

The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF READER ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

Reader Rock Ramblings

2015 Had So Much

By Diane Dalkin

As we take time to review this past year, weather seemed to dominate the headlines:

- ◆ On July 22nd Environment Canada issued a tornado warning for Calgary and the surrounding areas; social media lit up with photographs of a funnel cloud on the west side of the City.
- ◆ Another severe summer storm created havoc, hail shredded plants, intense rain flooded downtown underpasses, stranding cars and commuters.
- ◆ Sizzling hot days followed, and so did the smoke from forest fires; in fact, the air quality index reached dangerous health levels, while the entire City was blanketed with obvious thick and heavy haze for several days. Despite the spider's interference with skewing the readings, the conditions warranted numerous health advisories and warnings.
- ◆ August was soggy than usual and the rain turned to snow on the 21st. Fortunately, this wasn't as problematic as last year's Snowtember event, but still forced cancellations of many outdoor activities.

Consequently, the apparent impacts of climate change left the Garden in tatters on several occasions and struggling to reach its blooming potential. As resilient as Nature can be, there was doubt how it might recover this season. The Head Gardener expressed concerns about the seed production, but I am happy to report, the results turned out better than expected.

The political landscape also changed on the provincial and federal levels, leaving us all with a wait & see expectation. It's a bit early to make any conclusions of this development at this time. Yet, in the interim, Alberta's energy industry continues to cope with massive layoffs and setbacks, other industries and businesses are also feeling the pinch from low oil and gas prices. Attendance at the Café was lower than usual, but private functions and out-of-town visitors brought in much-needed revenue. The Café is now closed for regular daily operations, but is still available for special reservations & bookings; please see page 4 for contact details.

Despite 2015 being a challenge in so many respects, here at home and overseas (#jenaipaspeur), we continued with our customary annual events: participated in Seedy Saturday, attended the CHS Garden Show at Spruce Meadows, hosted the AGM, and offered the Garden Stroll to the public. We also had several training sessions for our volunteers and assisted with some private functions at the Garden. All of this was possible due to the generosity and many efforts from our committed volunteers. We are so very fortunate to have such a wonderful team—sincerest **Thank-you** to each and everyone of you!

The holiday season is around the corner. While this sometimes can bring a litany of social pressures, we hope you have time for family and friends, to get together and share the importance of this season, creating fond memories. Have gratitude & give hope to each other.

On behalf of the FoRRGS Board of Directors—Happy Holidays & Merry Christmas! ... wishing you & your families a safe & peaceful winter season. 2016 will be a fresh start ... see you in the New Year!



FoRRGS Team

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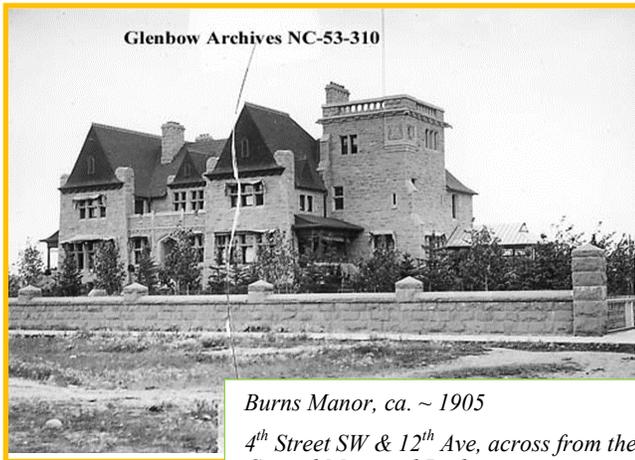
Reader Rock Gardens

By H. David Matthews

If you're interested in gardening and particularly gardening in Calgary, you'll soon run across the name:

William Roland Reader.

He arrived from the U.K. in 1908 as a Landscape Gardener and was soon working on one of Calgary's show-piece gardens at Senator Patrick Burns residence formerly located on 4th Street SW and 12th Avenue (current site of the *Sheldon M. Chumir Health Centre*).



Glenbow Archives NC-53-310

*Burns Manor, ca. ~ 1905
4th Street SW & 12th Ave, across from the
Central Memorial Park
Head Gardener, William Reader and his
wife lived in the coach house on the prop-
erty, while employed by the Senator.*

In 1913 he was appointed Superintendent of the City's Parks Department and he and his family moved into the Superintendent's house which had been built by the City at the northern end of Union Cemetery ... a rather barren and wind-blown location. It wasn't long before Reader decided to make this home more sheltered and comfortable and proceeded to plant wind-breaks and to convert the hill around his new home into an experimental gar



The early Superintendent's House when the Reader family moved in. ~1913. No gardens were yet developed at that time.



The Garden grows & develops; note the tiny Blue Spruce, in its infancy. It now has a commanding presence on the Main Lawn, adjacent to the Café.

den focusing particularly on Alpines and Perennials which could withstand the remarkable temperature changes in winter brought about the unique Chinook winds ... something unknown in almost every other large community.



The High Rockery evolves along the driveway. ~1919

Within a few years he had created a real jewel in the heart of the City ... one which attracted travellers from across Canada, as well as many local residents who could see what plants would flourish in this climate. Starting in the 1920's and going for almost fifty years,



the Reader Rock Gardens were an attraction which made it into the 'must-sees' handbook for tourists.

