

# **A History of the Peace Movement in Calgary**

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Today our lives are threatened by global tensions, on-going wars and a fear that somehow our homes and our families will be affected by this violence. At what time in our history has this not been true? These circumstances have been offered as the reason to create public policies based on fear and to involve our citizens in conflicts around the world. They have also been the reasons why ordinary citizens have come together to change attitudes, and develop an alternative response to that fear. Calgarians, throughout our history, have responded with a hope of a better future through creative and effective ways of responding to the challenges of the world without violence. It has changed the face of our city, our communities, and our world. Remembering those people and groups who made this history is a step towards finding strength and inspiration to continue this work.

When Europeans moved into the Plains in the 1800's conflict arose between Cree and Blackfoot Nations as resources diminished and space became scarce. Even though Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot was a warrior he still found ways to reconcile differences with his neighbours. During the Riel rebellion Crowfoot encouraged people to take care of Cree passing through their territory.

Chief David Crowchild, born only nine years after Crowfoot passed away, stands as a legacy himself to the work of peace and reconciliation. His work as Chief of the T'suu T'ina Nation not only helped to build the strength of his own people, but also built relationships with non-Aboriginal neighbours. The City of Calgary honours his life by offering a memorial award in his name every year to a person in Calgary who creates bridges of understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

Peace does not simply mean to acquiesce to unjust circumstances. It means standing up for the oppressed and establishing a just world through peaceful means. During the early part of this century women's groups arose in Alberta to establish justice for women. In 1929, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, and Nellie McClung, now memorialized in the Famous Five statue at Olympic Plaza, convinced the government to recognize women as persons under the British North America Act. Their leadership and willingness to step into public life continues as an inspiration for women to stand up for justice today. Today the Calgary Women In Black group stand in front of this memorial every second Friday to hold silent vigil for peace and against violence.

Calgarians have been affected throughout our history by world events and have had to find our own ways to respond to those events. Although it was not popular, during both World Wars there were men who either by faith or conscience would not go to war to kill. When conscription law was passed by parliament in 1940 provisions were made for conscientious objectors (COs). Alternative Service Work camps were

established in Prince Albert, Jasper and Banff where men cleared and constructed roads, cut wood and harvested ice. They provided a great deal of necessary work for those at home. Led largely by the Canadian Mennonites, men in these camps included those of from many different Christian backgrounds who chose to stay true to their pacifist faith and chose not to take up arms. Mennonite women also offered their support by providing material aide to those caught in the midst of the war in Europe, transporting over \$71,000 worth of clothing from Canada to England.

Throughout our history some Calgarians have come here as a result of conflicts in their own regions. Two streams of newcomers came to Canada came in the '60's and '70's. In the '60's the conflict in Vietnam brought young men to Calgary who left the US to avoid becoming combatants in a war they did not believe in. New and old Calgarians helped these newcomers to get landed immigrant status and would drive to the border to bring them here, as well as helping with the physical necessities of relocating to a new country. During the '60's hundreds of Calgarians took to the streets over the conflict in Vietnam and called for the US to end the war.

This same conflict in Vietnam brought refugees who were fleeing the violence at home. In 1976 the Refugee Act gave a distinct status to newcomers that was different from immigrants. From 1977-1999 over 170,000 immigrants came to Canada as refugees who otherwise wouldn't have come. Not only did the government accept refugees but community members, families and churches also sponsored refugees and aided their relocation and integration into Calgary. An example of many citizens work in this area is St. David's United Church who sponsored a Vietnamese family which consisted of two doctors. These doctors went on to support and help the growing Vietnamese community in Calgary.

Solidarity groups arose during the '70's and '80's to support citizens in countries around the world in conflict. Chileans, Nicaraguans, El Salvadorians, Russians and Cubans in the '80's, people from the former Yugoslavia in the '90's, among many other communities. Today groups help those in Sudan and other African countries in conflict, as well as those caught in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Calgarian newcomer agencies formalize the work to integrate those torn from their home countries and to help them establish a new life.

In 1972 the Arusha centre was developed as CIDA funded learner centre to help educate about the developing countries around the world. Their work to "move social justice forward" by providing development education created a central location for progressive work on creating a welcoming and diverse culture in Calgary. Their work continues today with the local currency project - Calgary Dollars.

The '80's brought a real surge of peace activity and an overwhelming interest in the world beyond Canadian borders. The cold war in full swing created a sense of urgency to resolve world issues and bring an end to weapons of mass destruction. Numerous nuclear abolition groups formed to lobby the government in great numbers. The proposal for cruise missile testing over Calgary galvanized the public

to protest by the thousands. The success of this campaign helped to develop a feeling it was possible for ordinary citizens to change public policy.

The Voice of Women in Calgary furthered issues related to women and war. Their campaign to protest war toys displayed during the holiday season led to businesses moving violent toys to the back shelves.

In 1982 Project Ploughshares Calgary, a local affiliate of the largest peace education organization in Canada was established. Their consistent efforts for peace for the last 25 years have created a backbone for the efforts of groups that have come and gone.

In 1987, due to the advocacy of a coalition of citizens and groups including Ploughshares Calgary, City council declared Calgary a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. In 2004, also with the help of Ploughshares Calgary, the Mayor of Hiroshima visited Calgary and convinced Mayor Bronconnier to join the Mayors for Peace organization. For the last two years the Mayor has declared September 21<sup>st</sup> the International Day of Peace and events in Calgary were celebrated.

In 2003 thousands of Calgarians joined millions around the world in one of largest demonstrations the world has seen to prevent the war on Iraq. Protests against that war continue today. In 2005, Calgary's very own Doreen Spence was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as one of a thousand women worldwide. Her work for the awareness of the situation of Aboriginal people in Canada is a significant contribution to peace work. In 2006 Calgary was the host of hundreds of peace researchers around the world through the International Peace Research Association conference. This conference was supported by the Consortium for Peace Studies- a working group of University of Calgary faculty and community members to develop an academic centre for peace in Calgary. These are only some of the many initiatives by Calgary citizens to create practical solutions to fear and violence. So many more stories are held by people you may know.

As Bev DeLong, one of the founders of Ploughshares Calgary has said - the history of the work and campaigns of those working for peace shows that initially efforts seem very discouraging but they are eventually and usually successful. Great patience, vision and determination supported by inner conviction fuels the great effort of peace makers in Calgary.