The bronze is of Colonel Macleod astride his horse, but the pose is more symbolic of the vision and “majesty” of the police in the western Canadian epic than anything to do with the Wild West image generally projected by the Stampede. Commissioned by the Calgary division of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans Association, it is intended to symbolize “law and order” and stability rather than the myth of the individual against the environment often associated with the cowboy. However, some Calgarians choose to see the statue as symbolizing not law and order, but the relationship between community of all kinds and the police.⁸

The public monuments of Livingston, the buffalo, Sitting Eagle, and Colonel Macleod all symbolize the end of wilderness, the imposition of law and order, and the triumph of Euro-Canadians. It can be argued that these continue the theme of earlier works of public art, many of which relate to Calgary’s imperial connections. The most obvious of these are the famous

replica lions on the Centre Street Bridge. Sculpted by James L. Thomson in 1916, the originals are now located at the Calgary municipal building to ensure their preservation. The dominance of the lions over the smaller heads of the buffalo in itself implies conquest (fig. 10). "The South African War" by P. Hebert (1912) at Memorial Park Library is of a mounted soldier, a real Calgarian and his real horse, but it would be a stretch to link it primarily to ranching rather than to the substantial military history of the city (fig. 11).

The most recent public monuments, while historical, have absolutely nothing to do with the spirit of the Stampede. "Gratitude," by Barbara Paterson, an Edmontonian, commemorates the triumph of Alberta's "Famous Five," who successfully fought to have women declared persons in Canada (fig. 12). It is a moving three-dimensional parlour in which Emily Murphy, one of the five women, invites you to enter, sit, and join in their success. Unveiled in 1999, "Gratitude" has pride of place near City Hall in the most symbolic and public of locations. While the statues themselves are far removed from any Stampede theme, their dedication did echo the many ironies of Stampede City. The first person to sit next to Emily Murphy during the unveiling ceremony was a twelve-year-old Peigan girl dressed in traditional clothing. Whether the symbolism of the gesture was understood by Calgarians is not clear.⁹ First Nations were not successful in securing the vote, in gaining full citizenship unfettered by enfranchisement laws, until the 1960s. If First Nations people voted before then, they were removed from their reserves and their communities on the grounds that if they could vote, they did not need the social supports offered by treaties. It should be noted that the fight for the First Nations vote was led by two Calgarians, John Laurie and Ruth Gorman, who herself was very much in the mould of the Famous Five. Perhaps the culture of the "strong-minded woman" is more Calgary than that of the cowboy.¹⁰

More recently oppressed people have found public space in which to celebrate their freedom. "In Search of Gold Mountain" (fig. 13), carved by Chu Honsun from 15 tonnes of granite from China, describes the pursuit of freedom and equality by Chinese Canadians. A companion piece, "Wall of Names" by Ferdinand Spina, also located in Sein Lok Park, was installed two years later to commemorate Chinese males who paid the head tax to enter Canada.

A significant series of public monuments use history to extol a public virtue. They can be described as international in context and generic to any urban environment. Their purpose is to define Calgary as a world city. "Family of Man" (fig. 14) was undertaken by Mario Armengol for the British Pavilion at Expo 67. Donated by Maxwell Cummings, a Calgary and Montreal developer, and dedicated in 1968, this particular piece of public

art is symbolic of the kind of contest that sometimes surrounds public art in Calgary. The circle of ten gaunt, expressionless, larger-than-life aluminum (not bronze) men and women attracted the anticipated hysteria from the artistically conservative, but seems to have found a home in the front yard of the Calgary School Board building. It has become so beloved that when the school board moves offices in 2008, it wants to take the naked family with it.¹¹ No urban environment can do without its nudes.

The trees are probably the most controversial of recent public sculptures. Located on the Eighth Avenue Mall in front of Bankers Hall, they were sponsored by another developer doing penance for increased density (fig. 15). The eight-story trees were to contain street lighting and programmable special light effects. To date this is the only public monument designed by the developer's architect rather than an artist. The trees were intended as highlights of a new downtown meeting place, like the Calgary Tower and Olympic Plaza. Some will argue that the trees are not art, but symbols of excess and disappointment, since they never leafed into the feature that the developers promised. The only link to the Stampede might be that both are the result of a promoter's exuberance.

