

The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



Spring Awakenings & Fresh Start

By Diane Dalkin

The promise of **Spring** is here ... excitement and joy fill out hearts with renewed expectations. At last, another gardening season is upon us! Fresh air and sunshine beckon us outdoors ... *ahhh!* 😊

This year is particularly special, as it marks the 10th year since the Garden re-opened to the public, following the restoration project. Marilyn includes more details about this in our featured article; however, we encourage you to share your thoughts with us and celebrate this milestone.

It's also the perfect year to plan a visit to **Reader Rock Garden** and check-in on the progress that a decade brings. Come by the Garden at your convenience or drop by our planned events:

- ◇ **April 9 & 10** - We'll be at the **Calgary Horticultural Society's Garden Show** at Spruce Meadows. Loads of things to see and do for beginners and expert gardeners alike. Look for our booth and pop in to say "Hello", support our initiatives and become a member, or simply enter your name for the tantalizing draw prizes.
- ◇ **May 15th** - (Sunday) **Annual General Meeting**, held at Reader's Garden Café, lower classroom a.k.a. Potato Room, 1:00-3:00 pm. Meet the team in-person and find out what we've been up to. All welcomed.
- ◇ **June 18th** - (Saturday) **Annual Garden Stroll**, in conjunction with the *National Garden Days*—a country-wide celebration of the vital role that gardens and gardening play in our communities and our lives. See www.gardendays.ca for all the news. Tour guides will be stationed throughout the Garden to answer questions and provide insights, 1:00-3:00 pm. Door prizes, light refreshments, used book sale and free parking will be available; as well as membership renewals.

Besides the above, please note that **Reader's Garden Café** re-opens **May 1st**, for your dining pleasure &/or private function; page 4 includes contact and reservation info.



Buds, colorful blooms and sweet fragrances are filling our gardens, awaiting our discovery. Song birds regale us with their happy melodies.

Time to get on outdoors and **welcome Spring!**

We look forward to seeing you at the Garden soon.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at info@readerrock.com.



FoRRGS Team

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Restoration Reminiscences

By Marilyn Mayall

In May 2016, it will be 10 years since Reader Rock Garden officially re-opened, so I thought it would be timely to ask some of the people involved in the renovation for their memories of that time. My own imagination staggers when confronted with the thought of rehabilitating 1.2 hectares of wilderness that has been left to its own devices for 30+ years.

Sheila Paulson (from CRAGS) remembers the pre-renovation Gardens as “a jungle”.

Overgrown rockery & along the driveway, pre-restoration. ~2004



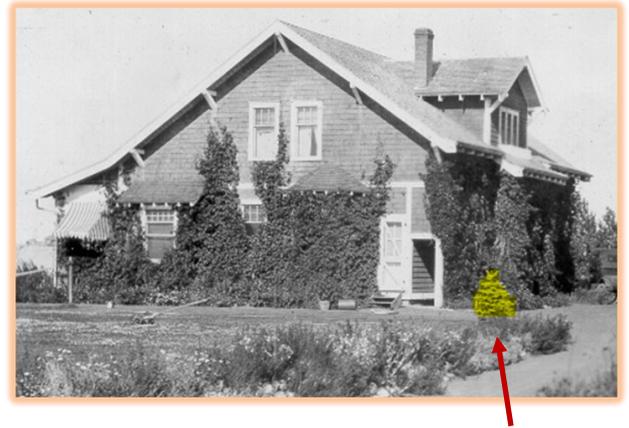
Janet Washburn (City of Calgary) who worked with contract crews in the fall of 2004 remembers the task as “incredibly intimidating”. As well as commonly recognizable weeds such as dandelions and burdock (both of which have long tap roots which need to be removed completely if regeneration is not to re-occur), the garden was over-run by feral descendants of original plant stock. Native geraniums (? Bicknell’s Geranium) were thriving and had happily been depositing their numerous seeds for years. The rocks of the High Rockery were completely invisible under a solid growth of delphiniums...not the most obvious choice for rockery plantings. And the notorious creeping bellflower was well established throughout the Gardens. I suppose it represented a pretty accurate picture of plants that could survive in Calgary (or put less politely a collection of “garden thugs” which included tansy, toadflax and hawkweed.

