

Calgary Stampede, Past and Present: Horace Inkster serves pancakes at the Calgary Exhibition, 1923; and an unnamed volunteer prepares a Stampede breakfast in the 1980s

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October 7, 2022



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Horace Inkster, serving pancakes at Calgary Exhibition and Stampede street breakfast, Calgary, Alberta, July 1923, CU1107314, Jack Morton Fonds, Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta, held in Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Calgary Stampede & Exhibition Media Guide, 1983, Box 8, Series 1981-1983, Calgary Exhibition & Stampede Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

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Introduction

The Calgary Stampede's pancake breakfast traces its roots to the early nineteenth century. The first pancake breakfasts were held in 1923 along Eighth Avenue and at the Old-Timers' hut, a replica pioneer shack. Early pancake breakfasts were linked to the chuckwagon crews who served them and were associated with Alberta's western image.

In the 1950s, the Stampede breakfast spread across the city. Churches, corporate entities, charitable organizations, shopping malls, politicians, and the Calgary Stampede itself began to host breakfasts. This document presents a selection of archival sources that, when viewed together, suggest the Stampede breakfast has evolved through the years to become an important part of Stampede festivities and the cultural fabric of the City of Calgary.

Introduction

Early Breakfasts (1923-1950s)

We're going to give them honest-to-goodness pancakes on Saturday afternoon, made with real butter, fried in butter and served with maple syrup right from eastern Canada. None o' those cheap, thin flapjacks.

"Old Timer" Charles Jackson¹

Early pancake breakfasts were an important part of Stampede culture with connections to cowboy culture—Alberta's pioneering and old-west image—and prevailing gender norms and expectations around cooking. Until the late 1950s, these breakfasts were only served out of chuckwagons in the downtown core and the Old-Timers' hut on the exhibition grounds.

Chuckwagon Breakfasts

Although the Calgary Stampede was first held in 1912, archival sources suggest that the first pancake breakfasts did not occur until 1923. That year, the Calgary Herald reported that Jack Morton, a rancher affiliated with the CX Ranch in Rosebud, Alberta, "galloped the CX chuck wagon down Eighth avenue [and] started the final performance of the 'Morning Stampede' in a way that Calgary will never forget." About the incident, they wrote:

Just how many city bylaws and statutes were broken by the howling, whooping, rip-snorting bunch of cowboys that he brought with him will never be known ... It was just what the thousands of people who thronged the thoroughfare wanted. They got what they were looking for, got it in bunches ... Out came the old cookstove, and soon the pungent odor of wood smoke filled the air, to be followed shortly by the inviting aroma of sizzling hot cakes ... Spectators fought to get to the front in order to bite into the luscious flap-jacks that were being turned out by the outfit's cook.³

Attendees noted that Morton's breakfast conjured up images of Calgary's "good old days" and transported them to the "pioneer era." ⁴

By the end of the 1920s, the chuckwagon pancake breakfasts became a vital part of Stampede festivities. Chuckwagons from ranches throughout the province set up downtown and served "hot flapjacks by the thousand and syrup by the bucketful." The wagons and crews travelled from places like Kew, Carstairs, Brooks, and Mosquito Creek. The breakfasts were popular



Wartime Pancakes

During the Second World War, chuckwagon crews were required to trim 25 pounds of iron from their massive cookstoves to be melted down and donated to the war effort.¹¹ Nonetheless, a radio broadcast from the era declared that chuckwagons continued to dominate the downtown street display, giving the city a "thoroughly western atmosphere," and serving "ham and eggs or flapjacks to those standing around."12

Horace Inkster, a cook at Jack Morton's CX Ranch in Rosebud Creek, Alberta, serves pancakes at a street breakfast in 1923.⁷

enough that Douglas Haig, 1st Earl Haig, stopped by the 1925 breakfast on a visit to Canada to enjoy a meal and socialize with the crowd, alongside Mayor Harry Webster.⁸ Photographs from the era show cowboys in western dress serving pancakes along Eighth Avenue.⁹



The Mosquito Creek Chuckwagon serves pancakes on Eighth Avenue in 1926. 10

KNOW HISTORY Historical Services Early Breakfasts (1923-1950s)

Southern Alberta Pioneers' and Old-Timers' Association

A separate pancake breakfast was held in 1923 behind the Old-Timers' hut, a replica pioneer shack "reminiscent of the very first homes of the west," that opened on the exhibition grounds in June of that year. The Old-Timers' breakfasts were an opportunity for early settlers and their descendants to reunite, socialize, and swap stories, but were also well attended by the public and the press. Fire Chief James "Cappy" Smart and Old-Timer Harold Riley spent "three solid"

hours or more bent over the blazing coals of the little stove, frying pans in hand," flipping the pancakes and serving them "piping hot, with clear maple syrup." This tradition was carried on by the Southern Alberta Pioneers' and Old-Timers' Association, who continue to hold an annual stampede breakfast to this day.

