

Morris Shumiatcher

“Well, there is really only one way this can go. All the way.”

Born under Czarist rule, Morris Shumiatcher’s story is that of the quintessential immigrant experience paired with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, resulting in the symbol of Western Hospitality.

One of 11 children born in Gomel, Byelorussia, part of the Russian Empire at the time (now Belarus) was under anti-Semitic rule by Czar Alexander III, followed by his son Nicolas II. This drove hundreds of thousands of Russian Jewish families to emigrate, including the Shumiatchers.

In 1909 Morris and his father Judah departed for Canada, leaving behind his mother and siblings. The pair would try it for a year after which they would either send for the rest of the family or go back to Gomel. When the year was over, Judah sent for the rest of the family and the Shumiatchers settled in Calgary, Alberta.

As with many immigrants of the time, the Shumiatcher family changed their name to Smith. Changing your name was an act of adaptation, making it more simple to spell or pronounce, fitting in easier to your new country and language.

Morris started out working in a sawmill, but wanted something of his own, something more dramatic. After a trying his hand at an acting career in Hollywood he was conscripted into the Canadian Army in 1918. Upon returning home to Calgary, an idea was born and after securing a loan for \$300 with help from his brother Harry, Morris followed his dream.



Morris Shumiatcher, Calgary, Alberta
Glenbow Archives NA-5692-1

A Symbol of Western Hospitality

In 1919 Morris bought the Calgary Hat Works and eventually changed its name to Smithbilt Hats. Though Smithbilt's main line consisted of men's fedoras and women's dress hats, the Calgary Stampede inspired a seasonal market for cowboy hats.

Inspired by the pastel colours of the time, Morris took it to the next level and in 1946 created the first white cowboy hat. Worn by Bill Herron and his family in the 1947 Stampede Parade, the now iconic white Stetson soared with popularity.

The fall of 1948 saw the Stampeders football team go to Toronto for the Grey Cup and a whole host of supporters and fans followed the team east to cheer them on, many of which were wearing Smithbilt white cowboy hats. The Stampeders won and a tradition was born when former Calgary Mayor, Don Mackay (an Alderman at the time) presented a white hat to the mayor of Toronto. During Don Mackay's time as the Mayor of Calgary, he gifted hundreds of the white Stetsons to visiting dignitaries and celebrities.

To this day, the White Hat is an international symbol of Western Canadian Hospitality.

Born: 1893 – Died: 1958

Additional Resources

- **Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta**
http://jhssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Smithbilt-plaque-June-2012_4.pdf
- **The Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta**
<http://jhssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/JHSSA-Oct-2007-v3.pdf>

Our Collections

Glenbow Museum

<https://www.glenbow.org>

Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>