The University of Calgary, as might be expected, is home to probably the largest collection of modern public sculptures, none of which relate even remotely to the Stampede. The most famous, known on campus as "The Prairie Chicken" (fig. 16), was placed in front of the administration building on Swann Mall. The university commissioned George Norris, a Vancouver-based artist, to undertake the piece to commemorate the city's centennial. To George Norris it is neither an open book nor a chicken; it concerns "revelation, a central concern of any educational institution."¹² Norris also secured the landscaping contract, although the field of marigolds that was to accompany the constructivist piece never materialized. The other sculptures on campus are for the most part of the 1970s and 1980s modernist constructivist movement and are managed by the Nickle Arts Museum as part of the university's outdoor art collections. It is interesting, however, that students tend to find references to the environment – in the case of Norris's contribution, a prairie chicken.

Few, if any, real pieces of public sculpture directly evoking the Stampede have escaped the confines of its grounds. The observation by a press wag that Calgary is beset by bovine and equine statuary simply is not true. Only the art on the Stampede grounds evidences an affinity for the "Remington" or "Russell" schools of western cowboy realism that appear to be so appreciated by ranching and cowboy communities throughout North America and so despised by the scribblers of the third estate.

The most famous sculptures that have come to symbolize the Stampede are Rich Roenisch's "Bronc Twister" (fig. 17) and Linda Stewart's "Roundup" (fig. 18). The Calgary Exhibition and Stampede has always been conflicted about its commemorative role and also celebrates farmers, for example, in "Our Land – Our Future: The Alberta Farm Family" by Vilem Zach (fig. 19). There are also important murals, but the critical point is that they are all confined to the Stampede grounds.

It took until 1980 for the Stampede to bronze its iconic image. Rich Roenisch, who spent a lifetime as a cowboy and came from a founding Alberta ranching family, undertook the "Bronc Twister" that greets visitors to the Stampede. It is based on the famous 1919 Stampede poster by Edward Borein depicting the horse known as "I See U." Roenisch also did the bucking horse relief on the Stampede grandstand and the famous "Question of Survival" bronze, based on Charlie Russell's famous painting, at the Bar U National Historic Site (fig. 20). Symbolically, "Bronc Twister" was unveiled in 1980 by the Honourable Peter Lougheed, premier of Alberta and scion of an old Alberta family, on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the year Alberta became a province. The point is that Calgary got its first Stampede sculpture relatively late in the city's history. Also curious is that while "Bronc Twister" has become the Stampede's symbol, it is seen only in banners, signs, and manhole covers outside the grounds. The appearance of "the Twister" coincided with a considerable increase in the use of Stampede themes in business activities. While there is no evidence of any planned linkage, it helped the Stampede become a greater presence in the public mind.

It is in commercial signage that the Stampede really flourishes as symbol: car dealerships, book companies, grocery establishments, messenger and express companies, pawnbrokers, and dry cleaners all seem to embrace the name with passion. Whether the names have led to greater economic success would require further study. However, these businesses tend to be linked for the most part to service industries – the needs of the everyday. It would be interesting to determine whether businesspeople, particularly owners of small shops, believed this image would benefit their business, or whether they adopted it in order to be city boosters.

A search through Henderson's City Directories for businesses using the Stampede in their signage reveals that there were seven businesses in 1954, thirteen in 1956, eighteen in 1970, twenty in 1985, and twenty-three in 1991 (figs. 22, 23, 24). A few businesses (always in the single digits) used "rodeo" or "Western" in the same years. Today seventy-three businesses in over sixty different categories use Stampede themes in their signage and

advertising. The Calgary Yellow Pages also lists three businesses using “cow-boy,” three using “bronco,” three using “round-up,” six using “corral,” and thirteen using “maverick.”

But for the most part, as previously indicated, Stampede public art is confined to the Stampede grounds. Perhaps this is because the Stampede is not so much an instrument of cultural memory as it is an invented tradition. Guy Weadick himself was key in the creation of an invented tradition based initially on the very successful American Wild West shows. His Stampede included Indians, closed-off streets, and merchant-driven events. His mastery of promotion and creation can be traced to 1923.