Pancake flipping at the Old-Timers' hut was an inherently gendered activity. While women were responsible for the majority of the food preparation during events, one day of the Stampede was set aside for men to take the lead. Articles from the 1930s through to the end of the 1950s recount that the final day of the Stampede was "Men's Day" at the Old-Timer's hut, when the men got their chance to be the "exalted rulers of the frying pans. In This unique norm harkened back to the role of male cooks, who prepared meals from the back of chuckwagons during long cattle drives. A 1933 Calgary Herald article traces the provenance of the Old-Timers' pancake breakfasts, claiming that attendees preferred men's flapjacks over women's "dainty sandwiches":

The reversion to pioneer culinary methods was not the decision of a day. Excellent as the refreshments have been in past years there was still a small band of irreconcilables who mumbled into their whiskers every time the sandwiches were passed ... The daintiest lady-finger seemed dust and ashes in their mouths when they thought of the flapjacks they used to eat at the business end of a chuckwagon ... To make a long story short the ladies of the Southern Alberta Pioneers' and Old-Timers' Association decided they'd give these hardy lads a chance to taste their own cooking. One helping of flapjacks they believe will silence criticism of the sandwiches forever.¹⁸

Cooking pancakes at the Old-Timer's hut took on a performative aspect as well as a social one, where the men got the chance to "play at cooking meals" and "demonstrate to their admiring friends the ancient and almost lost art of flipping flapjacks." ¹⁹

Expansion (1950-2000)

Chuckwagons, Mounties, early morning breakfasts of flapjacks and bacon, square dances, comfortable cowboy clothing, barbecues, spurs, guitars, yodels and cries of 'Howdy Pardner," are all a very real part of Alberta's heritage. It occurs to me that with the advent of the space-age comes an obligation to preserve for the future the western spirit of the past. That's why, when they told me in Edmonton to 'say goodbye to your rodeos and stampedes,' I simply smiled and said, 'We'll see.'

Calgary Herald Staff Writer Pac McMahon, 196520

Beginning in the 1950s, the number and scope of pancake breakfasts held during the Calgary Stampede expanded. Businesses, politicians, churches, and charitable organizations began to host breakfasts alongside those hosted by the Calgary Stampede and Exhibition.



Two boys in matching hats and shirts enjoying pancakes at the 1962 Stampede breakfast held at Chinook Centre. 21

KNOW HISTORY Historical Services Expansion (1950-2000)

Chuckwagon outfits and the Old-Timer's hut continued to hold well-attended breakfasts into the early 1960s.²² However, in 1955, the Downtown Attractions Committee joined in the tradition, hosting their first Saturday Morning Round-Up , which featured free flapjacks and bacon distributed to a crowd of 4,000 in Calgary's downtown.²³ The second annual Round-Up in 1956 drew a crowd of more than 10,000.²⁴ 1960 saw the first annual Derby Breakfast, hosted by the Alberta Derby Committee and held in the mezzanine of the grandstand.²⁵



Smiling youth dressed in cowboy hats are served pancakes from a chuckwagon stove. Undated, from the Calgary Stampede and Exhibition Archives. ²⁶

Businesses capitalized on the popularity of the pancake breakfasts and began to hold breakfasts of their own. Some advertisements from this era feature promises of free pancakes alongside discounted merchandise; for example, a 1962 Firestone Tires ad for half-priced tires also contained an invitation to a free breakfast of flapjacks and coffee. ²⁷ By the mid-1960s, breakfasts were being held at stores throughout Calgary, including Woodward's and MacLeod Bros.

