

## Episode 1 Transcript from Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule

**Peter Brown (host):** It is a beautiful, crisp fall morning in Calgary. Now I am standing indoors, I am in the pedway — the Plus 15 — near the south building of Calgary's Telus Convention Centre, which is pretty nondescript. There's carpeting with grey and black and blue geometric shapes, white walls, and big air ducts overhead. As you leave the south building, there are four or five sculptures on your right.

It certainly, doesn't seem as if there's anything mysterious or magical here — except there is. As you leave the south building, the second sculpture on your right is a bust of a distinguished-looking gentleman. He's got a big, bushy moustache, slightly raised eyebrows. The bust is on a stone pedestal, on the pedestal are two plaques. The higher plaque says: Artist Hazel O'Brien, the second plaque says: Colonel James Walker, 1846 to 1936. Soldier, policeman, rancher, businessman, community leader, Calgary's "Citizen of the Century," unveiled on November 17, 1975. Now, as you walk past this in your suit jacket and lanyard, or what would seem to be the other uniform, black jeans, black golf shirt, you'd probably think, oh, this is just another sculpture of an important historical figure, nothing more.

What you wouldn't know is that inside this column is a time capsule that was sealed 50 years ago. The time capsule was opened recently, and what was found inside is the story of this podcast.

Welcome to *Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule*.

**Devin McLaughlin:** There was a rumour about 10 years ago of a time capsule here at the Convention Centre.

**Brown:** That is the man who set this whole thing in motion.

**McLaughlin:** Devin McLaughlin, I'm manager of strategy and analysis here at the Calgary Telus Convention Centre.

**Brown:** He didn't become Devin the Capsule Hunter right away, but earlier this year, he started planning the 50th anniversary of the Convention Centre — and he remembered the rumour.

**McLaughlin:** So I started asking around for long-term employees, Do you remember a time capsule? What have you heard about it? And I kept being told, "No, no, it's just a rumour. There's nothing there. There's no place in this venue that we could ever host a time capsule. We've done renovations over the years — we've closed rooms up, we've opened up other walls, doors, whatever." It's like, did we carpet over something in the floor?

**Brown:** He admits now he wasn't 100 per cent confident...

**McLaughlin:** The doubts were always there.

**Brown:** But Devin's curiosity, or determination, or stubbornness, kept him looking.

**McLaughlin:** I think it's just the mystery of what could be inside a time capsule. It's like, what did people think about 50 years ago that would be of interest to people of today? Was there something there, and what could it be? And that really kept things moving forward. And also, let's face it, I almost wanted to prove people wrong. So it was a matter of doing the research, and it came down to the *Calgary Herald* archives and searching online through countless pages of old newspapers to verify the fact that, at least in 1975, we did have a time capsule in our building.

**Brown:** Devin had made a couple of major discoveries. He'd learned that the time capsule was in the base of a statue, and that that statue was moved in the 1990s.

**McLaughlin:** So that's where the conversation with past employees came in. They said, when this statue — which is located in the base of a statue — was moved in the mid-'90s, do you remember a time capsule? Do you recognize anything?

**Brown:** And one former employee did remember.

**McLaughlin:** Will Henderson, who is our director of maintenance — he's been retired for a few years now — was employed at the time in the mid-'90s when this statue was moved. He did witness it and did remember there were items in the base of the bust.

**Brown:** There was only one hurdle left.

**McLaughlin:** There was no visible access point to where we thought the time capsule was.

**Brown:** You know, I always say, when you're dealing with a time capsule that's in the base of a statue, and you can't figure out how to open it, this is a job for the public art department. Devin reached out to...

**Julie Yepishina-Geller:** Julie Yepishina-Geller, the public art lead for the City of Calgary. I got an email from the Telus Convention Centre that said, "We have one of your artworks, and we think there's a time capsule inside of the plinth. Can we open it, and how do we do it?"

**McLaughlin:** Do we just take a chainsaw to it? Or do we take a hammer or a mallet to it to open it up?

**Yepishina-Geller:** We sent our public art conservator and our collection specialist, who are two people dedicated to looking after our public art collection, to the Telus Convention Centre.

**McLaughlin:** This thing weighs a ton, and it seems like it's bolted to the ground. And so the conversation was, in the '90s, when we moved it, did we re-secure it to the point that we can't

actually open it anymore? That was a discouraging point, I'd say. If we couldn't get into the base, do we actually have to saw off the plate that this bust is sitting on?

**Yepishina-Geller:** We did some investigative work on the plinth to actually get inside without damaging it.

**McLaughlin:** It took a couple of hours to kind of mull it over and determine how we should open it, and when we figured out that it was just a matter of taking a plate off the front, there was a sigh of relief.