Two other manifestations of the Stampede in public imagery are Calgary’s two senior sports franchises and the fantastically successful “Udderly Art” charity event of 2000.¹³ Individual corporations purchased life-sized fibreglass Jersey cows for \$5,000 and then retained local artists to paint them. Over 200 decorated cows with names such as “Hollywood and Bovine” and “Cowabunga” were auctioned off at Stampede Park, with the proceeds going directly to the charity of the owner’s choice. A remnant of the painted herd lives on in the Centennial Parkade, and another fifteen are in the walkway on Ninth Avenue between Fifth and Sixth Streets.

The concept is hardly unique to Calgary. It was invented in Chicago in 1999 and has been adopted around the world, with similar events held in London, New York, and Sydney, Australia. Some cities adapted the cows to their own “culture.” While Calgary’s cows were unranchmanlike Jerseys, Scotland had highland cattle and Texas had longhorns. “Udderly Art” was an urban undertaking by the socially sexy to raise money. In Calgary the choice of a Jersey cow with little brand identification with the history of ranching or the Stampede did not seem to matter. And in the end, of course, it did not. It was an amusing utilization of an international community-based transitory public art movement that resonated with Calgarians no more than with residents of other major cities. Like commercial signage, it was to be “fun.” It was not “serious” public art – that was for those who cast in bronze.

The sports franchises also use “art” or “icons” to associate themselves with the Stampede, but the activities are transitory, much like commercial signage. The Calgary Flames play at the Saddledome – a building cleverly named because it could be construed as reminiscent of a saddle, although it took its shape from engineering formulas. Like many car manufacturers and dealers, the Calgary Stampeders have adopted a bronco as their brand image. Again, this is clever marketing. Stampede themes dominate in the commercial and charity fund-raising realms, but the Stampede is not “serious” enough for “serious” public art. The Stampede lacks gravitas – it lacks “class.”

Perhaps this is why city officials are so reluctant to allow the use of public art to commemorate the Stampede. Often those shaping the public spaces in the city were not merely passive about the Stampede, but actually unsympathetic to having it become a dominant element of Calgary's image. Just when business was embracing the Stampede through commercial signage, the city was contemplating "rebranding." The Stampede referred to an invented past, and inventions can be changed.

In 1984 the City of Calgary commissioned a study to determine the importance of the Stampede image in marketing the city. Undertaken just before the Olympics, the study found that seventy percent of visitors stayed with residents and only one in ten visitors saw any attraction at all. The Stampede was hardly the tourist draw that the city thought it was. The conclusion in 1984 was that Calgary did not have an image with any real commercial relevance. The report suggested that a new theme – "Heart of the West" or "Heartbeat of the West" – would integrate western hospitality and western heritage. In other words, the city should keep the white hat, but not the jeans. Calgarians were sophisticated folk whose modernity and urban reality demanded more upscale, more stylish, western wear. Hotel staff in particular were to be encouraged to adopt more "modern" western dress during the Stampede.

The boosters who wanted to rid Calgary of its rough western edges did not succeed. Calgarians like to be thought of as tough rural rustics. Perhaps that is why Ralph Klein was re-elected so often – he understood the importance of image all too well. However, as shall be seen, the sentiments that tried to moderate rampant cowboyism are still alive.

So if the Stampede itself is corralled, and public art only marginally relates to the myths the Stampede has generated, how does the Stampede manifest itself? Robert Venturi, in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* and *Learning from Las Vegas*, offers some insight into how the Calgary Stampede commercial images might be interpreted.¹⁴ Venturi is interested in the creeping "crud" architecture found sprawling all over the urban fringes and rural hinterlands of America. He tries to explain it rather than criticize it. Perhaps that is what we should do with the Stampede. Could it be that Calgary is the first large Canadian city in which buildings no longer matter? Whatever the purpose of a building – motel, casino, carpet warehouse, waterbed store, pizza shop – all are "cinder-block sheds," natural products of freeways and cars. Venturi claims the decorated facades of these buildings and their signage that can be read from a speeding car are the post-modern expression of "architecture," architectural graffiti affixed to modern buildings. Is this any different from putting shutters or siding on a bungalow box to suggest

tradition? It can be argued that for the most part history has been stamped out in Calgary; where it still exists it is tolerated as a pastiche of the past.

