



The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



It's Official, The Plaque Is Here! by Diane Dalkin

On **May 21st**, we were very fortunate to have Mr. Reader's grand-daughters, *Betty-Rose, Irene & Elaine* (plus other family members too, from Ontario, BC, Edmonton) join us at the Official Plaque Unveiling ceremony for the **National Historic Site** designation. Despite the day's cold & wet weather, ~ 115 enthusiastic attendees made the best of the situation and enjoyed the stories shared by the Reader descendants. The Parks Canada team from Banff, the City Parks folks & the Reader's Garden Café staff all added their professional efforts to this memorable celebration. *Thanks everyone!!*



Mr. Reader's grand-daughters, *Irene, Betty-Rose & Elaine* (left of the plaque); & Gian-Carlo Carra, Kyle Ripley, Kent Hehr, Donna Zwicker on the right side.

As you can see in the photo, the large plaque was indoors for the day, but eventually it will be placed outside, adjacent to the Café, right by the Main Lawn. It's a good prominent location, so keep your eyes out for the coming instalment. Such an honor deserves a visit and we all now have the bragging right to this special place in our very own city!

Besides this, our usual pre-season activities included Seedy Saturday at the Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Centre. Of course, we took part in the Calgary Horticultural Society's Garden Show at the new venue, Max Bell Centre. Plus, on that very same weekend, we participated in the Jane's Walk, a city-wide initiative organized by the Calgary Foundation. "Thanks" to the many volunteers for making these events such a success, even if the weather tried to dampen things. Once again, a great team prevailed!

On May 26th, our Annual General Meeting was held. We're thrilled to have *Lindsey Boida* take on added responsibilities as the Board's *Vice-President*. And, we are also delighted that dedicated longtime volunteers continue to serve and assist, diligently, year after year. However, I would like to point out that the Board Secretary position is now vacant. Perhaps you might give this role some consideration? We're always looking for fresh perspectives and new energies. Share your talents with us!!

We would like to take this opportunity to whole-heartedly extend our thanks to *Grace Satre & Barb Smith* for completing their 2 year-terms on the FoRRGS Board and wish them the very best as they move on to other adventures.

On a final note, did you hear that we're having our "**biggest Plant Sale ever**"? Come by on Saturday, **June 22, 10:00 AM-1:00 PM** to get your little piece of Reader Rock Garden to take home and enjoy. We're certain you'll find your special treasure. ☘☘☘

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Reader's Malus

By Marilyn Mayall

"The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now" (Old Chinese Proverb)

Of the many trees that Reader planted throughout the city and around his home, the 1936 plant list includes twenty one different species of *Malus*. Many of these species occur more than once in his lists. For example, there are multiple plantings of both 'Dolgo' and 'Osman'. The species represent a wide variety of apples.... from the native Wild Sweet Crabapple (*Malus coronaria*) to some of the more famous products of the Prairie Fruit Breeding Programs such as *Malus* 'Transcendent' to the widely acclaimed *Malus* 'Wealthy' which was used as a minimum standard by Dr. N.E. Hansen (an early hybridiser) against which some 10,000 new seedlings were evaluated during the 1920s.

Although Reader's many plantings would have provided a breathtaking display in Spring, beauty was not the only concern of early settlers. Food security (reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food) ranked high in the minds of both citizens and planners. One of Reader's grand daughters, Betty-Rose, commented that they didn't expect to have produce out-of-season when she was growing up.

My original quest was to try and determine whether any of the existing crabapples at Reader Rock Garden (the Garden) were likely to be specimens from Reader's time and although this seems like a fairly straightforward task, it has proven to be a long journey and I still cannot state with certainty whether the identified trees are what I think they are. In the absence of certainty I am prepared to believe that there is a good probability that we can identify a few of the remaining crabapples at the Garden as original Reader plantings.

Sadly, not many of the crabapples listed by Reader still exist in the Garden. One factor could be that many apples from Reader's time may be reaching the end of their expected life span and have died off. Some (like *M. coronaria*) are well outside their zonal limits. Some trees are clearly later plantings and do not correspond to Reader's locations. Some may be volunteers as they are either in less than optimal positions (did Reader really plant a fruit tree dangling over the upper pond?). Some do not appear to be cultivars that Reader listed. But it is clear from the cultivars that Reader chose that he was keenly aware of the ongoing research. His choices read like a 'Who's Who' of species chosen by other hybridisers as likely parents in the quest for the best apple for prairie Canada.

