

History of Calgary

The transformation of Calgary from the time when the Bow Valley was the favorite wintering quarters of the buffalo, up to the present, is a story of more than ordinary interest.

Available records show the first white men who made any pretence of settlement in the Calgary district were Fathers Lacombe, Remus and Seoolen, missionaries of the Catholic Church. In the spring of 1875 Fathers Remus and Seoolen built a log cabin, eight feet by ten, on the bank of the Elbow River, east of the site now occupied by the Grand Trunk Station and freight sheds.

First Building Was a Log Cabin

This was the first building erected in Calgary, and was in fact the first within a radius of a great many miles. The roof was of spruce bark and buffalo skins were used as doors and windows. Shortly after the Reverend George McDougall, a Protestant Missionary, reached the banks of the Bow, and travelling west to the Town of Morley, established a mission in the heart of the Stoney Indian District.

R.N.W.M.P. Established in Calgary

In the summer of 1875 the mounted police reached Calgary and immediately commenced to build suitable quarters for the establishment of a Fort. During the fall of the same year the Hudson's Bay Company of Adventurers built a trading post to the south of the Mounted Police fort. This was followed by the erection of a store by the I. G. Baker Company, of Fort Benton, Montana, which controlled the freight traffic of those early days, and inaugurated the first transportation trust in the Bow Valley. They controlled all the six-yoke spans of oxen on the trail from Fort Benton to Edmonton, and any one who raised any objection to freight charges or service along this route had the privilege of doing his own freighting.

Outside of the periodical arrival and departure of the Baker Company's ox teams, very little of interest happened at the police fort at the delta of the Bow and Elbow, until 1881, when reports of the Canadian Pacific Railway building through the Valley were circulated and adventurers of all kinds flocked here to see what they could pick up.

Tented Town Springs Up In Brewery Flats

The first results of the reported coming of the C.P.R. was to transform that part now known as East Calgary into a tented town. So certain were the early settlers that the advancing railway would locate its depot on the level flats of East Calgary that they squatted on every available inch of land and sat tight, mentally subdividing their holdings into picturesque townsites, but unfortunately their fondest hopes were blasted. The advancing steel crept nearer day by day, until one black Monday the steel passed them by on its westward march, and the Canadian Pacific Railway for reasons of its own, located its depot on the present site and the disappointed pioneers were compelled to fold their tents and pack them to the city's present site.

Canadian Pacific Railway Arrives in Calgary

The next epoch in Calgary's early history was the coming of the railway. In trying to settle the exact date when the first train reached the City, a good many bets have been made, and it has been accepted as fact that the first passenger train arrived August 27th, 1883. Shortly after the arrival of the first train, the president of the C.P.R., then Mr. Stephen, on his trip of inspection, reached Calgary in his private car, accompanied by the presidents of three American roads, a number of English bond holders, and the Count Bassano (after whom the town of Bassano was christened.)

Calgary was now in direct touch with the East with a band of 3,000 miles of steel, along which the street bred people of Europe would come to plow the land, subdivide the forest, to build up cities, and from the ribs of the earth exact tribute in precious metals for the toil and sweat of labor.

Thus ended the old order, giving place to the new. The railway was an accomplished fact and Baker's ox teams were sent to the Chicago packing houses.

Calgary Becomes a Municipality

On January 4th, 1884, at a meeting convened by the late James Reilly, steps were taken to obtain for Calgary the rights and privileges of a municipal charter, and it was then decided that an election of a civic committee of seven should take place on January 14th. The following candidates were nominated: Messrs. Reilly, Lindsay, Loughheed, Van Wart, King, Cushing, W. H., Swan, Armour, Bretin, Murdoch, Tennant, Butler, Hardisty, Moulton, Stewart, Ramsay, Oswald, Col. Walker, Col. Henderson, Clarke.

An election the following December resulted in the election of George Murdoch as Calgary's first mayor, with Messrs. S. J. Hogg, Dr. Lindsay, J. H. Millward and S. J. Clarke as aldermen.

The success of these men at the polls was celebrated by the firing of a cannon followed by a fusillade of small arms by a group of cowboys, who had watched the City's first municipal ceremony and could not restrain their desire to participate in the festivities.

Just a Question of Time

In these days Calgary was without a town clock and the first duty of the council was to provide some means by which the timepieces in the community could be regulated with agreement. To this end it was decided to fire a gun in some public place every day at noon, until arrangement could be completed with the C.P.R. to check up the time daily by telegraph.

Educational Facilities Considered Without Delay

At the second meeting of the council, the question of establishing a school was taken up, but before it was settled it was found that a census would have to be taken, with the result that the population was discovered to be 428.