**Remembering Riverside**

by Deb Lee, Heritage Committee

The North West Mounted Police arrived in the area known by the local indigenous peoples as Mohkinstsis, and now called Calgary, in 1875, first viewing the Bow River valley from the northern escarpment. They rode down and crossed the shallow area of the river, establishing Fort Calgary, which was soon followed by a permanent settlement nearby inhabited by predominantly Scottish and English settlers. The railway arrived in 1883 bringing trainloads of new people to build their lives in the Canadian west. The first wooden bridge over the Bow River was built in 1888, an improvement from the privately-operated ferry crossing. Stage coaches and wagon trains plied the trail northward to Edmonton. After the Canadian government issued an invitation overseas for people to settle the vast prairie area, Calgary experienced a great influx. Many immigrants from Europe, including Ukrainians, Italians and Germans from Russia settled on this north side area of the Bow River that was known as Riverside. There was such a predominance of Germans that the neighbourhood came to be informally known as ‘Germantown’.

The early 1900s saw significant growth in Calgary, including on the north side of the river, with the village of Riverside being formally established in 1903. Streets were laid out on the NS-EW grid system, and named after early Calgary mayors such as Ramsey and Marsh or given German names such as Berlin and Munich. Riverside’s boundaries extended from the Bow River as far north as 8 Avenue. Modest homes and shacks were built on 25-foot lots.

Riverside village flourished with businesses such as Pioneer Stables and Riverside Lumberyard with Riverside Ironworks and Riverside Steam Laundry built west of 4th Street. Wesley Orr, a future mayor of Calgary, operated a sandstone quarry from 1886-90 and a brothel was an attraction in the area of McDougall and 6 Street. Downtown Calgary’s significant growth extended across the river resulting in larger buildings such as Riverside Hotel being built. Those we still see today are the Armour/ Reliance and Poffenroth - DeWaal Blocks with the original Sligsby Block (now Bratopia) covered up by modern features. Storefronts occupied the main floors while residential units were upstairs. Banks, shoe repair and barber shops, small grocery stores and a billiard hall provided services to new residents. Today the art on the windows of the Armour block shows scenes of past days, including a speakeasy and synagogue. Further north, the Gallelli Block and Roma Grocery added to the vibrant retail corridor that developed along 4th Street. Riverside’s mix of Jewish, Italian, German, Ukrainian and Chinese residents, living and working side by side created a diverse and interesting part of Calgary.

Progress continued as Riverside was formally annexed to Calgary in 1910. The new steel truss Langevin Bridge (recently renamed Reconciliation Bridge) enabled Calgary’s Municipal Streetcars to cross the river. One route turned east on Louisa Avenue (now First Avenue) and extended to the Calgary General Hospital in the nearby but separate community of Bridgeland. The large sandstone Riverside Public School opened on 1st Ave at 6 St and later the Riverside Bungalows 1 and 2 were built to accommodate the growing number of school age children here.

The pace of immigration and development slowed significantly after the start of World War I, but Riverside and 4th Street remained a vibrant business district and transportation corridor for many decades. The two communities of Bridgeland and Riverside grew together, with boundary lines fluctuating and eventually becoming indistinct. The Bridgeland - Riverside Athletic Association, a precursor to the current Community Association brought residents together through sports and recreation.

In recent decades the name of Riverside has declined in our awareness and it risks being forgotten. Stay tuned next month to learn more about Riverside’s heritage and its coming renaissance.

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