

## Episode 6 Transcript from Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule

**Peter Brown (host):** Hi, I'm Peter Brown and this is *Greetings From 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule*. This is the final episode of this podcast, so I'll be tying up loose threads, trying to answer the unanswered questions and — because this podcast itself will be placed in the time capsule — leaving a message to the Calgarians of 2075.

This is Episode 6, maybe it is Colonel Walker or perhaps Ian R. Randall, and loose thread number one is still the contest itself. Why was Colonel James Walker chosen as Citizen of the Century? I can't say I've gained a lot of insight into the workings of the committee, although — spoiler — I do have one last conspiracy theory for you coming up later.

Initially, the lack of votes we saw for Colonel Walker, and the huge number of votes for Tom Baines, led Devin McLaughlin to a theory about the judges and the role they played.

**Devin McLaughlin:** These probably were historians, archivists who knew the Calgary history, who could pull names that the general public would not know.

**Brown:** Good theory. Turned out to be wrong. The time capsule held an article which described the backgrounds of the various committee members. There was Martha Cohen, who we know for her community and philanthropic work. Mary Dover was a city councillor and daughter of A.E. Cross, one of the Big Four who got the Stampede rolling in the early days. Stan Cramton was past president of the Jaycees and also dial service supervisor for AGT, Alberta Government Telephones, who sponsored the contest. There was also a former CFL player, two senior newspaper journalists, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, and both the founder and current president of the Jaycees.

So notable community members all, but not really a blue-ribbon panel of historians per se. Will any of that information be significant in about 15 minutes?

There's one thing I really have to address. Reading these nominations, many of them feel so vibrant in the present moment, it's easy to forget they were written in 1975. But every once in a while, I'd come across a word or term that we don't use anymore and go, oof! And then there's this question for Dorothy Freeman.

*Dear sirs, here is my nominee all carefully researched for you. I wonder if it is possible for a woman to win.*

**Brown:** You may well have listened to the first five episodes and wondered, why have I not heard more about women, even less about Indigenous people? Welcome to the mid 1970s. In the thousands of entries I saw, only a few women were nominated, and each of them got only a few nominations. Of those, the most popular, the most impressive, was Dr. Isabella Stevens. Betty Paulette wrote that...

*To me, there is only one that has given all of themselves.*

**Brown:** Isabella Stevens moved to Calgary in 1912. Legend has it she arrived on the last day of the first Calgary Stampede. She was assistant editor at the law publisher, Burrows and Company, for more than 40 years.

*She has always been interested in people, especially the aged, the children, the needy and the unfortunate. She devoted all her spare time to relieving their distress.*

She worked with a long list of social agencies. She raised funds for hospitals. She sewed baby clothes for the needy.

*She took girls in trouble into her home.*

Betty Paulette wrote that Dr. Stevens was a...

*...happy, smiling queen whose first words are 'what can I do to help?' We shouldn't wait till she's gone to give her the flowers.*

Dr. Stevens was Calgary's Woman of the year in 1958, and rightly so.

A few Indigenous names did come up. Crowfoot, the Chief of Chiefs, was nominated by one person for his contribution to peace and the signing of Treaty 7 in 1885.

And remember Jerry Potts? The guy who in one child's story, kept a cat under his shirt because he thought it would bring good luck? He was a rare, competent figure in the North-West Mounted Police March west. When Brisebois and his troops were lost and starving...

**Aritha van Herk:** He saved their asses because he could hunt, and he knew where places were safe, he knew how to camp, he knew everything that all those raw recruits did not, like "Don't drink the slough water, boys. Drink out of a clear river that comes from the mountains." But he was a really good hunter, so they had fresh deer meat, they had a rabbit stew, he knew where to find wild onions. Apparently one night he made a stew with rabbit and those onions, and then some of the other potatoes that they had gotten in Fort Benton, and one recruit said it was better than any stew his mother had ever made. So he kept them alive.

In many ways, I think the North-West Mounted Police would have been an abject failure without Jerry Potts.

**Brown:** So, in summary, yeah, it was pretty much a white man popularity contest. So I'm very happy to give some flowers to Jerry Potts and Dr. Isabella Stevens.

Now let's get back to the man on the bust in the Plus 15, Colonel James Walker.

**Harry Sanders:** Colonel Walker, in so many ways, laid the groundwork for what becomes Calgary, its institutions and its characters, the Stampede City. I'm Harry Sanders, and I'm an historical consultant and freelance writer in Calgary.

**Brown:** Last year, Harry published two books: *Fairmont Palliser: The Story of Calgary's Most Iconic Hotel* and *Abee to Zama City: How Alberta's cities, towns, villages and hamlets got their names*.

Colonel James Walker grew up in a military family and was a successful young officer himself. So, when the North-West Mounted Police made their great March West...