The annual and very popular breakfast sponsored by Calgary's CFCN television station began around this time. First held in 1960 at Chinook Centre (the same year the mall opened), the breakfast was originally a "pre-Stampede event to get everyone in a party mood" and attracted a modest crowd of 4,000.²⁸ By 1965, it was drawing crowds of up to 20,000, "who were prepared to stand in line for something like three hours to get their hands on some flapjacks." ²⁹ Photographs of the CFCN breakfast from this era show an elaborate display featuring a bandstand and smiling volunteers pouring batter. ³⁰



Volunteers dressed in cowboy hats serve beverages and pancakes to crowds at the 1962 Chinook Centre Stampede breakfast.³¹

While traditional downtown chuckwagon pancake breakfasts remained popular into the 1970s, chuckwagon crews expanded their reach, even visiting hospitals and nursing homes to serve flapjacks to patients.³² Downtown Attractions chairman Larry Carey remarked that a chuckwagon breakfast "isn't the pancake so much, as taking a good healthy bite of our western image."³³



An undated image from the Calgary Stampede and Exhibition Archives shows crowds dressed in western regalia enjoying a chuckwagon breakfast. 34

The Stampede's official marketing materials began to feature advertisements for breakfasts throughout the city of Calgary.³⁵ The Stampede's newsletter noted in 1971 that the downtown activities "will begin each morning at 7:30 when six chuckwagons start serving bacon and pancakes with syrup to hungry tourists and office workers."³⁶ The breakfasts were said to lend "an air of carefree Western spirit" to the city's downtown core and were described as a "trademark of the Stampede."³⁷ Calgary Herald articles from the 1970s feature advertisements for breakfasts held at stores, shopping malls, and churches. Doctors donned cowboy hats at Foothills Hospital to serve pancakes to the public, further solidifying the position of the pancake breakfast as an integral part of Calgary Stampede culture.³⁸

KNOW HISTORY Historical Services Expansion (1950-2000)

Political Breakfasts (1959 - 2000)

Political catering could be wave of the future.

William Gold's Diary, Calgary Herald, July 6, 1989³⁹

As stores sought to cash in on the popularity of pancake breakfasts for marketing purposes, politicians used these community events to network, entertain, and bolster their public image.

Harry Hays

The first politician to organize a Stampede breakfast was likely former Calgary Mayor Harry Hays. Archival sources suggest that Hays began hosting a breakfast at his property around the same time he was elected mayor in 1959.⁴⁰ The breakfast became an elaborate affair that Hays continued to host throughout his stints as mayor, member of Parliament, and senator, until his death in 1982.⁴¹ Guest and invitation lists from the 1960s and 1970s feature aldermen, city commissioners and councillors, provincial judges, provincial and federal politicians, foreign dignitaries, union chiefs, and corporate executives from Dome Petroleum, Amoco Canada Petroleum, and Husky Oil.⁴²

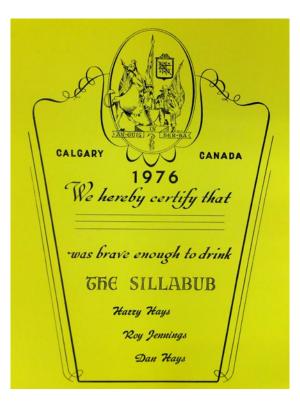


Harry Hays (left) mixes the Sillibub punch at his Stampede breakfast in 1965. 43

Not only were the Hays breakfasts well attended, but Hays's personal correspondence suggests they were much loved by attendees. They wrote to thank him for his hospitality and described the breakfasts as "tremendously thrilling," the "greatest breakfast in the world," and "unforgettable." In 1968, Dr. Franz Leitner, Ambassador of Austria, told Hays he had heard "so much about the fabulous 'Harry Hays Breakfast." In 1975, Mayor of Calgary Rod Sykes profusely apologized to Hays because he couldn't attend the breakfast that year and urged Hays not to drop him from the invitation list. 46

Alongside a traditional spread of breakfast foods, the Hays breakfasts featured an intriguing concoction called Sillibub or Sillabub, which was prepared during a ceremony on a stage:

A special punch is mixed which is done in a very informal ceremony conducted by the hosts, Senator Hays, Ron Jenkins and George Hill who add various ingredients into a block of ice, including milk from a cow after which this palatable refreshment will be dispensed to various guests ... in one oz. shot glasses.⁴⁷



A certificate from the 1976 Hays Breakfast given to attendees who drank the Sillibub. 48