**Brown:** Then the big moment.

**McLaughlin:** When that plate started to come off, and there's a hole, and you can see documents, you can see paperwork inside, it's like, wow, it's actually here.

**Brown:** The capsule was a box. There were documents, there were pamphlets, manila envelopes stuffed with papers, lots of souvenirs.

**McLaughlin:** We started pulling out individual things, and it made it through like a conga line, almost passing it around and saying, "Oh, there's a cassette tape. Wonder what's on the cassette tape?"

**Brown:** The box went to the public art team, specifically...

**Gregory Burbidge:** Gregory Burbidge, the interim public art director. I had no questions, I was only excited. As soon as you say there's a time capsule in something it just fires the imagination. I have no idea what I would put in a time capsule, but I assume that somebody else would have a great idea.

**Brown:** Greg's team started pouring through the contents, photographing everything they found.

**Julie Vincent:** My name is Julie Vincent, and I am looking through the Calgary District Telephone Directory from June 7, 1975, with the area code 403, the only area code that existed at the time. Let's see if I can find my papa in here. G.B. Vincent, Gordon Bishop Vincent, 4015 Vincent Drive Northwest. He was thrilled to find a house on that road.

**Brown:** If you grew up with phone books — as Julie did, as I did — they bring back powerful sense memories.

**Vincent:** Oh, gosh! It's an instant nostalgia.

**Brown:** The heft of the book, the thin paper pages, and of course, your family name and address printed there for anyone to see. Which seems a little unnerving now.

**Vincent:** I remember the house and it has a triangular-shaped park. Now, I have very, very fond memories of those times.

**Brown:** Just to give you a sense of how different the world was 50 years ago, there's a small pamphlet in the time capsule called Telephone Tips. Here is some of the advice it offers:

*To make your calls enjoyable to yourself and your caller be sure to follow these simple telephone tips. They'll help to brighten your telephone personality. Wait for the dial tone before you dial. Dial carefully, bring the dial all the way around to the finger stop. Let the dial return by itself. If you're being called, answer promptly. The caller can't see if you're busy. Hold the receiver directly in front of your lips from one half to one inch from your mouth. Speak clearly and slowly. Keep foreign objects, gum, pencils, cigarettes, etc. out of your mouth when on the phone. Terminate calls courteously. The best way yet is a simple goodbye. And remember, telephone as you would be telephoned to.*

But most of the contents of the time capsule — and what I'm most interested in — were entries in a contest. In early 1975, Calgarians were invited to nominate the Citizen of the Century.

**McLaughlin:** From the initial contest that really created the statue in the first place.

**Brown:** The time capsule held thousands of those nominations.

**Burbridge:** To find out that it's the letters of all the nominees — amazing! Who did everybody think was the Calgarian of the Century 50 years ago?

**Brown:** There are handwritten letters, there are nomination forms that a number of people signed. Some of the most entertaining entries come from school classes — from Grade 2 up to about Grade 5.

**Burbridge:** When you're looking at these, they're from a different time, I don't know that my handwriting would hold up to what we're seeing today. My typing skills wouldn't hold up to what we're seeing today. I don't think about that on a daily basis, but also as soon as you see that, you're like, I remember that. I was that little one.

**Speaker:** What were these people doing? Was it something simple in the classroom? Were they writing this on their way to work? Some of the ones for Senator Pat Burns had, like, coffee stains on them, and they were written by adults. Were they writing this on their way to work? Were they sitting at their desks and splashed some coffee over it, and then they submitted it and now here I am, speculating about what they did. Just thoughts like that.

**Brown:** As for who all those people nominated, some of the nominations are pretty predictable.

**Speaker:** I'm seeing a lot of nominations for William Aberhart.

**Speaker:** The nominees that I'm seeing is Senator Pat Burns.

**Speaker:** I'm seeing a lot of nominations for Mr. Grant McEwan.

**Speaker:** Highwood Elementary School. I don't know if this was a writing project or like a biography project for them, but these kids are doing some really great histories of the people they are nominating.

**Brown:** There were a lot of nominations for a well-known philanthropist whose name is now all over the city.

**Speaker:** Eric Harvie was nominated a lot. Eric Harvie passed away in January of 1975, right before this competition opened, and I found it really interesting, because in some of these letters, they specifically wrote the word "deceased" after Eric L. Harvie when they were nominating him.

**Brown:** When you read through these nominations, especially the ones from school children, some amazing details emerge. You want to learn more about the nominee, and about the person who wrote in.

**Speaker:** Jerry Potts is somebody else who has a few nominations. This has a great background on him and some of the things he did for our city. Jerry helped the RCMP until he died on July 4, 1896. They also included one of the things he did to help protect the RCMP fort he was living in. Jerry had a dream that a cat living in the fort would protect him from evil. When he found the cat, he killed it and wore it under his shirt until he died. Oh, wow.

