

The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF READER ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

Reader Rock Ramblings

President's Message - 2020 Closing Thoughts

By Lindsey Boida

Hello FoRRGS members & supporters!

I hope you all enjoyed the beautiful Fall, and warmer weather while it lasted, despite dealing with the inconveniences of the pandemic. FoRRGS continues to make the best of this situation and has decided to focus on two key areas to support and compliment the work the Head Gardener, Daniel, would like to achieve at Reader Rock Garden. The focus areas are as follows:

- ◆ Connecting/reconnecting with local garden societies to build a stronger Calgary garden community.
- ◆ Increase the plant diversity at Reader Rock to William Reader's original plant list, while also encouraging diversity across Calgary.

This year FoRRGS has already connected with the Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs (BGSS) (check out the Fall 2020 Newsletter for FoRRGS' field trip to BGSS), Lougheed House Garden, the Calgary Rose Society and Rundle Wood Gardens. We have a few more connections that are in the works (more to come on those potential connections). These affiliations will also support in seeking out the hard-to-find species from the original plant list – the more eyes out there the better for this initiative.

If you are interested in helping out with these focus areas mentioned above or have ideas/suggestions for FoRRGS, please reach out to us at our website email: info@readerrock.com.

In closing, on behalf of the Board of Directors, *thank-you for your continued patronage!* We wish you, your families and friends a safe & healthy Holiday Season!! Looking forward to seeing you at the Garden in 2021.



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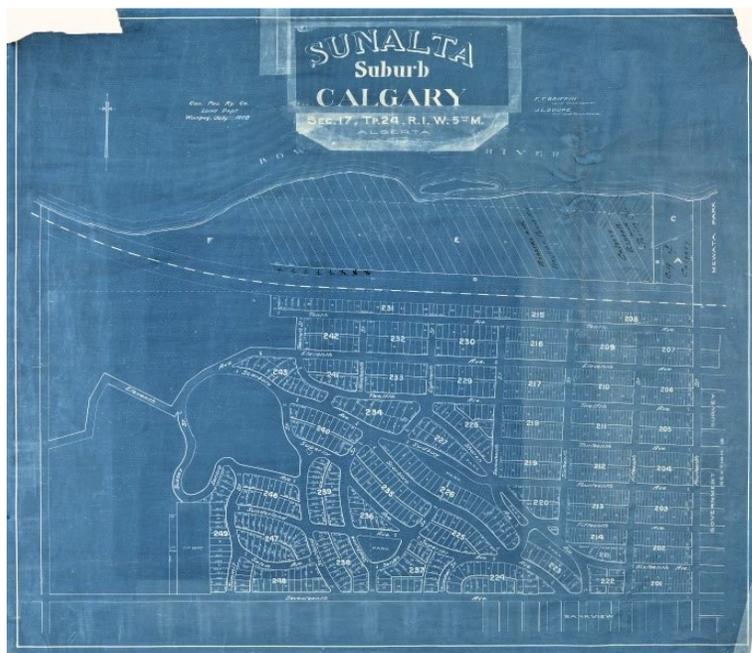
FoRRGS Team

President - Lindsey Boida
 Vice-President - *Vacant*
 Treasurer - Liz Lunney
 Membership - Karen Hogan
 Secretary - Lillian Kasa
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The Impact of Olmsted Brothers & Reader in Central Calgary

By Glynn Wright

In the late 19th Century, William Pearce and the Calgary City Council were important in the development of our boulevards, parks and residential trees – what we now call the urban forest. The Olmsted family’s landscape design company also influenced communities here. Frederick Law Olmsted and partner Calvert Vaux were responsible for Central Park in New York and the Riverside Village community, west of Chicago, Illinois, but it was Olmsted’s adopted son, John Charles Olmsted (1852-1920) who designed the Uplands in Oak Bay, Victoria, some parts of Calgary’s central Mount Royal and the entire Scarboro community (the latter was referred to then as the Sunalta subdivision, or addition, when it was being planned for the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1910). The escarpment and neighbouring streets and parks in Bridgeland and Renfrew were also designed by the Olmsted brothers in 1911: a feature typical of the Olmsted company, one of their triangular parks still exists at the intersection of Child Avenue and Danloe Street NE.