Sillibub became renowned. In 1964, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson attended the Hays breakfast on his first visit to Alberta as Prime Minister and assisted Hays in milking a cow and preparing the concoction.⁴⁹ Invitations to the breakfasts encouraged invitees to become members of "the Sillibub club," and certificates proclaiming that a guest was "brave enough to drink the Sillabub" were given out to those who partook.⁵⁰

KNOW HISTORY Historical Services Political Breakfasts (1959 - 2000)

A poem addressed to Hays from an individual named Nell Jenkins in 1978 testifies to the welcoming atmosphere of the breakfast, and to the reputation of Sillibub:

This was a special day of days,
The breakfast out at Harry Hays,
The day was fine the weather great
And mountains of good food we ate
We drank the punch till it was gone
And all the time the band played on
And no one really seemed to mind
That Silabub could make you blind! 51

Ralph Klein

The personal papers of Ralph Klein, who served as mayor of Calgary from 1980 to 1989, are filled with invitations to breakfasts across the city, suggesting he was a desired guest. In 1988 alone, Klein was invited to more than 60 breakfasts hosted by land and real estate developers, oil and gas companies, civic institutions, and charities. ⁵²



Mayor Klein receiving a traditional Ceinture fléchée at the 1981 Mayor's Stampede Breakfast. 53

Two invitations received by Klein during his tenure as mayor are worth noting. In 1988, a delegation of youth from the USSR, along with the Soviet Consul General, toured Canada as part of a bridge-building initiative called the Peace Train. The Peace Train was organized by the Centre for Peaceful Endeavors in Canada, designed to "create in the public a new, non-defensive conception of peace" and build "lines of communication and rapport." The Russians were accompanied by ten Canadian youth.

The Peace Train came at a time of heightened tension between Canada and the USSR. Canada had recently expelled several Russian diplomats and alleged that they were participating in espionage.⁵⁵ Regardless, the Peace Train went ahead, featuring a pancake breakfast for 1,000 guests on July 5 at the Municipal Plaza. Mayor Klein addressed the crowd with a message encouraging peace between the two nations.⁵⁶

Also in 1988, Mayor Klein hosted a Stampede luncheon for a delegation from Quebec City with the goal of strengthening ties between the two cities.⁵⁷ Approximately 27 people, including Mayor Jean Pelletier, attended the luncheon, which was hosted by the Chamber of Commerce.⁵⁸

Don Getty

In 1989, Alberta Premier Don Getty hosted the First Annual Premier's Stampede Breakfast at McDougall School in Calgary, which was sponsored by Alberta Agriculture.⁵⁹ Absent from the guest list were the city's five opposition MLAs, which led critics to assert that Getty was "mean, petty, and blindly partisan" and that the act was "a callous and calculated partisan snub ... utterly at odds with the friendliness, hospitality and gregariousness which are the underpinnings of the Stampede."⁶⁰

Nonetheless, the Premier's breakfast went on to become "the place to see and be seen by people who make things happen politically in this province." According to an article from 1998, there were "a lot [of people] who used the occasion to schmooze, network and lobby harder than a bull's forehead for their pet causes." ⁶²

KNOW HISTORY Historical Services Political Breakfasts (1959 - 2000)

Diversification (1980-2000)

The camp grills will be lit, and bacon and flapjacks served to all hungry cowpokes. The only cost is a friendly smile and a 'Howdy.'

1983 Calgary Stampede Media Guide⁶³

Traditional chuckwagon and Old-Timers' breakfasts remained popular into the 1990s. However, Stampede breakfasts evolved and diversified alongside Calgary's changing cultural and social landscape.

The 1980s

Into the 1980s, chuckwagon crews continued to serve pancake breakfasts to hungry Stampede attendees downtown. Stampede breakfasts were still associated with images of early western culture, advertised in official Stampede promotional materials as an important part of Alberta's "cowboy" image. ⁶⁴ A 1982 information package describes the downtown festivities:

