

# FORESTRY FARM PARK SASKATOON

**A walking tour of the former  
SUTHERLAND FOREST NURSERY STATION**



*Photo courtesy City of Saskatoon Archives*



**Friends of the  
Forestry Farm House**

## Over Three Million Trees in One Year!

The Sutherland Forest Nursery Station was established in 1913 by the Dominion Department of the Interior to supplement its first nursery station built at Indian Head in 1903. Established primarily to produce trees for farm shelterbelts, staff also did horticultural research and used the site to demonstrate how trees could beautify the landscape. In collaboration with its sister site, the Sutherland Nursery Station shipped over three million trees in one year alone.

The first superintendent of the Sutherland Station was James McLean, who from 1914 to 1942 oversaw the construction of buildings, planting of shelterbelts, and the growing and distribution of trees for the northern half of the prairies. His successor, William Leslie (Les) Kerr continued to foster the growth of the Nursery Station until it was closed in 1966 and a portion of the land was turned over to the City of Saskatoon to become the Forestry Farm Park. This transfer of buildings and grounds resulted in the preservation of a piece of Canada's agricultural history and in 1991 it was recognized as a site of National Historic Significance.

**Start the tour facing the entrance of the red brick house – see map in back of booklet for its exact location**



Photo courtesy Saskatoon Public Library –  
Local History Room

### 1. Superintendent's Residence & Sutherland Golden Elder

Built of red brick with an open veranda and two dormer windows, the Superintendent's Residence was the focal point for the lawns, walkways, flower beds, and tree groupings planted at the Nursery Station. This landscape soon matured and created an oasis of green on the prairies that by 1930 could attract as many as 3,000 visitors on a pleasant weekend. In its later life the Superintendent's Residence stood unoccupied and was in danger of demolition when a group of concerned citizens formed the "Friends of the Forestry Farm House" in 1996 to restore and manage it. The Residence contains an historical display that you can view.

To the left of the front door you can see a Sutherland Golden Elder (*Sambucus racemosa* 'Sutherland Golden'). This is one of the many plant varieties developed by Superintendent Les Kerr for distribution, possibly as early as 1954.

***Walk down the roadway to the left (west) and stop at the planting bed on the right side of the road that has three large evergreens marked with identification signs***

## 2. Siberian Larch & Black Hills Spruce

One of the aims of the Nursery Station was to demonstrate the beauty of trees as well as show examples of trees suitable for the prairie climate. The central tree in this planting bed is a Siberian larch (*Larix sibirica*), which may look like a typical evergreen, but has needles that turn a brilliant golden yellow every fall before being shed for the winter. These drought tolerant trees were used as part of the first perimeter shelterbelts at the Nursery Station.

The trees on either side of the larch are Black Hills spruce (*Picea glauca* var. *densata*) a variety of white spruce introduced from the Black Hills Nursery of South Dakota. They are better adapted to dry prairie conditions than ordinary white spruce and were shipped from here as early as 1937.

*Return to the Residence and look on the lawn south of the parking area for the tree labelled "Ohio Buckeye"*



## 3. Ohio Buckeye

The Ohio Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*) is a slow-growing, long-lived tree that is relatively rare in Saskatoon. It has large showy flowers in the spring that turn into spiny fruits in the fall. The name "buckeye" likely comes from the white patch found on this tree's brown fruit that looks like a shiny deer or buck's eye. This tree was listed as one of the "test" species distributed from the Nursery Station in 1957. The layout of the lawns and borders in this area is much like the original plan for the site.

*Continue walking along the curved roadway east of the parking area and stop at the first picnic area on your right to view the shrub labelled Sutherland caragana*



## 4. Sutherland Caragana

One of the plants that Les Kerr developed during his time as Superintendent of the Nursery Station was the Sutherland caragana (*Caragana arborescens* 'Sutherland'). It grows very quickly in a narrow, columnar form reaching heights of 3 to 3.5 m. Reports from the Station boasted that the Sutherland caragana grew 1.2 to 1.8 m taller than any other caragana and produced 100% more wood.

Along with one other caragana, Mr. Kerr developed twenty rosybloom crabapples, one mountain ash, two weeping pincherries, one larch, fourteen flowering plum hybrids, six apricots and apricot hybrids, numerous Nanking cherry hybrids and Mongolian cherries, one trailing geranium, and four chrysanthemums. Unfortunately, many of his selections are lost or no longer available.