The classic elongated shape and bright red colour of the *Malus* in Bed 8 made this specimen the easiest to identify. Betty-Rose remembered the wonderful colour of the jellies made from the 'Dolgo'.

Malus 'Dolgo' was grown from seed collected in 1897 at the Imperial Botanical Gardens (St. Petersburg, Russia) from *M. x robusta*. It was introduced to the U.S.A. in



Bed 8 – October 2017 Photo: Marilyn Mayall

1917. In the search for the perfect northern apple it was used as a parent in many of the early trials at the experimental stations in both the northern U.S.A. and Canada. Both Morden and Ottawa Experimental Stations released progeny of 'Dolgo'. It was a popular choice on the prairies (undoubtedly its Russian heritage helped in making it hardy to Zone 2) and although

not a good keeper, it was considered to be excellent for making jelly. Fairly early ripening time (August) was probably attractive to the householder desperate for early ripening produce.

While many other crabapples have been superseded, 'Dolgo' is still available to the home grower. Be aware that it is a large tree and can grow to a height of 30-40 feet with a spread of 10-20 feet. It is susceptible to some slight scab and slightly susceptible to fire blight.

Unlike the 'Dolgo', the crabapple in Bed 11 was more challenging to identify. The pale yellow skin is flushed with pale red and the round fruit is about 3.5 cm wide. Although the specimen in Bed 11 is not a large one, 'Osman' can, like its Siberian parent, be a large tree (H: 70 feet; width: 40 feet).

It is probably *Malus* 'Osman' because the description of the blooms does not exactly match what I have observed of the blooms at the Garden.



Bed 11 – October 2018 Photo: Marilyn Mayall

Reviews of the 'Osman' were mixed. Coutts described it as "a good crab in the 1930s". One of the concerns was its habit of dropping fruit when ripening as well as a tendency for fruit to split. Although I have only tracked the specimen in Bed 11 for 2 years, I have not noticed these problems. Some concerns about fire blight and scab are also noted. The 'Osman' was clearly one of Reader's favourites as he planted no less than 9 around the gardens. The 'Osman' was also one of the most frequently recommended cultivars by the Dominion Experimental Farm in Lethbridge. The other most recommended cultivar from Lethbridge, 'Moscow Pear' does not appear in Reader's lists.

The 'Osman' was the result of an early cross (1904) between *M. baccata* and 'Osimoë' (a hardy domestic apple). It was developed at the Canadian Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa by William Saunders and named in 1911.

The fruit is described as having yellow, crisp flesh with a tart astringent taste suitable for canning and jelly. M. F. Babb notes that it is also a fair to good dessert apple when fully ripe (1959).

Both the ‘Dolgo’ and the ‘Osman’ are clearly old trees (possibly nearing the end of their life cycle) and easily accessible from Reader’s residence (which adds some credibility to the idea that they were planted as food producing trees).

Thoreau, of Walden fame, commented that “*it is remarkable how closely the history of the apple tree is connected with that of man.*” The history of the apple on the prairies, beginning in the late 1800s mirrors the settlement of the western provinces as the search for a winter hardy apple was pursued by settlers and government agencies at the provincial and federal levels.

Some, like William Saunders, chose to use *M.baccata* and the hardiest standard apples as parents. Some, like Dr. N. E. Hansen, used a hardy wild crabapple (probably *M. ioenensis*) as well as the Siberian crabapple as parents. The use of European apples as parents was largely abandoned due to disappointing results. Both the severe winters of 1916-17 and 1942-1943 proved to be particularly devastating to apple growing on the prairies. Many of the specimens did not survive these so-called “test winters”. The need for shelter belts was reinforced as was the need to develop only the hardiest strains.

The Experimental Stations across the country were responsible for the testing of thousands of fruit trees in search of a “*wonder apple [that] would not only stand the long and harsh prairie winters without suffering die-back, but wouldapproach the size of a commercial apple, have good texture, a flavour acceptable for dessert or cooking (preferably both) and possess good keeping qualities. The tree would show vigour, disease resistance and be of good form and structural strength. It would fruit at an early age, and continue to bear a heavy annual crop without over-production that would necessitate thinning.*” (Anonymous, 1991)

Like many of the Experimental stations, the Headquarters Farm in Brooks, Alberta, was tasked with producing better varieties of hardy fruits. In 1935, there were “*13 varieties and seedlings of apples, 24 varieties of crabapples, four varieties of pears and 45 varieties and over 800 seedlings of plums and cherries. There were also numerous nut trees.....*” As well as the development of prairie hardy fruits, the Brooks Station distributed fruit trees to farm families and was active in shelterbelt work (Alberta Agriculture, 2000).

