

Urban Profile: Calgary

Canada's got a cowtown too!

By Alan Harvey

For most people, the history of the Wild West is America's history, a romantic cowboys-and-Indians saga written in dust and feathers on a baldheaded prairie. As portrayed by Hollywood and television, it all happened south of the Canadian border: everyone knows Matt Dillon and Wyatt Earp, the sheriff's lonely walk in High Noon, the saloon brawls, the covered wagons, the war-whooping redskins massing for a final assault on the white man's covered wagon.

But what happened north of the border? How come no handsome heroes riding out of the Canadian twilight to save the homestead at the last ticking second? There were of course the Mounties, immortalised by Nelson Eddy and Jeannette Macdonald in "Rose Marie," but not much else on the silver screen. Yet there was a distinctive Canadian story; equally as fascinating as America's, though a little less bloodcurdling thanks to the Mounties. They preceded the settlers into Canada's western and northern territories, and imposed a framework of British-style justice on the clash between a primitive Indian plains culture and the importunate colonialism of the European white man.

Anyone looking for a Hollywood-style scenario in Canada might well begin in Calgary. Perhaps more than any other Canadian city, Calgary retains a whiff of the Old West. It recalls the roistering days when gunslingers and cowpokes, whisky traders and half-breeds, scarlet-coated Mounties and Blackfoot Indians, adventurers and remittance men, Highland Scots, Orkneymen and nobly-bred English cattle ranchers jostled in the struggle for Canada's Last Frontier.

Two hundred years ago, no white man had ever set eyes on the place. One hundred years ago it was a strip of uninhabited ground straddling two brisk mountain rivers. Today it's a major city in Canada, a sophisticated modern metropolis brashly proud of its frontier past.

Sandstone skyscrapers

From zero population to just under half a million in 100 years — that's the swift pace set by Calgary, one of Canada's fastest growing cities, a breezy, high-

spirited community in the province of Alberta whose sandstone skyscrapers soar out of grassy foothills beneath the snow-capped Rocky Mountains. It is almost three-quarters of a mile above sea level (exact elevation 3,439 feet) and Calgarians like to say with pardonable hyperbole that they are "nearer Heaven than any other city in Canada." From their westward-looking windows, citizens can almost reach out an arm and pluck off a chunk of mountain rock — though the majestic Rockies are in fact some 50 miles away.

It has other claims to fame. By common consent, Calgary is today the oil capital of Canada. Every big oil company in the world has offices here; more than half the city's 436,000 population is involved in oil or associated industries. Today the oilmen and their families are experiencing what they hope will be a fleeting setback resulting from disagreements between federal and provincial governments which are holding up investment.

But the city goes on growing. And this is a special year that may help to ease any disgruntlement — Calgary's 100th birthday. It is exactly a century since some 275 men in scarlet tunics rode out of Fort Dufferin



Photo: N.F.B.