Michelle Reid (Cultural Landscape Lead Calgary Parks.) described the overgrown Gardens as “a place that time forgot”, but even in its overgrown state as having a strong sense of history. The task was made intimidating by the fact that the Gardens could not be cleared entirely (no Round-Up or rototilling allowed) because of the imperative need to find and preserve valuable historic plants from Reader’s original lists and which were hidden and intertwined amongst more aggressive survivors.

The whole project was as much an archaeological dig as a garden renovation. Long buried lead tags, broken bits

of crockery all needed to be evaluated as part of the renovations. The stream bed shown in Reader maps above the Fern Walk was not discovered. Nor were an estimated 80%-95% of Reader’s approximately 4000 plants. Today, the large white posts scattered throughout the Gardens indicate original Reader plants.

But there were treasures amongst the thugs. The iconic flower of the Gardens -*hepatica*- was discovered in the Gardens. Boxwood (which shouldn’t survive in Calgary, let alone 30 years of neglect) can still be seen in the Gardens. As can the ghostly, unusual and out of zone *Fritillaria pallidiflora*.



The blue spruce was a rarity when Reader planted it on the main lawn near the house. It now has Heritage status.

The garden as a whole is a Provincial Historic resource.

The unique cobblestone section of road outside the Garden was uncovered. And there were some spectacular repatriations of rescued plants. Ev Keddie remembers travelling to Killarney to collect a *Hepatica*. Sheila Paulson remembers the donation of *Adonis vernalis* from a resident in Mount Royal.

Janet Washburn remembers that “what made the biggest impression on me was the incredible sense of pride and accomplishment that the crews so quickly developed.” (Some of whom still visit the Gardens today with their children.)



This has become a common theme as I talk to people who were involved in the renovations. This was not just a job....this was the realization of a dream.

But I am ahead of myself....for years prior to the clearing there had been the strongly expressed opinion by numerous people that the Gardens needed restoration

Monika Korsten (then Open Space Inventory Administrator for Parks Development and Operations) requested the return of rescued plants as early as 2000. She took courses at U. Vic to add to the level of expertise about restoration. Representations from individuals and groups emphasized the importance of the Gardens as a historical resource and botanical treasure while deploring the current state of the Gardens. Initial applications for funding were not successful.

It was only when funding was secured that the dream could move forward.

After the funding was in place, there was a short window in which the work was to be completed. Planning and coordinating the many groups involved became the job for *Anne Charlton*, the project manager of the renovation.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”
Margaret Mead

Ev Keddie and Sheila Paulson remember Sheila’s ping-pong table as well as other places in her basement being covered with the seedlings which had been sourced and ordered from Reader’s lists. Before these could be planted out in April, they remember re-digging their assigned beds to clear yet more *Campanula rapunculoides* tubers.

Donna Balzer wrote in an article for Alberta Views Magazine: As part of the restoration ‘a border of white spruce was planted at one metre intervals along the cemetery fence at the edge of what Reader considered to be his private area. While working in the garden...a young couple visiting the cemetery stopped along the fence to advise me that we had planted the white spruce too close. “Yes, I agreed. They are too close. We are planting according to the original plan”, Balzer goes on to comment: “While few landscape gardeners today would plant hedges of spruce, the hedges Reader planted are definitely character defining for the era.”

During the restorations, choices and compromises between current horticultural thinking and the need for historical accuracy were not uncommon. Guidance was available in the newly published *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* and from the wealth of written documentation which was part of Reader’s legacy.

Extraordinary care was taken to ensure that the renovations conformed not only to the guidelines for historic restorations, but to both the spirit and letter of Reader’s Garden.