Perhaps urban manifestations of the Stampede in the form of signage or public art can best be seen as “entertainment architecture” presenting a digestible, readable, and comprehensible context in which to understand the cleansed interpretation of the frontier. New buildings on the Stampede grounds are designed to be user-friendly and promote old-fashioned virtues such as comfort, intimacy, and festiveness. Significant locations become “key urban attractions” and “the show begins on the sidewalk,” whether in signage or “re-creations” of trees. The Stampede has been confined to an entertainment park, but its image has escaped to the freeways and landed on the front of Calgary’s concrete-block businesses.

The elite, or at least those who control public art, might deny the general public its appetite for Stampede monuments, but the public has created its own symbols. The extent of the use of “Stampede” in commercial imagery suggests that the Stampede and its values are strongly held by “Joe Average” citizens, whose taste for the equine and bovine in their choice of public imagery has been decried by Calgary’s third estate.

The “Bronc Twister” symbol is the one most frequently used, seen on manhole covers, Stampede street banners, commercial signs, and signs on the “plus fifteens,” the above-street walkways connecting buildings in the city core. It is in Calgary’s “architecture” of the modern West that the image of the Stampede flourishes; car dealerships, sports teams, book companies, grocery establishments, messenger and express companies, pawnbrokers, and dry cleaners seem to embrace the name with the greatest passion.

So where does this leave the future of the Calgary Stampede in the physical urban environment? There is really no evidence that the Stampede will have any lasting impact on the physicality of the community. Those responsible for public art in Calgary seem to have no intention of embracing the Stampede in the future. In 2004, for example, Calgary unveiled five projects funded by developers in exchange for density exceptions. Two of the projects had recreational themes and the rest focused on the environment. The city’s art committee has decided that an environmental theme will dominate public art.

Public art plans are essential in ensuring that our visual environment and identity be as intentional, deliberate and carefully considered as our civic infrastructure systems ... Calgary is unique among North American cities in its relationship to the Bow River and its watershed.

The river traverses Calgary from the northwest to the southeast and serves as an organizing principle to the urban form of the city. The health of the watershed ecosystem is unprecedented for a river system running through a city of a million people. The UEP (Utilities and Environmental Protection Department) Public Art Plan will move citizens and visitors along the river's path and watershed, highlighting the excellent successes of UEP, as well as the unique environmental relationship between the healthy ecology of the Bow River and our urban needs. For Calgary, the Bow River is part of our city and our city is part of the river. The Public Art Plan will celebrate this complex relationship and call attention to the high quality of life that our citizens enjoy.¹⁵

Some might argue that the city boosters are at it again; however, Gail Anderson, current chair of the Calgary Public Art Committee, conceded that the federal government had influenced this policy. While there may not be public support for this decision, there is also really no opposition, since the policy is not well known. Calgarians have not been meaningfully involved in any debate on the nature of their public spaces. The most recent public manifestation of the policy are the 144 concrete trout on the Glenbow Elbow interchange (fig. 26). Violet Costello, a graduate of Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, won the commission in a competition. The fish are accepted as "nice" decoration, but Calgary newspaper articles focused on the engineering prowess that produced the concrete cast and colours.¹⁶ While swimming and jumping fish are environmentally appropriate, equally vigorous horses and cattle would seem not to be. The Stampede is just not fashionable, and the rejection of the Stampede myth ensures that any public expressions of cowboys, horses, and steers will continue to be confined to the Stampede grounds for the foreseeable future. The values they might evidence are simply not those the elite want to inculcate in Calgarians. The Stampede is for amusement; it is not to be associated with reality.

Another key indicator of the role of the Stampede in the urban landscape might be its impact on Calgary's toponymy. While public art and architecture may be prime indicators of public values, in their absence in the post-modern city values may be expressed through the place names given to neighbourhoods and principal geographic features. Generally throughout North America, eighty percent of everything that has been built, has been

built in the last 50 years: commuter tract housing, shopping plazas, hotel complexes, fast-food joints, office parks, and freeways. Do Calgary's urban place names reflect the ranching and cowboy West, or are echoes of the Stampede manifested only in commercial signage?