**Brown:** Who sent that in?

**Speaker:** That's Murray J. Patton, Grade 5, Highwood Elementary School.

**Brown:** So you spent a good chunk of the day going through these handwritten documents from 50 years ago. What's this been like?

**Speaker:** I've loved it — just paying attention to all the details of the handwriting, of students and of adults, with such clear printing and their own style has been really nice, you know, in a context where we're mostly digital. It's also been, in some ways, a bit jarring, because I feel like as I was going through these, I found myself thinking, Who would I nominate for Citizen of the Century? And to be honest, nobody really comes to mind. I feel like to say somebody is the Citizen of the Century, I don't know if I could get it right. And maybe that's the problem, maybe there's no right or wrong here. But yeah, it kind of just sent me down a bit of an existential spiral.

**Brown:** I think Devin and I are going to do a little spiraling as well, because while there's a lot in these nominations that's fascinating and curious and funny, there's a lot that's not there.

**McLaughlin:** There are 5,000 entries and about 136 names for the potential winner of this honour.

**Brown:** The time capsule has only a couple thousand entries.

**McLaughlin:** Where are the 5,000 entries? Why did we get the ones that we do? And why do we not have a single entry form for Colonel James Walker?

**Brown:** Colonel Walker is the man who was named Citizen of the Century, the man portrayed on the bust, on the pedestal that holds the time capsule. There was only one entry for him in the time capsule.

**McLaughlin:** When I first started this and didn't see any nomination forms, I thought, well, how could this person have won? What was the contest? Why do we have all these names for people who really didn't win? So I was like, oh, this is just a conspiracy. It was almost like, this is not legit.

**Brown:** Or maybe...

**McLaughlin:** Maybe it was, and the entries were given to the family members of Colonel James Walker, and they're holding on to those initial entry forms. Maybe it was stored within AGT Telephones, who really sponsored the project.

**Brown:** Part of the explanation may lie in the fact that the final decision was made by a committee of judges.

**McLaughlin:** But then, when I started looking into the initial contest rules and looked at it, it didn't really specifically say the person who had the most votes was going to win this. So they went out to the public, asked for their nominations as maybe a, okay, let's see who we get, and maybe they were thinking of someone we weren't thinking of. But in my mind, these were probably historians, archivists, things like that who knew Calgary's history, who could pull names that the general public would not know. And I think it is fair for them to bring those names to our attention, because it shouldn't just be someone who was around in 1975 as the one who would win this honour.

**Brown:** What do you know about the people who decided and the criteria they used?

**McLaughlin:** That is a complete mystery. We have no idea who these people are.

**Yepishina-Geller:** I think the biggest question for me is how they made the final decision.

**Brown:** This is Julie Yepishina-Geller.

**Yepishina-Geller:** Was it done by a selection panel? Who were the members of that panel? Because, as we know today, particularly working in public art, it's the representation you have around the table, making these decisions, that's really going to influence the type of outcome you have.

**Brown:** What's your best hope? At the end of all this, where do you hope we end up?

**Burbridge:** I kind of hope that we find some of these people.

**Brown:** Gregory Burbidge.

**Burbridge:** I just feel a sense of familiarity with some of these kids, of like, yeah, I would have done this, I would have said these things. What did you end up like? I think a lot backwards now, and it's fun to think, these people are just a little bit older than me. Where are they? What happened to them?

**Yepishina-Geller:** I think my big hope for this is bringing a story from the past back to life in the modern day. That's why we have a public art collection, is to capture these points in time for our city, and to help keep that collective memory alive, and I hope that's what we do through this.

**Brown:** My mission on this podcast is to dig into the stories of some of the Calgarians who were nominated, using some of the most interesting and entertaining entries as jumping-off points. I'm also going to find out as much as I can about the Citizen of the Century contest. Where are the rest of the entries? Who was the judging committee? And why was Colonel James Walker named Citizen of the Century?

Here's something fun — you can see all those nomination forms for yourself. We'll post all the nominating letters and forms we talk about, as well as some artwork, just go to the link in the episode descriptions.

We have some great stories coming up, full of entertainment and surprise — starting with the man Aritha van Herk called...

**Aritha van Herk:** Such a winter jerk.

**Brown:** This has been Episode 1 of *Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule*.

Thanks to the team who documented every single entry in the time capsule — Fatima, Alex, Julie, Kaitlin.

Special thanks to the Calgary Telus Convention Centre for being secret stewards of the time capsule.

*Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule* is produced by me, Peter Brown, for Calgary Arts Development and the City of Calgary.

Now all I have to do is think of a way to end this episode.

*The best way yet is a simple goodbye.*

Goodbye.