But in early 1943, shortly after Reader's untimely death of a heart attack, the City-owned house he had called home (for almost 30 years, on site) was demolished by the City. Furthermore, when the LRT/C-Train line to the south was built, the greenhouses which had provided much of the plant material for these and other City gardens were also demolished.



Historical view of the City Greenhouses (which were removed), at the base of the hill. Currently the south line of the LRT, Ert-ton C-Train station is in the vicinity. Note original location of the sandstone entrance arches.

These events, plus the final coup-de-grâce ... when the new Parks Superintendent at the time, drastically reduced funding to the labour-intensive Rock Gardens meant that the once-famous gardens rapidly spiralled down into dereliction and for many years few, if any visitors looked around at the skeleton and what was left of these gardens.

For at least eighteen years, a few 'dreamers' envisioned that the Gardens could perhaps be restored, but each year the project came close to the top of the Parks Department list yet never once reached the approval phase. In 2003, the *Friends of Reader Rock Garden Society* was officially established to steward the dream. It became obvious that other City projects were being favoured; however, luckily the 'Gardening' Alderman, Barry Erskine, was persuaded to be the Champion for this project, raised about \$850,000 from the City's Legacy Fund and this amount was later matched by the Province and finally by the Federal Government. With \$2.5 million available, the new Project Manager, Anne Charlton (who later became the new head of the Parks Dept.) decided that, not only could the Gardens be restored, but also the old Superintendent's House rebuilt. With the expertise of

Lorne Simpson in house reconstruction and Len Novak and Donna Balzer in gardening, the rest, as they say, is history.

The Gardens and the reconstructed former Reader home were formally re-opened in the Spring of 2006, with many of the Reader family present ...



Official re-opening of the refurbished Reader Rock Garden, 2006.

Reader's descendants and City dignitaries were in attendance for the Celebration.

... and the challenge now is to ensure the Gardens continue to be attractive and the House, with its new Café remain financially successful ... even with limited fair-weather seasonal operation.

Should some of the large Poplar trees which create deep shade be cut back to allow Alpines to flourish once again? Should the greenhouses be rebuilt to provide special plant material? Can one City gardener adequately maintain this labour intensive-rock garden (at peak operations, there were said to be ~6 full-time gardeners onsite, for the 3 acres)? Lots of questions to be pondered by the new generation of Calgary gardeners.

Mr. Matthews is one of the founding members and was the first President of FoRRGS in 2003.

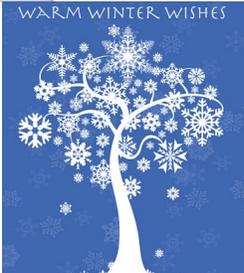
We thank him for his continued support and for sharing his perspectives on the Garden.






Season's GREETINGS

Hope to see you in the New Year!

WARM WINTER WISHES

We need YOU and your talents!

Please consider becoming a volunteer with us; our team is looking for all sorts of fun-loving, passionate folks that want to give back to their community, in your own ways. A wide range of tasks and time commitments are available. Let's chat.

Start the new year off on the right foot; make 2016 memorable... Volunteer!

Give Diane a call at 403-281-5899 or email at info@readerrock.com. Thanks!!





In the silver hush of a starry winter's night

In the song of the wind thru the trees

In the gentle grace of snowflakes as they fall ... is the whispered promise of peace.

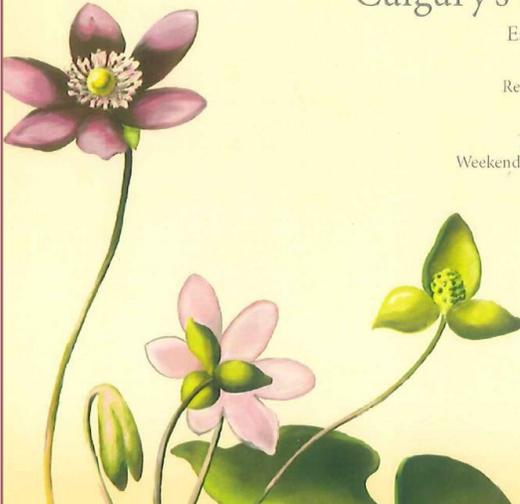
Wishing you the true, deep blessings of the season.




Thank-you members for supporting us this year! Your contributions helped us with our continuing efforts to get the message out.

Reader Rock Garden is a beautiful oasis to be cherished!

Also ... **Kudos** to our volunteers and sponsors, who believed in our initiatives and backed us in their own special ways. **Much appreciated!**

Calgary's Best Kept Secret

Est. 1913 - 2013

Reader Rock Garden
Historic Site

Lunch • Dinner
Weekend Brunch • Special Events

Reader's
GARDEN CAFE

Kitchen Garden Cuisine

Macleod Trail & 25th Avenue SE
403-263-0210
www.readergardencafe.ca

The Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS)

Potluck Dinner (6:30 pm) & Presentation - Trip to Talus Lodge by Carol Huggler (7:30 pm) Thursday, Jan. 14, 2016

**Lakeview Community Association Hall
6110 - 34 Street SW**

See their website for more details
www.crag.ca/events



Call 403-263-0210 or see the website: www.readergardencafe.ca
Closed for the season, but available for *Holiday events* or special occasions.