

It's a 'who's who' of Alberta's cemetery residents

By Ted Murphy
Editor

The Alberta Family Histories Society has come across the famous and infamous as it continues to digitize cemeteries throughout southern Alberta.

The volunteer-run organization, which has catalogued almost 200,000 headstones from more than 300 cemeteries in an effort to make the province's genealogical data more accessible, has begun compiling a list of 'Notable People' on its website.

That list includes well-known names like business tycoon Max Bell and Calgary Stampede founder Guy Weadick as well as those not instantly recognizable but noteworthy all the same. Those include the likes of Titanic survivor Vera Gillespie Dick as well as Henry Alexander Cooper, the tallest man in the world.

"We have what I call villains, we have gunslingers, we have heroes and, of course, we have business giants," said Ron Gilmore, the society's director of marketing.

"We try and find these unique residents and do a little bit of a bio on that person and highlight their headstone and a bit of their history," said Gilmore, a longtime Okotoks resident and amateur genealogist.

He said the most famous resident of the Okotoks

Cemetery is Bell (1911-1972), a newspaper publisher, business magnate, racehorse owner and philanthropist. Best known as the co-founder of FP Publications, Canada's largest newspaper syndicate in the 1960s, Bell's fortune was also built on Alberta's burgeoning oil and gas industry.

Weadick (1885-1953), who is buried in Highwood Cemetery in High River, was an American-Canadian cowboy, performer and promoter best known as the founder of the iconic Calgary Stampede.

Other notables include John Ware (1845-1905), who was born a slave in the United States before becoming a legendary cowboy in Canada, including time spent at the Bar U Ranch south of the Longview. He's buried at Union Cemetery in Calgary.

Sam McGee (1868-1940), the name synonymous with the Robert Service poem, was a prospector in the Klondike Gold Rush. Although his name will forever be associated with the word 'cremation,' he was not cremated. Instead, McGee was buried in a plot next to his wife in Beiseker.

Dick (1894-1973) was just 17 when she boarded the ill-fated Titanic in 1912 with husband Bert and the lifeboat carrying the Calgary newlyweds was one of the last to leave



ROBERT KOROTYSZYN/Western Wheel File Photo

A plaque dedicated to legendary cowboy John Ware, designated a person of national historic significance, was unveiled at the Bar U Ranch National Historic Site south of Longview in 2022.

the sinking ship. Believed to be the inspiration for the storyline of the character "Rose" in the movie Titanic, Dick is buried at Union Cemetery in Calgary.

Cooper (1853-1899) came to Calgary with the circus in 1899 but fell ill and had to stay behind. He passed away in Calgary General Hospital and is buried in Union Cemetery. His adult height was reported as 8 feet 6 inches.

For more on the 'Notable People' buried in southern Alberta, visit albertaancestors.ca.



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