Apart from the more scientific crosses carried out at the Experimental Stations, many private individuals carried out their own experiments in apple growing. Some used controlled crosses but many specimens were open pollinated. Betty-Rose recollected that seeds from apples were saved, grown and given to friends by Reader's wife. This resulted in many apples of unknown parentage

which were often named by their growers, but most of which did not ultimately stand the test of time (and which presented a nightmare for Experimental Stations as far as classification and identification was concerned). There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization. Adolph Heyer used open pollinated apples and then selected from the better adapted specimens. ‘Heyer 12’ remains a popular specimen that has stood the test of time and which was still rated as ‘Highly Recommended’ by the authors of “Edible Apples in Prairie Canada” as late as 1991.

Times change...the massive Fall task of canning and juicing and preserving of crabapples became less attractive when it became possible to buy dessert apples at a reasonable price at local stores. This was made possible by the development of better fruit distribution systems. Funding for research was reduced and the focus of the Experimental Stations changed. The quest for the perfect prairie apple became

less pressing. And perhaps there was a feeling that this particular dream was not to be realized (at least at that time).

However, not all crabapples were grown for their fruit. More than half of Reader’s listed *Malus* were of a more ornamental character.

The multi-trunked tree in Bed F may not be old enough to be an original Reader planting, but it certainly earns its keep with a profusion of blooms in Spring, attractive clusters of red-purple fruit in Fall and the purple in the foliage which is characteristic of the Rosybloom group of crabapples. There is a strong likelihood that this specimen is a progeny of the famed *M.pumila* ‘Niedzwetzkyana’ (the Red Vein Crabapple) in which even the fruit is suffused with red. Reader planted two of this specimen. Neither appear to be in the beds indicated by Reader.

Research with this group of crabapples was undertaken by a number of prominent hybridists in the 1920s and 1930s. Isabelle Preston developed some of the earliest of these hybrids, naming them after lakes in the region. ‘Makamik’ (no longer in the Garden), was one hybrid which was planted by Reader.

Research has continued since the applemania of earlier times. Between 1997 and 2010 the University of Saskatchewan has released a number of apples that more closely approximate the perfect prairie apple.

And all those crabapples that require substantial hours of raking up in Fall? In the last few years, some local cideries are making use of these in their brewing operations. A much better outcome than becoming part of the landfill (or the compost bin).



Bed F – May 2018 Photo: Marilyn Mayall



MW
MARKET WINES

Thanks to Sarah M. and the folks at **MW Market Wines** for providing numerous cardboard beer trays which will be very helpful for our upcoming **Plant Sale on Saturday June 22 @ Reader Rock Garden 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM.**

So nice to get community support for our activities & re-purposing supplies at the same time!

Acknowledgements for the featured article:

This article has been an odyssey of discovery about fruit crops in the prairies. Many people have played a part in this journey, and I appreciate their generosity and encouragement on this journey. Especially, I would like to thank members of Edmonton's DBG Fruit Growers Group: Jo Granger, Thean Pheh, Gabor Botar, Brendan Casement; University of Saskatchewan: Rick Sawatzky; Brooks' Crop Diversification Centre South: Shelley Barkley and Darcy Dreidger.

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BTW ... FoRRGS is currently exploring creative ways to utilize the abundant crabapple harvest at the Garden (besides sharing with wildlife & the compost bin).



*Once again this year, **Reader's Garden Café** will offer **High Teas**, on certain weekends. Their website has all the stylish details.*

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*Reader's
Garden cafe*

The Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS)

2nd Thursday of each month
(Jan-June and Sept-Nov)

Lakeview Community Association Hall
6110 34th Street SW.
6:30 pm Social & Refreshments
7:00 pm Q&A
7:30 pm Presentation

Thursday, **June 13, 2019**

Speaker: Marcela Ferreyra
Topic: *Flowers in Patagonia*

See: www.crag.ca/events