**Sanders:** ...He was part of it, one of the leaders of that project, and he'd recruited a lot of the men, he'd acquired a lot of the horses, single handedly recaptured some of them by stampeding them when they'd run off, and came west as a mounted police officer, and remained for the rest of his life.

**Brown:** He provided security for the treaty negotiations in 1876 and maintained order during annual treaty payments.

**Sanders:** One thing that I know that really speaks in his favour, is on at least one occasion, he advanced the food rations to Indigenous people who were hungry, who were starving, before he received authorization for this, which is another, you know, a positive contribution from his mounted police service.

**Brown:** He served in the First World War at the age of... 70?

**Sanders:** That's right. He was 70 years old when he returned to military service and served overseas as commanding officer of the Canadian Forestry Corps.

**Brown:** Harry quotes historian Max Foran and his impressive picture of Walker.

**Sanders:** *With his fine physique, military bearing and practical intelligence, Walker was in many ways the quintessential frontiersman, a man of daring and courage, a natural leader who gravitated to what had to be done.*

**Brown:** But Colonel Walker's most enduring accomplishments involve the creation of Calgary.

**Sanders:** Perhaps the singular contribution he made was to have been chair of the civic committee that sought and won incorporation for the town of Calgary in 1884. So, for this service he was regarded as Calgary's first unofficial mayor in his lifetime. As much as anyone, we can thank him for Calgary, really, but also many organizations, you know, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, which started in 1886 as the Calgary Board of Trade, he was the first president. He was on the original hospital board, he was a driving force behind the formation of the Calgary Protestant Public School Board, which is now the Calgary Board of Education. He was a

trustee, he was chairman of the school board in the late 1890s, and again just before the First World War, and he donated the land for what became Colonel Walker School, which still exists and is still in operation.

**Brown:** He also helped build the physical structure of the city. His sawmill provided the lumber for many of Calgary's early buildings.

**Sanders:** It's before bricks were readily available, and he had what Calgarians needed to build up a nascent town, and that is a real contribution of his that isn't as well remembered as I think it ought to be. His contribution was solid and essential to the formation of Calgary, but it did surprise me that he won that contest in 1975. I just think his memory had faded somewhat, or his central role was not really appreciated by that time.

**Brown:** Why have I heard of Macleod and not Walker before this?

**Sanders:** Oh, Peter, I wish I had an answer. You know, just sifting through the evidence, going through what these people's accomplishments were, Walker is, to my mind, the obvious choice and certainly the choice of Max Foran, his biographer, in the diction of Canadian biography, and in fact, Max's father-in-law, Grant McEwan, was a great admirer and wrote a book on the life of Colonel Walker. They recognized it. I feel I can see it, too. I do not know why Walker isn't on the level of a Colonel Macleod in the public perception of Calgarians in 1975 or now. I can't put my finger on it. Maybe he was just a competent actor and not a person at the centre of drama. You know, maybe that's it.

**Brown:** Two final things about Colonel Walker: a caveat and a conspiracy theory. The caveat goes back to what I was talking about earlier, the people, the experiences not represented in this contest.

**Sanders:** Since that time, of course, we've really reconsidered things. I mean, at that time, you just assumed, I mean, if you were not Indigenous, you know, you were likely to assume the colonial transformation of this region was the exact right thing to do and something to be applauded. We've really reconsidered our history since then, as you know, we should, in every generation. We need to reconsider the evidence and come to our own fresh conclusions. But back in 1975, if you're thinking as well, who really advanced the project to take this frontier region where there's an encounter of vastly different societies and create from it a settler colonial city tied in with what we think of as the Western world, well, then he did it.

**Brown:** And as promised, I have one last conspiracy theory for you. James Walker brought one more innovation to Calgary.

**Sanders:** It was he who started the telephone system in Calgary. Colonel Walker needed a way to have rapid communication between his downtown office and his factory on his farm, the

sawmill itself. So he installed a telephone line, Calgary's first telephone system was just built upon the system that Colonel Walker had installed for his own business purposes.

**Brown:** Now, this is where it gets interesting. The contest to name the Citizen of the Century...

**Sanders:** ...was co-sponsored by the Calgary Jaycees and Alberta Government Telephones, precursor to Telus. Well, it was kind of a backslapping result to choose Colonel Walker in their contest for the Citizen of the Century.

**Brown:** One of the nine committee members was Stan Cramton, dial service supervisor for AGT. I know that because I heard it on this podcast 10 minutes ago. So there were many possible reasons to choose Colonel Walker, some had to do with the central role he played in the founding of the city, one might have to do with supporting a sponsor. You can pick your favourite theory.

In amongst the nominations for The Settlers and Founders and Heroes were nominations that took completely the opposite approach.

*I hereby nominate myself, Ian R. Randall, as Citizen of the Century, as a representative typical taxpayer. All the so-called prominent personalities seem to have been honoured already in one way or another, but without the taxpaying citizen, the city would not exist. I believe I am a fairly typical representative of the taxpaying citizenry. Therefore, I tender my nomination.*

**Brown:** I see you, Ian R. Randall. I see you.

**Mayor Jyoti Gondek:** Today's event is a bridge between the past and the future, and it's a celebration of everything we have achieved and all of the things that we aspire to become.

