

History Lesson

Stroll through Mount Royal for a look at our luxurious past

By Debra Cummings
Calgary Herald

Nellie McClung, R.B. Bennett, Eugene Coste, Thomas Blow, Bert Stringer, James Lougheed.

Such classic Calgary names are hard to forget in their own right. But just in case you lose sight of them, or out-of-town visitors want a magical history tour of Calgary, you can find their original homes conveniently located in one neighborhood.

Walkabout

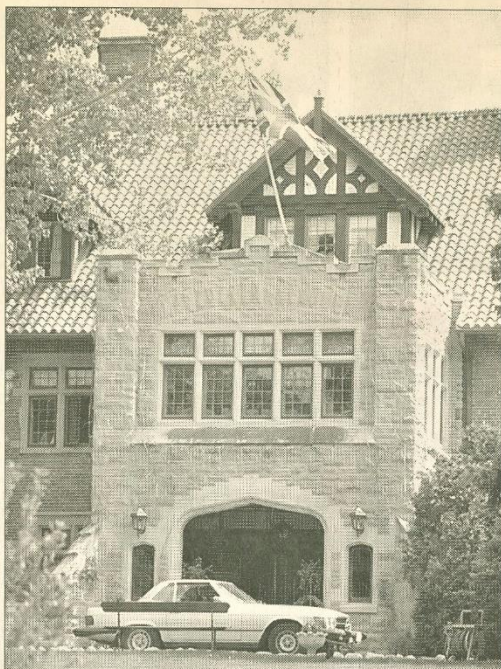
Mount Royal. Named by CPR president William Van Horne after the highest knoll in his home town of Montreal, Calgary's historical enclave was this city's first "exclusive development," explains Mary Rozca de Coquet, a long-time resident of Mount Royal.

Choosing to elevate themselves from their other early counterparts, Hillhurst and Inglewood, the lots in Mount Royal – wedged between 17th Avenue and 14th Street, south to Council Way and east to Hope Street – are far larger than the ubiquitous turn-of-the-century 25-foot wide parcels of land, and certainly boast the best city views.

Also distinguishing this posh neighborhood of 1,100 residents are the actual street designs. They dip and doodle across the natural topography, free of the usual boring grid system preferred by the CPR. Reflecting the tenets of the City Beautiful Movement, born at the World's Columbia Expo in Chicago in 1893, Mount Royal's architects designed not only curvilinear streets but girdled the area with ornamental gardens, groves of unusual trees and plenty of sunken parks.

Fragile, yellowed building plans show this "CPR Sub-division" officially went by that very nondescript title until 1910. Prior to that, the locals referred to the area as American Hill because of the preponderance of American residents such as the Sayres, Stronges, Irvines, Halls and Honens. In fact, so strong was this southern influence that these early residents wanted to name the streets after famous Americans such as Washington, Cleveland and Grant.

This patriotic brashness didn't sit well with the majority who hailed from Britain and eastern



David Lazarowich, Calgary Herald

OPULENT: Large lots, plush gardens a trademark of the area

Canada, so they hurriedly named the streets after their own: Sydenham, Durham, Colborne, Dorchester and Amherst.

Stroll back to those times yourself and join Harry Sanders, president of the Chinook Country Historical Society, next Sunday when he guides a historical walk through the neighborhood (see map for details).

For those who'd rather a walk about be an independent experience, here are a few landmarks: ■ Nellie McClung's House, 803 15th Ave. S.W. This lower Mount Royal home was where the leader of the Canadian Women's Movement, branded by critics as a "hyena in petticoats," lived between 1923 and 1935. Considered a "sub-urban middle-class" home, it was designated a Provincial Historical Resource in 1978.