If you had spent the night on the prairie with your saddle for a pillow, and the stars for a roof, then the flapjacks and bacon that a 'cookie' whipped up ... would sit pretty warm and fulfilling in your belly. Here in Calgary, it doesn't really matter to us that most of our Guests now sleep in air-conditioned comfort ... the flapjacks and bacon still fill a hole in your stomach. And when they are cooked under the blazing July sun, with just a touch of Rocky Mountain cool ... they are as tasty as they were 75 years ago ... By 8:30 am., the air is filled with the scent of grilling pancakes and the smoke of crisply frying bacon. Breakfast is free to all comers. The labour is donated by the waggoneers, their families and our downtown attraction volunteer.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, the volunteer-based Stampede Caravan Committee, established in 1976, served breakfasts in parking lots across the city.⁶⁶ Approximately 55 volunteers cooked breakfasts at 11 malls (which paid a flat rate for the honour) and served as much as 1,000 kilograms of bacon and 2,700 kilograms of batter.⁶⁷

By 1985, the Chinook Centre breakfast was sponsored by CFAC, the Calgary Sun, and Woodward's. CFCN sponsored a breakfast at Market Mall, which drew a crowd of around 25,000 in 1986, including international visitors.⁶⁸ In 1987, to celebrate its 75th anniversary, the Stampede organized a trail drive from the Stampede Ranch near Hanna, Alberta, to Stampede Park, with breakfasts held in towns along the way.⁶⁹ All the while, the Southern Alberta Pioneers' and Old-Timers' Association continued to host breakfasts, and "the men assume[d] the chore of flipping

the pancakes" right up to 1983.⁷⁰ So prolific were Stampede breakfasts at this time, in fact, that the Calgary Herald suggested as many as 50,000 pancakes were served at Stampede breakfasts every day.⁷¹



A volunteer serves breakfast at an undated Stampede breakfast, ca. 1980s. 72

The economic downturn in the mid-1980s had an impact on the long-standing Stampede breakfast tradition, as some struggling companies temporarily cut the annual feast.⁷³

"The enthusiasm is still there but the money isn't," noted one Calgary area business owner in 1984.⁷⁴ Many companies had separate funds built into their annual budgets to host breakfasts, but belt-tightening during the recession meant that many of these funds were diverted and instead used to keep struggling businesses afloat. ⁷⁵ Nonetheless, some organizations and companies, including Alberta Health Services (AHS), the City of Calgary's Electric Services department, and the University of Calgary, held internal breakfasts for staff and their families. Photographs from the AHS Archives show smiling employees being treated to live music and dancing with their food. ⁷⁶

In spite of tough economic times, every company contacted by the Calgary Herald in 1984 allowed their employees time off to participate in Stampede festivities.⁷⁷ Archival materials from the 1980s show that breakfasts continued to be held across the city.⁷⁸ A 1989 downtown chuckwagon breakfast was pounded by heavy rain, but the volunteers had a crowd to please and continued to cook "until the rain diluted the pancake batter so badly they couldn't cook anymore."⁷⁹

KNOW HISTORY Historical Services Diversification (1980-2000)



City of Calgary employees Jack Speedie and Ted Rowsell serving pancakes at the North Service Centre's employee Stampede Breakfast, 1980.80

The 1990's

Attendance at breakfasts across the city boomed in the 1990s, averaging close to 45,000 attendees at Chinook Centre, 50,000 at the Shell Family Breakfast at Stampede Park, and 30,000 at the Kid's Day Breakfasts, also at Stampede Park. Each of the dozen or so Stampede caravan breakfasts hosted between 3,000 and 4,000 people.⁸¹

These figures do not include the many smaller breakfasts held across Calgary at community centres and churches.⁸² At church breakfasts, attendees might listen to gospel music while enjoying their pancakes.⁸³

"Here's a little Stampede quiz. How many flapjacks (or pancakes, as flatlanders from Edmonton call 'em) will all the hungry cowgirls and cowboys at this year's Stampede eat? If you guessed a half-million, you're probably a bit high, but that's never been a sin at Stampede time, has it? ... Each stampede breakfaster will eat, on average, two flapjacks per serving ... Multiply the individual intake by the number of folks who last year came out to the numerous free Stampede breakfasts around town, and you have 400,000 plus flapjacks."

