



Postcard circa 1917

The most impressive feature of the new bridge: the lions guarding each entrance.

High on the towers guarding the north and south entrances were four massive concrete lions, modeled after the bronze lions at the base of the Nelson monument in London's Trafalgar Square.

The kiosks upon which each lion rested included a sculpted English rose, Irish shamrock, Scottish thistle, Canadian maple leaf, patriotic floral emblems, a buffalo head and City shield.

But the Calgary lions almost didn't happen.

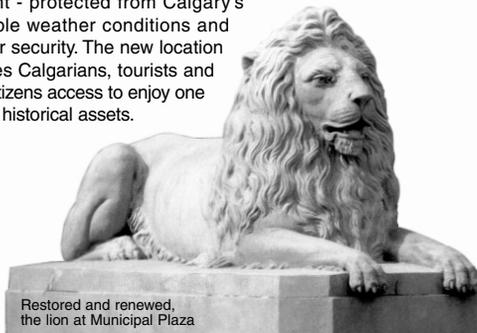
When the bridge was originally planned, the staggering cost (\$375,000) meant The City couldn't afford to add any unnecessary 'frills'. And certainly, ornamental statues were out of the question.

As luck would have it, according to some reports, a City alderman, chanced upon a "handsome stone lion" on the verandah of a private home on Calgary's north hill, a home that coincidentally belonged to a City employee, James L. Thomson. Even more coincidentally, Thomson turned out to be a former Scottish stone mason who sculpted in his spare time.

He was promptly seconded from his regular City job, and the rest is history. Truly Calgary history.

The original southwest lion, fully restored and renewed, is now safely at home on the City Hall Plaza.

The lion was unveiled in summer of 2003 by Calgary's Mayor Dave Bronconnier. It is located at the front doors to the Municipal Plaza. There it is provided with a "safe" environment - protected from Calgary's unpredictable weather conditions and with 24-hour security. The new location also provides Calgarians, tourists and our future citizens access to enjoy one of our City's historical assets.



Restored and renewed, the lion at Municipal Plaza



City Council committed to support the restoration of one of the lion sculptures. But, the remaining three lions still need to find homes. With the help of Calgarians, that will happen.

The City has committed to provide Calgarians with the opportunity to sponsor the restoration of the remaining three lions. Sponsors will have to provide a protected environment and one that is publicly accessible. Their final location will require Council approval.



For more information about sponsoring a lion call 268-CITY.

The Centre Street Lion

From the bridge to the plaza: history finds a new home

Once the pride of Calgary's Centre Street Bridge, a restored concrete lion still guards the heart of our City but now from its new home at the entrance to The City's Municipal Building.



Long a favourite Calgary landmark, new concrete lion sculptures are at their posts on the Centre Street Bridge.

And now one of the originals – restored, renewed and rejuvenated – has a protected home on the City Hall Plaza.



It was a big day, December 18, 1916.

Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden, accompanied by Calgary Mayor Michael Costello, officially inspected the not-quite-finished Centre Street Bridge. Then City Engineer George W. Craig drove the first car over the bridge's upper deck, and the North Hill was officially connected to downtown Calgary.

The bridge itself was impressive. Built of concrete, it was designed to handle all traffic, streetcars, automobiles and pedestrians. Calgarians hailed the new bridge as proof that the city was planning for strong growth and a prosperous future. Growth beyond the 1916 population of 56,514.



Postcard circa 1917 (left), The precasting team with original 'den of lions' (above)

The 14-ton (12,600 kg) lions were hoisted onto their pedestals, from which they kept watch for the next 84 years. And Calgarians loved them.

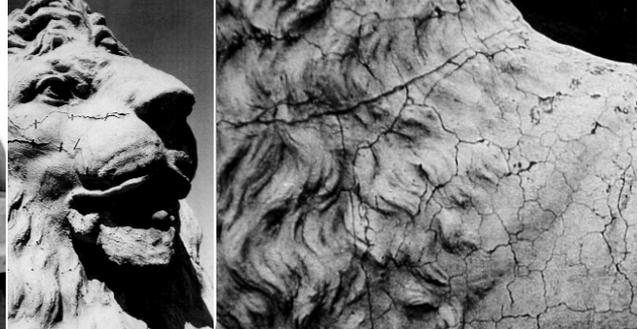
The Centre Street Bridge lions meant a great deal to Calgarians. Somehow, they came to represent the strength, integrity and independent character of the city itself.

But, 84 years of exposure to the vagaries of Calgary weather and the vibrations of traffic on the bridge were hard on the fragile lions.

And, the many attempts to mend the inevitable cracks merely patched over the damage, hiding – not stopping – the deterioration.

Major repair projects in the 70s and 80s extended the life of the bridge itself - and of the lions guarding its entranceways. In 1992, the Centre Street Bridge was designated a Municipal Historic Resource, and restoring the bridge - including the lions - to its 1916 condition became a priority. The lions are holdings in the Calgary Public Art collection and are managed by the Calgary Allied Arts Foundation.

But the original lions could not go back on their pedestals: the concrete was cracked and crumbling. City Council, with the



Years of exposure to weather were hard on the fragile lions

advice of The Calgary Heritage Authority, agreed the lions could 'survive' only if carefully and expertly repaired and restored, and then housed in a protected environment, away from moisture and Calgary's extreme weather changes. Local artist and sculptor Ilyas Pagonis, was called upon to tackle the restoration task.

Although the original lions had to be 'retired', their symbolism would continue. Neither would their history be lost. The least-damaged of the original four lions - the one on the southwest tower - would undergo major restoration and rehabilitation. Ilyas Pagonis would then use it to make the full size mould, from which four new lions were cast.

And, eventually the restored lion would be displayed – safely protected from the weather – in some public place.

The bridge was closed in August, 1999 and, just over one year later, was re-opened, fully restored to its original appearance, strengthened, slightly larger, and with four new concrete lions guarding the entranceways.

Ilyas Pagonis, restoration artist

