

CHAPTER ONE
**The
Presence
of the
Past**

Throughout its brief but eventful lifetime Calgary has grown erratically through alternating periods of "Boom and Bust". Southern Alberta's frugal precipitation pattern, our altitude and the resultant fickle climate, dominated as it is by our proximity to the mountains, all immediately affect this area's agrarian well-being. Also, especially during the past fifty years, our snug relationship with the petroleum industry has encouraged this mercurial pattern. These predominant factors, particularly that of fossil fuel exploration, development, and marketing have been, and continue to be, the pace-setters of our real estate profession.

When, in 1884, the Canadian Pacific Railway decided to locate its Calgary depot west of the Elbow River, pioneer residents hastily moved their settlement a couple of miles to the west in order to dwell and work adjacent to the rail terminal. On the first day of the railway company's land sale, the first farmer in the area, John Glenn paid \$200 for the northwest

corner of what was to become Ninth Avenue and Centre Street.

P. Turner Bone, who had helped survey the rail line into Calgary, was another first-day buyer. His \$300 purchase was for a plot in mid-block on the north side of Eighth Avenue between First and Second streets East. A newly-arrived wealthy young lawyer by the name of James Lougheed was bold enough to buy about 30 mid-town plots, each with a 50-foot frontage, for prices between \$200 and \$300.

Yet only a couple of years later with the arrival of the Twentieth Century, greenhouse man A. M. Terrill, laid out \$2,500 in order to build his glass hothouse on the site of today's Lougheed Building on First Street and Sixth Avenue West. Before long, a substantial group of homes and businesses occupied the river-bottom bowl where the Bow and Elbow rivers meet, and speculators had carved up, on paper, square miles of the surrounding treeless land to the north, east, and south, well past the contoured hill-side suburbs beyond which stretched the level, treeless prairie.

Allan Poyntz Patrick, credited as being the first to lay a surveyor's chain across Alberta before the turn of this century, in his capacity of district engineer, laid out most of the heart of Calgary in a grid pattern of streets and avenues. In 1902, Welsh immigrant, real estate investor and stableman, Calgarian R. C. Thomas lived in one of three houses he owned on today's Eighth Avenue between First and Second streets West. He rented two of them for \$5.00 per

This 1884 photo shows Stephen Avenue between 2nd and 3rd Streets, E., on the north side and roughly about 310 - 8th Avenue E. The large building is Boynton Hall, with Bannerman's feed store this side.

Photo - Courtesy of Glenbow Museum Archives. (NA-1075-14)



Following Page - Calgary as it appeared to visitors in 1884. The CPR line is under construction and the trackage can be seen most visibly in the lower left-hand corner.

Photo-Courtesy Manitoba Archives, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. (NA-1315-9)



month and, with a down payment of \$500, bought a piece of land where T-D Square stands today. The agent who helped him complete the deal was William Toole, a real estate family name well-known in the city to this day.

Spawned by a land boom during the first dozen years of this century, scores of novice real estate speculators descended upon the little community to jostle for a share of the riches. Around 1912, for example, an undertaker, a tailor, a fire-fighter, a wholesale grocer, and an automobile salesman indulged in the lucrative sideline of buying and selling raw land. They dealt in quantities varying from a few building lots to entire suburban tracts of bald, hastily surveyed prairie grassland.

Calgary had severe growing pains. Annexation, in the name of the small city, appeared to promise a cure for unimproved land snapped up by developers, the majority of whom paid for their immediate purchases but proved either incapable or reluctant in the matter of paying taxes on their investments. So the young city continued to add acreage, expanding the city limits in 1907, 1910, and 1911 as the feverish pace of land transactions continued.

Empty communities appeared on real estate maps bearing such fanciful names as Hiawatha, Maharg, the Golden Bronx, La Hoyt, Strawberry Hill, Balaclava Heights, Von Mieleke Park, and Happyland. These blueprint paper dreams were imaginatively linked by yet-to-be-built urban tram lines. Unruly and deceptive high-pressure sales pitches were in full spate, aimed



especially at gullible overseas buyers who, the fly-by-night dealers prayed, would never turn up to examine or claim their mail-order purchases.