The demographic and cultural influences that shape Calgary's urban landscape were recognizable as early as 1913. In that year over four thousand workers were directly employed in manufacturing, in rail yards, in brewing, in abattoirs, and in ceramics. The great boom of this period was predicated on industrial agriculture, not the lone bronc-busting cowboy. In 1914 what would become the heritage infrastructure of the city so beloved by Calgarians today had already been created. That this was to be a modern city, cognizant of its geographic surroundings and the Bow River, is further evidenced by the city's near embrace of the Mawson Plan, which would have made Calgary an ornate garden city of the north, an idealized Arcadia.¹⁷

In *Calgary Builds: The Emergence of an Urban Landscape, 1905–1914*, Bryan P. Melnyk notes that between 1905 and 1914, when Calgary's population exploded to eighty thousand, over ten thousand buildings were built in dozens of neighbourhoods.¹⁸ These buildings created the urban landscape from which future buildings gained their inspiration, and neighbourhoods their names. A local booster enthusiastically observed:

Where a few years ago were bare hills and bald-headed prairie...are now such beautiful suburbs as Bowness, Mount Royal, Elbow Park, Elboya, Glencoe and Rosedale ... Calgary in recent years has shown the most phenomenal growth of any city on the American continent in the same space of time. Million dollar hotels have replaced the frontier saloons, million dollar department stores have replaced the fur trading posts ...¹⁹

Not a single name reflects a ranching or cowboy culture. It would not be until the 1960s that developers, planners, and city fathers began to embrace a ranching or Stampede heritage in urban toponymics: Chaparral, Ranchlands, Hanson's Ranch, and Rocky Ridge Ranch.

It is often difficult to determine from urban images where the souls of a community's inspirational elite rested. Were Calgary's elite disconnected from their "wilderness?" Often aspirational values can be determined from an examination of private as well as public spaces. It can be argued, based on heritage house inventories and images in the Glenbow Museum, that

the homes of the elite reflected not ranching traditions, but the traditions of wealth. Some of the aspirational homes in Mount Royal would have been acceptable even in Montreal – the other Mount Royal. The Lougheed House in Calgary certainly reflects Montreal tastes. The home of Mr. Robertson, a Calgary entrepreneur with ranching interests, was furnished with the contents of Government House acquired at the Aberhart auction and was decidedly Euro-Canadian, with its red brick exterior and mock Tudor elements.²⁰ Western Canada entered the decor only in the occasional painting.²¹

However, it should not be assumed that the elite had no connections with the hinterlands. For example, Dr. Margaret Hess, Dr. Ruth Gorman, and Dr. Margaret Cross Dover, like other members of wealthy families, had ranching interests and country as well as city homes. These ties mattered a great deal. The Cross family all had roots in the foothills,²² and their position in Calgary society was reinforced by their status as landed gentry. The “bronc” and the “cowboy” were not really part of that ranching culture. Dr. Lewis G. Thomas, a leading Alberta historian and a ranching scion himself, argued that the ranching community in Alberta was more genteel, more aristocratic, than elsewhere in the West, and that this tradition informed Calgary’s culture. Early ranch homes may have had animal skins as decorations, but these and the rough log walls were abandoned as soon as possible.²³ Perhaps the ranching aristocracy’s rejection of the Stampede was a rejection of the wilderness and the lawless cowboy culture that it symbolized. Their reality was not rooted in that past. They may have seen the Stampede as a cynical and inaccurate exploitation of a brief period of history for the purpose of generating revenue.

So, what does the minimal role of the Stampede image in public art and public spaces say about Calgarians’ perceptions of their city, their culture, their region, province, and country? Calgary, like many Canadian cities, has created an official past – a useable and commercial past – in part through boosterism, festivals, and public art. Public bronzes, iron sculptures in parks or on streets, and commercial signage are all expressions of what the community determines to be its publicly acceptable past. Public bronzes, in particular, indicate what the community as a whole feels should be validated and acknowledged.

