



# The Reader Rock Garden

[www.ReaderRock.com](http://www.ReaderRock.com)



## Farewell 2016

By Diane M. Dalkin

Frost, wind and snow have now completed their work of stripping deciduous trees of their leaves and blackening the hardiest herbaceous plants. Yet even in tatters, the garden retains traces of its faded beauty in silence.

You wouldn't think that Winter was created for gardeners, but it's the ideal time to take a break, a respite, a pause ... since sleeping plants don't need our controlling hands ... accordingly, winter fantasies can bloom ... what comes next, ... imaginative plans for spring's ventures or perhaps it's time to try a new approach for that special garden project or simply to take stock of last season's accomplishments and/or limitations? So, wrap yourself in a cozy warm sweater and pull out the seed catalogs, gardening books or research designs online. Winter's creativity holds the key, no time for hibernation!

For Reader Rock Garden, 2017 will bring some changes: A new Head Gardener, will be taking hold of the reigns in the new year. We hope to introduce him to you in our upcoming 2017 newsletters. In the interim, we wish him much success and look forward to working with him in the near future. The Café will also be under new management, but there are few details to share with you at this time. Stay tuned for more info, as we receive it. Both these developments will bring renewal and an infusion of fresh perspectives, so there's no need to worry about the adjustments.

However, we would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank *Janet Washburn* and *Katherine Moore* for their unwavering support of the Reader Rock Garden & Café for over a decade. You both will be dearly missed, but your long-standing diligent efforts built a strong groundwork for a promising future, of which we are truly grateful.

As wise Dr. Seuss suggests, *"Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened."* It was indeed great having you here; may continued happiness and good fortune follow you on your new adventures. Our heart-felt thank-you!!

Til we meet again ...

*On behalf of the FoRRGS Board of Directors—  
Happy Holidays & Merry Christmas to all our supporters ... wishing you & your families a safe & peaceful winter season. 2017 will be a fresh start ... see you in the New Year!*



First public Christmas tree, Dec 24, 1914,  
Central Memorial Park, Calgary



Glenbow Archives NA-4355-27

### FoRRGS Team

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## *The Superintendent of Many Things*

By Diane M. Dalkin

While we are aware of the fabulous hillside retreat, the **Reader Rock Garden**, where *William Roland Reader* and his family resided (1913-1943); did you know that *Mr. Reader* was *Superintendent of Parks, Cemeteries & Recreation*, for almost 30 years?



Glenbow Archives NA-789-125

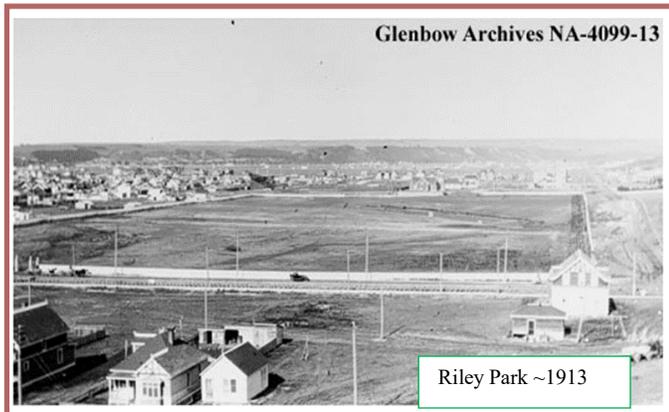
This influential position afforded him a huge impact on the growing city, albeit hard economic times and wars curtailed many of his good intentions.

Nonetheless, during his tenure, Mr. Reader led the development of many places, programs and initiatives. Here are a few:

### PARKS:

Some of the earliest parks he reported on were: Central Memorial, Mewata, Riley, Reservoir, Shouldice, Tuxedo, Shaganappi, St. George's Island, Bowness, Victoria, and later the network evolved with the extended boundaries of the city. Each of these parks had very different settings, designs and purposes. By 1937-38, there were ~108 parks, covering ~1,300 acres.

As early as 1914, Reader believed that *"a progressive park extension program is inseparably associated with the public welfare. It is not nowadays a question whether parks can be afforded, but rather whether we can afford not to have them."*



Glenbow Archives NA-4099-13

Riley Park ~1913

He also expanded the scope and perception of Calgary parks and the need to beautify streets, boulevards, bridge approaches, and other public spaces. His horticultural influence was vast too: introducing fashionable gardening trends (e.g. rock gardening, useful shelter wind-breaks, preserving native flora, trials on new plant specimens, & regretfully - ugh ...the dreaded invasive Creeping Bellflower-Campanula rapunculoides, etc.). He was one of the founders of the Calgary Horticultural Society, and had a regular column in the local newspaper, offering instructional advice for gardeners (as a former teacher, he was a big proponent of education). *"In 1922 alone, some 4000 inquiries for horticultural information were received."*



Glenbow Archives NA-1604344

Formal design of Central Memorial Park ~1919

Other notable undertakings included: being a member of the Alpine Club of Canada, overseeing the municipal greenhouses & nurseries (flowers & palms were loaned out), researching and documenting plant material (including their sources), participating in world-wide exchange of seeds, providing plant decoration for special city-events/pageantry (e.g. the 1919 H.R.H. Prince of Wales visit), hospital cheer *"Sunshine Campaign"*; championing city-wide efforts towards tree-planting (especially Memorial Drive & 1930 Arbor Day), designing floral displays, maintaining trees & pruning, administering control efforts over *"destructive insects/pestilences & other menaces"*. Planting records & inventories were kept (thorough testing & trials of trees, shrubs, perennials, vines, bulbs, annuals, & vegetables).