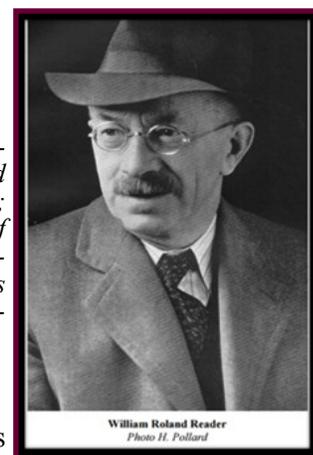


1910 design for the Sunalta suburb, derived from Olmsted’s earlier map

Their designs for the three Calgary areas are still evident, attractive, and beneficial to Calgary citizens and our environment, and follows the design of the Illinois Riverside Village, characterized by winding streets and triangular parks of varying dimensions – with occasional rectangular street intersections – that take advantage of the views afforded by the dramatic topography. For instance Calgary’s Scarboro Avenue follows the top of the escarpment over-

looking the Bow River Valley and provides views over inner western and downtown Calgary.

Olmsted’s belief was that access to green spaces would be the answer to many of the social problems that came about with the industrial revolution and the subsequent migration from the countryside into crowded cities. The Olmsted’s company philosophy was to provide clean air, and space for recreation and relaxation, but it was William Reader who was largely responsible for implementing the “green” development of Calgary parks and communities, including the Shaganappi Point golf course, other natural areas, and various cemeteries. This is consistent with the social philosophies and Picturesque tradition and aesthetics of city planning, integrating design with the natural setting that was gaining popularity in the 19th Century.



William R. Reader, Superintendent of Parks, Cemeteries, and later, Recreation, 1913 – 1942; undated photo, Courtesy of Glenbow Archives Glenbow Archives, NA 789-125, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary.

William Roland Reader was born in England in 1874, emigrated with his wife Rose Martha (+ son & daughter) and in 1908 was hired by Patrick Burns to work on his ranch just south of Calgary. In 1910 Reader built a small house in Crescent Heights and started his own tree nursery there: he played a founding role in the Calgary Horticultural Society.

On April 1, 1913 he was hired as Parks Superintendent and moved into the cottage adjacent to the Union Cemetery and began to transform the northwest corner of the cemetery into a rock garden, a popular feature of U.K. gardens at the time. He also began experimenting with trees and forbs that could withstand the rigours of our climate. As a salesman for urban beautification and societal improvement, Reader commented to Calgary City Council in his 1913 annual report that *“I think that each [city] park should have a distinct individuality of its own ... it is important to plant trees of the same species on any one street or avenue; this will give character and individuality to each ...”* His plantings often included tough, fast growing trees from abroad, “Russian” Poplars for example, with regularly spaced honeysuckle, cotoneaster or lilac bushes ... but he used local spruce from the Rockies too. Perhaps one of the biggest poplars in the three

Olmsted Calgary communities is on 5th Avenue NE that is approximately 106 years old, planted about the time Reader became Superintendent of Parks.

In 1913, William Roland Reader reported "... I very much doubt if any other public improvement will tend to create and foster a civic pride in Calgary to the same extent [extent] as will the making of boulevards, and planting of trees on our streets, nor will any other feature of our city impress visitors so favorably."



Purple Lilacs along Shelbourne Street, S.W. Calgary



Avenue of old American Elms along 13th Avenue S.W., maximum width 91 cm (DBH)

As a proponent of a healthy society, in 1914 he helped formally organize the Vacant Lots Garden Club to utilize properties (lots) transferred to the City as compensation for unpaid taxes: this club guided and supported the growing of vegetables in various parts of the city to provide for people who needed the food. He also tried to instill civic-duty, social consciousness and responsibility and the long-term goal of conservation, long before it was in vogue.

His attitude evolved and he embraced what we now call IPM (Integrated Pest Management) and understood what

disease could do to a monoculture of trees of a single species: "*The general planting of any one species of tree would have a monotonous effect. It would also be found that an epidemic or disease or pest attacking that particular species would be difficult to control under these conditions.*" One of the most influential experiments was the introduction to Calgary of the Colorado Spruce as a tall hardy evergreen with eye-catching blue needles: the Reader Rock Garden has a spectacular specimen near his house there, planted circa 1918, and this resulted in its enduring popularity in Calgary and elsewhere on the prairies.