It was a heady time, to be followed by periods of despair when one dream after another was dispelled. But in 1910, as swiftly-growing Calgary reached a substantial population mark of 40,000, it became apparent to locally-based property salesmen

The land boom of 1911. Prospective purchasers line up for land outside the offices of Toole, Peet and Company, 301-8th Avenue West. The firm were real estate agents for C.P.R. suburbs. Photo-Courtesy Glenbow Archives, Calgary. (NA-2641-1)

The inset advertisement was from the Calgary Herald.

and women that there was a need for some organized rules to protect both buyers and sellers of the city's land.

Serious professional real estate men of the day awoke to the fact that the world, as well as local, financial misfortunes had become the implacable enemies of the opportunistic fortune hunters. Thus, in April, 1910, about 75 real estate men formed what turned out to be a short-lived Calgary Real Estate Association. One reason for its swift demise was the



The photo depicts an unidentified firm's real estate office in the Alberta Block in 1908.

Photo-Courtesy Glenbow Archives, Calgary. (NA-1331-1).

presence in their midst of the substantial corps of speculators bent on practising only a dog-eat-dog type of business.

By 1911 Calgary had a population of about 43,000

which in a year mushroomed to more than 45,000. A business directory revealed the existence of a realty firm for every 100 residents! Particularly in the local press, and in central Canadian, and British newspapers much of this land development was flamboyantly reported.

Here at home among the sceptics, the predators who were raising money, first for themselves, then for their absentee clients, were aptly described as "Subdivision Sharks." This is a typical 1912 example of their bait:



The interior of the Toole, Peet and Company offices situated at 809-2nd St. S.W. shows the employees at their desks in this 1926 photo by W.J. Oliver.

Photo-Courtesy Glenbow Archives, Calgary. (NA-2641-2).

"The agriculture, industry, and commercial activity which constitutes the life of the city is of the most permanent and non-fluctuating character, something which always makes for a steady development as against the speculative trend in less fortunate

localities." Thus, obviously, "...there can be practically no limit to the value to which land may rise in the world's vortexes of trade and commerce."

It was estimated that 64 real estate firms were in business in Calgary in 1906, a number that had exploded to 405 at the peak of the boom in 1912. Yet by 1915, despite the scheming and the "Alice In Wonderland" daydreaming, that number had shrunk to 164. Of course the Great War played havoc with the speculators' game plan, but despite persistent talk of the increasing evidence of a tight money situation in Europe, right up to the outbreak of hostilities on the European continent, our local real estate market blossomed.

However, in order to bolster the tax rate, the city began assessing the newly annexed, but still empty, acreage at urban rates rather than at the former \$50.00 per acre agricultural rate. This brought into the marketplace a good many new local landowners who decided to sell their potential subdivision property rather than pay urban taxes. This threw another curve at all dealers, as well as the city itself, because of the effect of their actions upon the land market.

By 1922 the number of local real estate firms in post-war Calgary had dwindled to 103, and as the years passed, the quixotic ups and downs of petroleum discoveries, first in nearby Turner Valley, then in areas such as Leduc, Redwater, and Pembina, quickly exerted an entirely new and unanticipated domino effect upon the well-being of the Calgary real estate business and its professional members.

Obviously, as swiftly-growing Calgary reached the substantial population size of about 40,000, the time had come for some organized rules to protect both buyers and sellers of the city's land. Calgary grew, and so did the professionalism of those who made their living in the increasingly complex field of urban and interurban real estate. The association's rather shaky start in 1910 gave it no assurance of longevity. Despite its founders' well-intentioned aims it had been socially, rather than commercially, oriented during its brief lifespan.

That group's successor began putting down roots in the late 1920s and, on March 20, 1929, a Calgary Real Estate Board was registered under the Statutes of Alberta. That organization, too, was used more than anything as a socializing core and it also languished, rather than flourished for a number of years before fading from use and memory.

Then, in the early 1940's, Kennett Lyle, one of the city's group of fewer than 100 full-time real estate men, pursued the possibility of starting a real estate board. His discussions with long-time real estate man Clair Cote, revealed there indeed was a board, even though it was dormant. This discovery resulted in the calling of a general meeting of local real estate practitioners on January 26, 1943, in the board room of the morning newspaper, The Calgary Albertan. That historic gathering marked the re-birth of the Calgary Real Estate Board, the predecessor of what, in time, was to be named the Calgary Real Estate Board Cooperative Limited. Clair J. Cote Sr., who had been president in 1929, was named president in 1943, a role he fulfilled for the next three years.

Clair J. Cote, Sr. President of the Calgary Real Estate Board in 1943, 1944 & 1945.