In 1914, ~255 vacant lots were prepared for vegetable gardens and the harvest was ear-marked for the needy.

Reader was ahead of his time in other respects too, advocating wise use of watering and reusing/re-purposing materials, focused on weed eradication (*"troublesome dandelions"* frequently noted); kept meteorological records of weather, temperatures & precipitation - including torrential storms, chinooks, deluges of rain, hailstorms, floods, droughts, and accompanying damages.

He seemed to share his wide-ranging thoughts and opinions quite readily, thus giving us some historical insights, as shown below:

- *"Appropriate gateways should be added to the entrances. These would add to the dignity of our parks."*
- *"I would recommend that a regulation be made to prevent automobiles travelling at a greater speed than say, 8 miles per hour on parks roads"*.
- *"I intend to neatly label the flowers planted in the parks ... this will, I think, add materially to the interest of citizens, for the educational aspect of park work is by no means the least important."*
- *"After much loss of time and unsuccessful experimenting, we seem to have hit on the right method by which to make Calgary a city of trees."*
- *"Planting of trees and flowers, together with other improvements is now beginning to eliminate the barren dismal landscape effect, that, at one time prevailed, " 1916*
- *"I am opposed to the too general planting of Russian or other species of Poplars on the streets. Though these trees are rapid growing and therefore appeal to citizens, yet they have undesirable characteristics as fully developed trees and are short lived."* 1915
- *"With regard to weeds on private property, I beg to recommend that an inspector be appointed to enforce the Bylaw recently passed."* 1915

**CEMETERIES:**

Despite numerous local environmental challenges and demanding conditions, Reader acknowledged that *“the care of the last resting place of the dead always demands respectful consideration”*; yet he also supported the improvement for peaceful and beautiful settings for visitors. *“Provisions should be made for perpetual care, so that these areas may not again become as they have been in the past, deserted villages of the dead.”* 1924

The first successful site development was at Union Cemetery (with a neoclassical Archway built at the entrance), followed by Burnsland, Chinese, St. Mary’s and Queen’s Park cemeteries. Proposed Cemetery Regulations were revised subsequent to his recommendations in 1915 (77 general, 17 for visitors & tariffs).

On Union Cemetery, he stated: *“I have planted about 700 spruce trees along the main driveway and propose to extend this planting, year by year, on all roads. This will eventually give an avenue-like appearance and do away with the barren aspect of the cemetery.”* In 1919, he also suggested to *“plant trees in memory of those citizens who made the supreme sacrifice in the Great War”*.

**RECREATION:**

This area of focus was a big part of his department’s endeavors: *“In response to public demand, there was considerable emphasis on the playground work of the Department”*. He supported supervised children’s playgrounds, which offered numerous activities, equipment and facilities: games, handicrafts, all-season sports & athletics, swimming, skating, rinks, curling, tennis, baseball, softball, football, soccer, cricket, rugby, Lacrosse, basketball, archery, horse-shoe, competitions & galas, picnics, boating, golf course, “Mutt Shows”, first-aid assistance & supplies, Baby Welfare week was introduced in 1917, milk and biscuits provided to children on occasions, 1930 Olympic training, a campaign to prevent accidents in 1933, lawn bowling, corn roasts, story-telling and bridle trails, to name but a few. He emphatically concluded in 1929 that *“the most popular medicine is outdoor recreation ... it is nature’s own route to sturdy bodies & sound nerves.”*

He devotedly remarked in 1929 that *“playground work is a municipal duty.*

*The supervised games of children can be used not only to enlarge their lungs and straighten their backs, but also to act as character builders.”* Moreover, *“as the City provides opportunities in this way, so in turn will its children be better, happier and healthier, and develop into useful citizens”*. *“Play is not only necessary and essential to the life of the child, but also to the well-being of the adult, helping him to throw off fatigue & strain of his daily work.”*