*Continue walking east on the roadway and then follow it northward through the picnic area until you reach the first building visible on your right*

## 5. Boarding House & Jumping Pound Pincherry

The Boarding House was built in 1916 to accommodate labourers hired to work at the site. With no insulation, no electricity, and only one toilet and dish sink, the 6 to 10 men who could fit into the house would have found it far from cozy in the winter months. It was likely best suited for seasonal workers such as those hired when seedlings were lifted each fall, tied in bundles of 25 and “heeled-in” (placed with their roots buried in the soil) until shipment in the spring.

The ‘Jumping Pound’ pincherry at the south side of the Boarding House, is a beautiful weeping variety of a native prairie shrub that is still somewhat rare today.

*Proceed to the next building in the open yard area just north-east of the Boarding House.*



## 6. Packing Shed

This 1913 Packing Shed was the hub of activity at the Nursery Station. This is where the trees that had been heeled-in for the winter were packed in peat moss and wrapped in burlap before being shipped to prairie farmers from the railway station in Sutherland. The entire interior of the building was lined with sheet metal to discourage rodents. In 1945 tree storage cellars were built alongside the building to eliminate the need for the costly heeling-in process. Approximately 147 million trees were shipped out of the Nursery Station during its 52 years of operation.

*Continue to the next building , north of the Packing Shed*



## 7. Tree Storage Shed/Auditorium & Other Buildings

The Tree Storage Shed/Auditorium was a relatively late addition to the site, being built in the late 1940s. The purpose of the building was two-fold with the large open basement designed for cold storage of trees and the upper floor designed as an auditorium and place for short term storage and the sorting of trees.

A large horse barn, called the Stable, was built in 1913-14 on the north end of the yard area. It was large enough to hold 14 horses, but was damaged by a fire during the Second World War. The Stable was replaced in 1949 by a new horse barn that was approximately 25% smaller and held only five stalls. This barn was eventually moved into the zoo area for use as a winter home for waterfowl.

*Cross the yard area to the group of buildings directly across from the Tree Storage Shed*



## 8. Pumphouse

This small square-shaped building is the Nursery Station Pumphouse built in 1913 to store well water and distribute it to the other buildings. Pressurized water lines ran from the Pumphouse to most of the buildings on site, as well as to three hydrants used to water the gardens. The Nursery Station was eventually connected to the City water supply and the Pumphouse water storage tanks were removed. The adjacent Header House and attached greenhouse were built in the early 1950s for the germination of ornamental bedding plants and seedlings for research purposes.

*Walk around the right (north) side of the Pumphouse to view the back and front of the Blacksmith Shop*



## 9. Blacksmith Shop

No one is quite sure when the Blacksmith Shop was built, however, the date "1939" is cast into the concrete apron on its south side. The type of siding used on the shop suggests that it is much older, possibly built shortly after the original horse barn was put up in 1913-14. The blacksmith shop was kept busy making and repairing the many implements required at the Nursery Station and keeping the horses shod. As time passed the shop became a garage and was later used for cold storage.

*Return to the front of the Pumphouse and proceed to the east side of the Superintendent's Residence*