The Calgary Herald, July 6, 199584

In 1992, the Calgary District Hospital Group organized a pancake eating contest, which raised eyebrows from critics who noted not only the unhealthy nature of pancakes, but also the fact that the Group's own eating disorders clinic had been shuttered due to lack of funding.⁸⁵

Calgary Herald advertisements show that breakfasts began to take on a charitable nature in the mid-1990s. Some corporate-sponsored breakfasts donated portions of their proceeds to charity, and breakfasts were organized for patients at the Alberta Children's Hospital.86 The spread of breakfasts across the city also reflects the city's evolving cultural landscape. In 1997, the Ismaili Muslim Community of Calgary hosted a StampEid breakfast.87 The event became an annual affair, featuring attendees such as Mayor Al Duerr in 1999.88 Attendees were treated not only to pancakes, but also to cultural activities such as face painting, line dancing, and tours of the Ismaili Jamatkhana prayer hall.89 Additionally, a Calgary Thai restaurant, King & I Thai, hosted a Thai Stampede breakfast throughout the 1990s, featuring free Thai breakfast cuisine.⁹⁰ In 1999, the Calgary Herald interviewed Hernan Guerrero, who ran a resettlement program for newly arrived refugees in Calgary. Guerrero noted that the Stampede was a perfect opportunity for newcomers to familiarize themselves with the city's hospitality and cowboy spirit.91 Guerrero brought newly arrived refugee families downtown and advised them to "mingle at some of the hundreds of free breakfasts available on many a corner."92 In the weeks leading up to the Stampede, Bow Valley College's English-as-a-Second Language program introduced its students "to the lexicon of chuckwagon racing, bull-riding and pancake recipes."93



"Tens of thousands" of attendees enjoyed pancakes at the Chinook Centre breakfast in 1992.94

KNOW HISTORY Historical Services Diversification (1980-2000)

Some of the long-standing breakfasts continued through the 1990s. Newspaper articles and official Stampede promotional materials from the late 1990s show that chuckwagon crews were still serving pancakes.95 The Calgary Stampede's official media guide from 2000 advertised that Stampede attendees could eat flapjacks served hot "from the back of authentic Rangeland Derby Chuckwagons," in much the same manner that Jack Morton dished them out in 1923.96 Even the Hays breakfasts continued through the decade, albeit in a modified format. Harry Hays's son, Senator Dan Hays, hosted the breakfasts at Heritage Park, where Sillibub continued to be served.⁹⁷ The guest lists still included political heavy hitters, such as Conservative leader Joe Clark and the Minister of Health Allan Rock.98

The Chinook Centre breakfasts, now sponsored by the Calgary Herald, Oasis, Burn's Meats, and more, relied on more than 300 volunteers to prepare 5,000 lbs of pancake mix.⁹⁹ In 1998, the Calgary Herald interviewed long-time Chinook breakfast attendee

In 1993, Calgarian Katherine Nugent reflected on 50 years of Stampede breakfasts:

Each morning the chuckwagons would be loading up to do the daily tour through the downtown area, to cook pancakes for the crowds ... They set up the Coleman stoves on the back of the wagons and cooked pancakes for all who visited the festivities downtown ... Some very fond memories which will long remain with this city kid, who for one week got to play cowboy at the annual Calgary Stampede.¹⁰²

Rosemary Batdorf, who attended the first breakfast in 1960. Batdorf noted that physical and social landscapes of Calgary had changed drastically over those 38 years, but she said that "the Stampede breakfast is a Calgary tradition that forms a thread, linking generations together." Batdorf remembered that the Chinook breakfast was one of the first to be held outside of the downtown core, and she brought her young family "as a way of getting to know the community." 101

Conclusion

When Jack Morton fired up his camp stove on Eighth Street in 1923, he inadvertently began a tradition that would endure for nearly 100 years (and counting). Pancake breakfasts have become an important part of the Calgary Stampede's image, and of the city of Calgary's identity. Early breakfasts hosted by the chuckwagon crews and the Southern Alberta Pioneers' and Old-Timers' Association are inextricably linked to Alberta's western image, pioneering past, and reputation as a cowboy's paradise. Although these traditions persisted into the late twentieth century, the pancake breakfast evolved.

Over time, breakfasts were hosted by corporate entities, politicians, diverse religious and ethnic communities, and charitable organizations. These groups used the breakfasts to promote political agendas, sell products, encourage donations to their causes, or simply to demonstrate the spirit of hospitality that has become associated with the Calgary Stampede. The breakfasts, which have survived economic recessions and inclement weather, are seen by organizers, volunteers, and attendees as an important part of "The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth."

KNOW HISTORY Historical Services Conclusion

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