■ Royal Avenue. A few of the homes on this avenue were the first in Mount Royal. Documents

dated 1907 explain the city's most southern boundary was 17th Avenue so the first homes built in Mount Royal did not require city building permits; nor did they appear on the tax rolls. The Sayre House, 717 Royal Ave., was built in 1905 for an American mining, real state and lumber baron named A. Judson Sayre. Now a private home, this 2½-storey quarry-glassed wonder was converted into the Ursuline convent in 1923 and operated as such until 1979.

■ Jog south to Prospect Avenue and meander past the home at 802, known as the R.B. Bennett house from 1917 to 1939. The story goes that Bennett bought this gabled beauty for his bride to be, but the engagement was broken off and Bennett never actually moved in. Instead he rented it out and made his home the Alberta Hotel, where he lived in a set of rooms from 1922 to 1939.

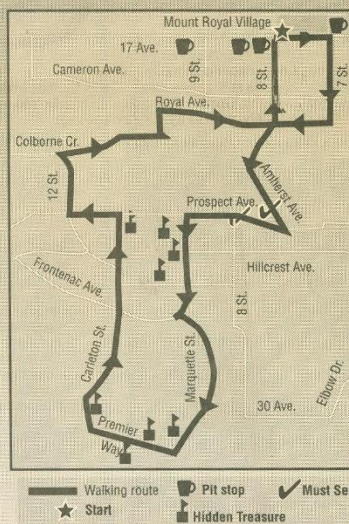
Mount Royal

ROUTE: Join the president of the Chinook Country Historical Society, Harry Sanders, on June 25th to walk about the community of Mount Royal. Everyone is invited to meet at Tomkins Square, in front of Mount Royal Village, near the bandstand at 1:30 p.m. sharp.

PIT STOPS: For a big bowl of cafe au lait and a light lunch, try Jojo's Bistro, 917 17th Ave. S.W. or Chit Chats, on the corner of 11th Street and 17th Avenue S.W. The Western Canada high school crowd chows down at Bagels and Buns, 807 17th Ave. S.W. For big slabs of home-made bread and hearty stewy soups, the old Soup Kitchen (now Nellie's) at 738 17th Ave. S.W. is a must. For picnic fare, Peppers, 803 17th Ave. S.W., has a terrific take-out menu.

HIDDEN TREASURES: Numerous creeks once cut paths down and around the slopes of Mount Royal, which is why homes are set back far from the road. A fine example is Premier Way. This was a concern until the late '30s, when the creek was drained. The lots between Carleton and 10th Street, Prospect and Dorchester were once the Calgary Convalescent Home (a TB sanatorium 1911-1932) that was later sold to a Dr. Morrison who subdivided it in the '40s.

MUST SEES: Thriving examples of varied architecture are found on the Stringer House, 2003 8th St. S.W.; the Blow House, 2104 8th St. S.W.; the Coste Mansion, 2208 Amherst St. S.W.; and the Bennett House, 802 Prospect Ave. S.W.



At 930 Prospect Ave. sits the Burns house. Owned by John Burns, a nephew of cattle baron Senator Patrick Burns, the house was reputed for its Japanese gardens.

■ Amherst Street. Within the 28-room labyrinthine mansion known as the Coste House, 2208 Amherst St., are numerous fireplaces, gabled dormers, the charming glassed-in extension and the Tudor-arched porte-cochere. This is one of Mount Royal's all-time dazzlers – built in 1913 for Eugene Coste, the father of Canada's natural gas industry, who founded the Canadian Western Gas, Light, Heat and Power Company in 1911.

■ Hillcrest Avenue. Due to the housing bust in the '20s there were still 416 unsold lots in South Mount Royal in 1923, which led a group of keen golfers to create the Earl Grey Golf Club, on the brow of the escarpment between 7th and 8th Streets. The course wrapped around the Earl Grey School which is why they couldn't tee off on the first three holes during school hours. By 1924 the club had a small clubhouse on the south side of Hillcrest Avenue and a membership of 271 with annual fees set at \$6 (men), \$4 (women) and \$3 (juniors).

By 1932 housing squeezed the course south, replacing it with a park and a series of large lots.



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