**Brown:** Last May, a group of civic leaders gathered in front of the statue of Colonel James Walker to formally reseal the time capsule.

**Speaker:** As part of our celebrations of our 50th year, we have asked our guests to contribute to the time capsule, some items that are meaningful to them today, to be rediscovered by a new generation in 50 years.

**Brown:** Calgary's Mayor, Jyoti Gondek, made a contribution.

**Mayor Gondek:** I will be dropping a letter into the time capsule, and I will be dropping in a naloxone kit. And some of you may think that's a strange choice. I'll tell you why I'm doing this. It is my sincere hope that 50 years from now, people don't know what it is, and they don't know what it is, because we actually invested in caring for people with addictions, that we provided them with treatment and recovery options, and perhaps even more importantly, that we invested enough to make sure everyone is able to live with dignity and with the supports they need to live the life they were meant to.

**Brown:** The next speaker was Blackfoot Elder Sheldon First Rider.

**Sheldon First Rider:** When we signed the Treaty in 1877, our interpretation of that was to share the land, to live in peace and friendship. And that is what I hope to see in the next 50 years. I don't want to see us as forgotten people. I want us to live together and share what we have as Knowledge Keepers and how we have been a part of this land for thousands and thousands of years.

For many of you who are not Blackfoot, yes, you're all newcomers, but to us, as Blackfoot people, being in our territory, you are also Blackfoot people, and I welcome you all. The next 50 years, I hope that we'll still be here to be able to teach you to honour the sky people, to honour the earth people, to honour the river people, the elders, and especially our most precious gifts, the children.

Thank you.

**Ari Ki-Michaels and Alex:** Good morning. To the future. From the past. I'm Ari, and I'm Alex. And this is your special daily episode for year 2074.

**Brown:** Students at Ernest Manning High School created a special edition of their school newscast.

**Student:** I just hope that a lot of our history from this time is maintained.

**Student:** In 50 years, I would like to see Calgary in a place where affordable housing is an everyday aspect of our lives. I would like to see the homelessness problem at least alleviated considerably.

**Student:** My hope for the future is that we continue to strive towards building and accepting community, where individuals can embrace who they are and their experiences.

**Ki-Michaels:** My name is Ari Ki-Michaels and the program, and the school is Ernest Manning, specifically Ernest Manning Television, which is our student-led broadcast journalism class.

**Brown:** Your generation in the coming decades is going to be making the decisions. What do you hope your generation will do differently than the generations that came before?

**Ki-Michaels:** I would like my generation to care more because I feel like this day and age there's so much knowledge, but not enough meaning. Issues like global warming, climate change and the sort of things that we as a global community have to work towards solving. Being able to care about that more. In the past, there's definitely been times where like, that has happened, like with the ozone layer, when like got so close people kind of just realize, oh crap, we're about to go under, we need to fix this. So, I would like my generation to not have to reach that point of almost no return in order for more action to be taken.

**Brown:** Do you know what message you would like to send to people 50 years from now, or what you would put in the in a time capsule now?

**Alex:** I think I would want to put maybe an image or a video of the city, maybe it would be a video of kind of snapshots of what's great about Calgary right now, just to show that moment in time of like, this is what we're celebrating, and this is what's cool and happening here. I would want to kind of capture that spirit. Maybe we should put an iPhone in there. I mean, it won't work.

**Brown:** As soon as you put it in, it will be outdated. Oh, you could put an iPhone like two generations of iPhone ago, open it in six weeks and people would think, how did you live like that?

I've been thinking about what my message to the future should be. I mean, this may well be heard in 50 years. I'm going to send out a hope. We the people of 2025 live in an age of miraculous technology, but also serious threats. Remarkable achievements, but also a lot of disagreement and anger and uncertainty about where all this is headed.

So, future Calgarians, I wish you the selflessness of Isabella Stevens, the vision of Guy Weadick, the unquenchable joy and wonder of Tom Baines, the hope of Ari Ki-Michaels and the humour of Ian Randolph. Above all, future person, I hope your world is calm and kind, and that our problems and arguments seem outdated and quaint. Is the Plus 15 still there? If it is, please say hi to the statue of Colonel James Walker. Send him greetings from 2025.

You've been listening to the sixth and final episode of *Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule*. Thanks to Harry Sanders, Aritha van Herk, and to Brendan McDermott and his students at Ernest Manning High School. Special thanks to the secret stewards of the time capsule, the Calgary Telus Convention Centre. You can see everything from the time capsule we talk about, letters, souvenirs, kids, art and more, just go to the link in the episode description. *Greetings from 1975: The Calgary Time Capsule* is produced by me, Peter Brown for Calgary Arts Development and the City of Calgary.