The department also policed these areas, using Commissionaires on motor bikes to patrol the parks & playgrounds, responding to com-

plaints, issuing warnings and citations pertaining to all sorts of things: e.g. the *“vicious nature of vandalism”*, use of *“bad obscene language”*, *unruliness, noise, horses roaming-at-large, stray dogs & cats, mischievous children, throwing stones, stolen plants, cattle ranging in parks, wild driving and speeding indulged at night, parking violations, careless uncontrolled fires, malicious persons, carrying firearms, destruction of lamp globes, driving into shrubbery, damage done by ignorant and mischievous elements visiting the parks, flagpole ropes stolen, stealing golf balls, unsanitary conditions, personal cleanliness, littering, to ensure that bathers were properly clothed, rough play, other forms of hooliganism, and preventing the development of “jungle” communities.*

Yet, despite the objectionable references above and countless others, he also extended many kind tributes and accolades to various groups and individuals like: his *“faithful & efficient staff”*, as well as highlighting the inter-departmental collaboration. He acknowledged numerous donors, various charities, community groups, clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, *“public-spirited citizens for their untiring efforts & generosity”* and the *“zealous cooperation of citizens”*.

The Zoo also grew under his leadership, with the tremendous support from the Calgary Zoological Society and many other generous citizens’ hard work. Reader kept detailed listings of the varied *“Zoo inmates & occupants”* (their place of origin, survival rates, causes of deaths, epidemics, 1929 flood losses, etc.) and provided the inventories in his annual reports to City Council.

Interestingly, through research for this article, an urban legend was clarified. In 1928, Reader reported that the non-native Black Squirrels were thriving in their new homes, being thoroughly acclimatised and *“were turned loose in the park and roamed to all corners of the city”*. Hhhmm ... thanks for this? Furthermore, native wild bird protection was encouraged as a duty and a pleasure, with the installation of feeding stations and nesting boxes for parks in 1917.

Additionally, other miscellaneous tasks he undertook included: attempting to *“encourage tourism & impress visitors”* (e.g. *sight-seeing drive within the city*). He tried to *“foster a civic pride in Calgary”*, by introducing various community standards by-laws. Furthermore, he demonstrated compassion by offering employment and utilized relief labour during the war.

Although this article does not include an exhaustive account of those busy 30 years, hopefully this cursory review of some early City developments provides a glimpse into the immense responsibilities of Reader’s domain and the great variety of operations. His influence was indeed far-reaching and a strong foundation was built by this *Superintendent-of-many-things*, who embraced the great diversity of functions. Today, these duties are now covered by several City departments and employ huge teams.

If you are interested in reading more about Reader and his teams’ activities (including loads of statistics, interesting opinions, insightful observations, proactive suggestions, historical references, etc.) while he was Superintendent of Parks, Cemeteries, & Recreation, you can view his annual reports online at:

<http://www.calgary.ca/CA/city-clerks/Pages/Corporate-records/Archives/Holdings/Parks-and-Recreation-Department-Annual-Reports.aspx>

Just a note, a lot of these annual reports are well over 100 pages each, in case you plan on down-loading them.

*A fascinating step back in time with this interesting & innovative character.*



Children in St. George’s Island Park ~1914






*A Time For Pause & Respite, to Experience Winter's Silence!*





**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 2017 memorable... Volunteer!

Give Diane a call at 403-281-5899 or email at [info@readerrock.com](mailto:info@readerrock.com). Thanks!!




DON'T THINK THE GARDEN LOSES ITS ECSTASY IN WINTER. IT'S QUIET, BUT THE ROOTS ARE DOWN THERE RIOTOUS.

- RUMI



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



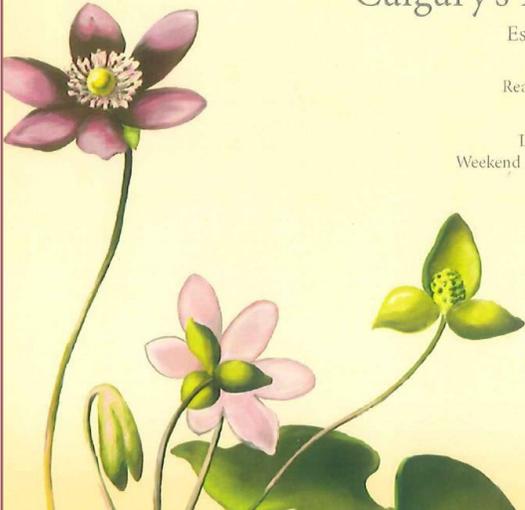


Calgary's Best Kept Secret

Est. 1913 - 2013

Reader Rock Garden  
Historic Site

Lunch • Dinner  
Weekend Brunch • Special Events



*Reader's*  
GARDEN CAFE

Kitchen Garden Cuisine

Macleod Trail & 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE  
403-263-0210  
[www.readergardencafe.ca](http://www.readergardencafe.ca)

The Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS)

**Meetings are Usually the Second Thursday of the month.**

Lakeview Community Association Hall  
6110 - 34 Street SW

See their website for more details  
[www.crag.ca/events](http://www.crag.ca/events)



Call 403-263-0210 or see the website: [www.readergardencafe.ca](http://www.readergardencafe.ca)  
Closed for the season.