## 10. American Bittersweet & Other Points of Interest

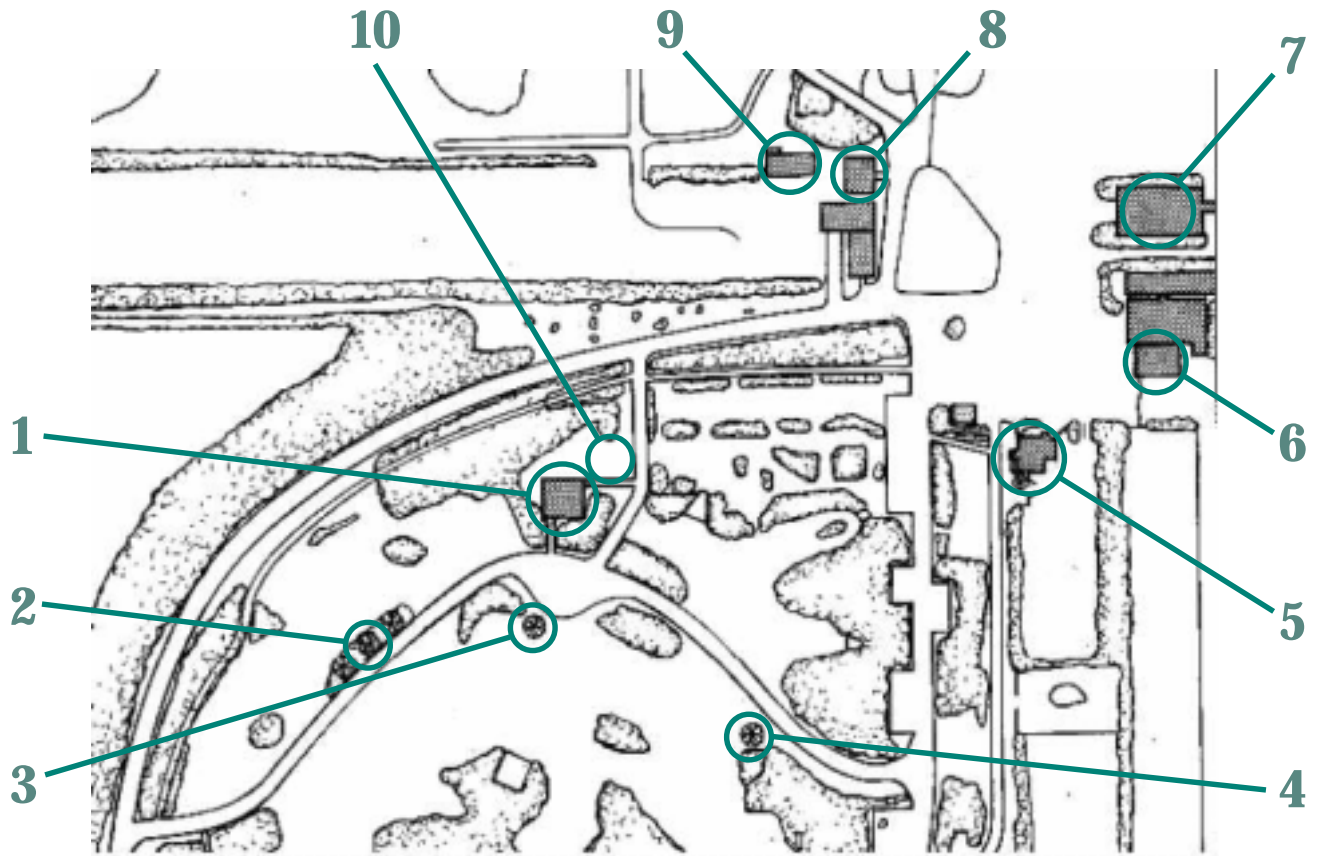
The American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) found on the east side of the Superintendent's Residence is a climbing vine native to North America, yet rarely seen in Saskatchewan gardens. Its orange fruit splits in the fall to reveal scarlet seeds. This vine used to cover the entire east side of the building.

You may also wish to view the following:

- ◆ A visit to the Saskatoon Zoo allows you to see the 1949 Horse Barn, as well as some of the original Nursery Station plantings as it was built on the original experimental fields
- ◆ The Robin Smith Mediation Garden found south of the Boarding House is a memorial to a city horticulturalist and marks the site of the demolished Nursery Station Foreman's Residence.
- ◆ The avenue of green ash to the east of the Superintendent's Residence runs south to the original working entrance of the Nursery Station through what were once propagation fields.



# A Walking Tour of the Former Sutherland Forest Nursery Station



- 1. Superintendent's Residence & Sutherland Golden Elder**  
Home-base for the two men who developed the Nursery Station
- 2. Siberian Larch & Black Hills Spruce**  
Two dryland conifer species perfect for the prairies
- 3. Ohio Buckeye**  
A unique and unusual tree with a "shiny eye"
- 4. Sutherland Caragana**  
Developed on site to create a pleasant sight
- 5. Boarding House & Jumping Pound Pincherry**  
A place to hang your hat at the end of a hard day
- 6. Packing Shed**  
Pack 'em up and move 'em out to points across the northern plains
- 7. Tree Storage Shed/Auditorium & Other Buildings**  
Some of them have come and some of them have gone
- 8. Pumphouse**  
Water for trees and a rest stop for tree workers
- 9. Blacksmith Shop**  
From shoeing a horse to fixing a plow
- 10. American Bittersweet & Other Points of Interest**  
An uncommon vine and other ideas if you have time