Again Reader demonstrated his enlightened attitudes towards the environment when in 1918 he said "*The benefits to the public health afforded by street trees, by the restfulness of their green colour, the impediment they offer to dust-laden wind, their cooling and shade-giving properties and the pleasure they afford by ornamenting the streets, are now being felt and appreciated in the earlier planted districts.*"

In the 1920s, Reader's expertise began to be recognized around the world. He was commissioned in 1923 to plan the Prince of Wales' grounds at the EP Ranch at Pekisko in southern Alberta and as a consequence in the 1930s he hosted a variety of very distinguished visitors to the Union Cemetery's rock garden and interacted with horticultural experts from Harvard, the UK, France, Burma (Myanmar), Tibet, and elsewhere that helped to expand his plant and seed collection. In addition to his work on Calgary recreation facilities, his design for and revisions to the Balmoral Circle, Central Memorial and Riley Parks (Central Park began earlier) ... and particularly the Union Cemetery with "his" Rock Garden will continue as permanent reminders of his heritage.

Reader retired in December 1942 after 29 years at his post, and on January 10, 1943 after giving an illustrated talk about his garden, the 67 year old Reader died on his way home. In 1944 the City formalized the rock garden as a park and named it the "Reader Rock Garden" in his memory.



Glynn Wright is a Master Gardener & regular contributor to this newsletter; he is also a FoRRGS Tour Guide, Past-President of the Calgary Horticultural Society, and owner of Scarboro Garden Design.

Sources:

- ◆ *Reader's quotes from Annual Reports to City Council, 1913-1942*
- ◆ *William R. Reader, Superintendent of Parks, Cemeteries, & Recreation, 1913 – 1942; Photo Courtesy of Glenbow Archives NA 789-125, Archives & Special Collections, University of Calgary.*
- ◆ *Sunalta Suburb, Calgary, Sec.17, Tp.24, R.1. W. 5thM., Scale 400 feet = 1 inch, Can. Pac. Ry. Co., Land Dept, Winnipeg, July 1910, F.T. Griffin and J.L. Doupe*
- ◆ *Scarboro Community Historic Context Paper, draft form, 2020.*

Dreaming about ... what to do next year?

Perhaps volunteering might be a consideration??? We're always looking for fresh ideas & more keen helpers! Additionally, we'd especially like to fill our vacancy of Board Vice-President.

Contact *Lindsey* at Info@ReaderRock.com for more details



"To appreciate the beauty of a snowflake it is necessary to stand out in the cold."

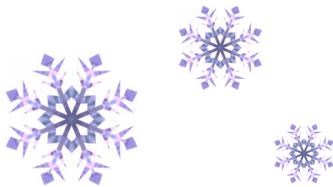
- ARISTOTLE



(Not) Business As Usual

by Diane M. Dalkin

- ◆ 2020 is a year we'd all like to forget, for so many reasons.
- ◆ Covid-19 invaded every aspect of our social-distancing lives.
- ◆ But rather than focus on all the losses, perhaps we could think of **hopeful lessons-learned** from this pandemic. Each of us have our own personal experiences in this regard.
- ◆ The "pause" in our life of normalcy has pushed us to think & act differently, and appreciate those we may have taken for granted. It has offered us time to reflect on all the abundances in our lives.
- ◆ Priorities have been rearranged, new protocols are in-place, which is okay too, ... at least for now.
- ◆ Yet, we should find comfort in trusting that we'll eventually resume our *meaningful human connections*, coming back stronger. Until then, take care, **be patient, stay safe & keep well**. We'll surely see you back at the Garden in the New Year!





UPDATE:
The original missing garden plaque from 1944 was never found after being stolen earlier this year.
Regretfully it remains lost.
Thankfully, the City of Calgary Parks will be replacing it.
Plans to have it restored are in the works for next year.



ESCAPE FROM THE BUSY CITY
 RETREAT TO CALGARY'S
 HIDDEN GEM

LOCATED IN THE BEAUTIFULLY RESTORED SEASIDE ROCK GARDEN HISTORIC SITE - CORNER OF 25th AVENUE AND 14th STREET

Coffee & Tea Specialties
 Pastries, Sweets & Sundaes
 Lunch Specials
 Brunch

Reader's Garden Café is closed for the Winter Season
Re-opening next Spring 2021.
 See www.readersgardencafe.ca or call 403-234-0065

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

Best to check their website for an up-to-date listing of events during the current pandemic

See: www.crag.ca/events