Michelle Reid remembers that when the renovation was completed the plants were so small that she felt that the Gardens temporarily lost their sense of being a historic site. But now that the plants have grown, there is a renewed sense of the historic - the garden has grown into itself.

Was this an important project? When I asked this question, the answer invariably involved references to Reader and his enormous impact on the history of horticulture and the history of Calgary.

Michelle Reid noted that the project “illustrated that people do have a need for history” and a “recognition of how people had a connection with the past”. The story of the Gardens goes beyond the gardens....it is also the story of how Calgary grew and the impact of Reader on that growth. In a city more usually intent on eliminating rather than restoring the past, that in itself is hugely significant.

She also noted that the successful restoration of the Gardens subsequently led to other restorations in Calgary... the Memorial gardens being one such example.

Donna Balzer referred to the broad range of his interests....not only as someone who trialled plants suitable for Calgary gardeners, wrote extensively about his findings and introduced exotics like the Himalayan poppy. She referred also to his enormous networking capacity, his broad thinking and as a man who was completely involved in the life of his city.

Monika Korsten noted how in the 1930s Reader employed men on the dole to work in the garden of the (now demolished) General Hospital growing produce for the Hospital.....the local food movement seems to have come full cycle again.

I began to become quite irritated with W.R.Reader (personal hero or not)....he was always there! I wanted to concentrate on the restorations! Now with a small distance from those conversations, I recognize that ... he is the essential component in the ribbon of Garden history. Without him, Calgary would be a different place. We are, indeed, standing on the *shoulders of a giant*.

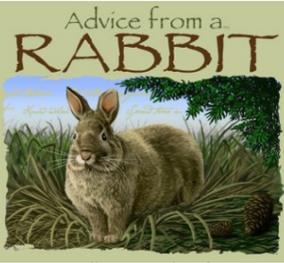
I am painfully aware that I have captured only a narrow selection of memories. So many more people were involved in this project. If you are one of them and would like to add your memories of the restorations to the newsletter, please email them to me at info@readerrock.com and I’ll do my best to include them in later newsletters.



Advice from a Rabbit



Be a good listener;
Eat plenty of greens;
Let your dreams multiply;
Hop to it!;
Know when to be still;
Spend time in nature;
Don't worry, be happy!



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. Tour guides are especially needed. Let's chat soon.

Start the new gardening season off on the right foot; make it memorable... Volunteer!

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



“Behold, my friends, the spring is come;

The earth has gladly received the embraces of the sun,

And we shall soon see the results of their love!”

Sitting Bull

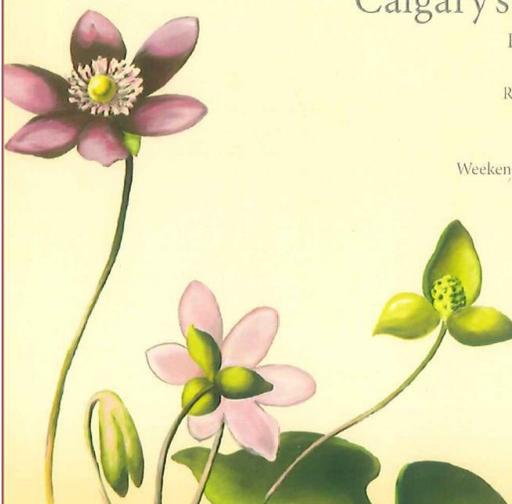


Hope to see you at our upcoming events:

- * April 9th & 10th - CHS Garden Show @ Spruce Meadows. Come visit us at our booth.
- * May 15th (Sunday) - FoRRGS AGM - lower classroom @Reader's Garden Café 1:00-3:00 pm
- * June 18th (Saturday)- 1:00-3:00 pm Annual Garden Stroll @ the Garden, in conjunction with National Garden Days



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The Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS)

Upcoming Talks & Events:
April 14—Wildflowers in Waterton
May 12—Asian Plants for Calgary
May 14—Plant Sale

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.readersgardencafe.ca

Re-opening May 1, 2016,

but also available for private events or special occasions.