Calgary’s public art would seem to convey three key messages. The first and most important is a careful identification of key foundation myths, the second is modernity, and the third – the environment – is still emerging. The foundation values apparent in the public art focusing on the city’s heritage are sacrifice, progress, and the taming of a wilderness – the wilderness being

symbolized by First Nations peoples (John Hunt) and their environment (the buffalo). Few pieces are related to the Stampede, and the most famous of these are located on the Stampede grounds. For the most part, Stampede images are in commercial signage and sports teams. The Stampede is commercial, not cultural; of the pocketbook, not the soul – although Calgary’s soul might well be its pocketbook. Heritage is, however, a key subject in Calgary’s public art. It reinforces what most of us believe about Canadian history – that peace, order, and good government were introduced by the North-West Mounted Police, and that they exercised compassion and provided the link that held the West together. The taming of the West involved struggle; “In Search of Gold Mountain” and “Wall of Names” in Sein Lok Park and “Gratitude” celebrate victories over prejudice and marginalization and a new age of equality. However, most public art has one object in mind – to make Calgary appear as a modern city to its citizens and to the visiting public. The dancing circle in front of the school board, the trees on Eighth Avenue Mall, even the fish on the freeway are efforts to make the public see Calgary as a contemporary city with international concerns. The “Udderly Art” phenomenon, born in Chicago and adopted by the fund-raising elite, was almost a mock celebration of Calgary’s heritage, focusing as it did on domesticated cows rather than ranchland steers.

The new theme of public sculpture for the city will be the environment, linked always to the Bow River. I suspect that most Calgarians would find this choice surprising; however, I also think few would disagree. Water, air, and energy have become primary concerns for Calgarians. The Stampede, while part of the commercial soul of the city, has no place in modern Calgary, at least not in its public art. It has ever been so.



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Notes

I would like to thank Fiona Foran for interviewing a number of the artists who have contributed to Calgary’s public art landscape. I would also like to thank Stéphane Guevreumont for taking the photos.

1. Nuala C. Johnson, “Mapping Monuments: The Shaping of Public Space and Cultural Identities,” *Visual Communication* 1, no. 3 (October 2002): 293.
2. The best of the most recent North American studies are on monuments in New York and those relating to the American Civil War. See, for example, Thomas J. Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004). See also Nuala Johnson, *Ireland, the Great War, and the Geography of Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
3. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
4. James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).
5. Robert J. Belton, *Sights of Resistance: Approaches to Canadian Visual Culture* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2001).
6. “The Steampunk Gazeteer – Alberta, Canada,” in *Steampunk*, n.d., n.p.
7. Sorcha McGinnis, “Livingston’s Bust Greets Visitors,” *Calgary Herald*, 28 January 2003. See also Interview with Al Henderson, Fiona Foran notes, 6 September 2006.
8. See, for example, http://members.shaw.ca/rcmpvets.calgary/macleod_statue.htm.
9. *Calgary Herald*, 19 October 1999.
10. See F. Pannekoek, ed., *Behind the Man: John Laurie, Ruth Gorman, and the Indian Vote in Canada* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007).
11. *City Centre News*, July 2006. See also *Calgary Herald*, 30 September 1984.
12. *Calgary Herald*, 26 May 1985.
13. Tom Kaplar and Clayton B. Keyser, *Udderly Art: Colourful Cows for Calgary* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2000).
14. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art Press, 1966); *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).
15. “Draft City of Calgary Utilities and Environmental Protection Department Plan,” October 2006.
16. Canadian Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute, “Jumping Trout Glenmore Interchange (GE5), Calgary, Alberta,” Project of the Month, 20 November 2006, <http://www.cpci.ca?sc=potm&pn=monthly112006>.
17. See a copy of the plan and background at <http://caa.ucalgary.ca/mawson.html>.

18. Bryan P. Melnyk, *Calgary Builds: The Emergence of an Urban Landscape, 1905–1914* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985), 1.
19. B.S. White, *The Story of Calgary, Alberta, Canada: Progress, Resources, Opportunities* (Western Standard Publishing Company, 1914).
20. See F. Pannekoek, M. McMordie, et al., *Heritage Covenants and Preservation: The Calgary Civic Trust* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004). The Robertson house is referred to in this volume as a key heritage site meriting preservation. I had the good fortune to see the house and its contents prior to Mr. Robertson's passing. It was truly an outstanding example of Calgary's private spaces.
21. An excellent study of interior decoration of ranching houses is Lewis G. Thomas, "Ranch Houses of the Alberta Foothills," in *Canadian Historic Sites Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History*, No. 20 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979), 125–43.
22. For the importance of the ranch in shaping the early culture of Alberta, see Sherrill MacLaren, *Braehead: Three Founding Families in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).
23. Thomas, "Ranch Houses."

