

Smithbilt Hat Company

1208 – 1 Street SW



Morris Shumiatcher (1892–1958), circa 1921. More than once, he changed his name to Smith and back to Shumiatcher. Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta Collection. (Curlette Studio, photographer.)

For nearly half a century, this was the site of the factory that gave Calgary its symbol of western hospitality: the white cowboy hat.

In 1919, Russian Jewish immigrant Morris Shumiatcher bought the seven-year-old Calgary Hat Works which operated at this location. Shumiatcher changed his own name to Smith and the company's to Smithbilt.

The Calgary Stampede created a market for cowboy hats. Pastels replaced dark hats after the Second World War, but Smithbilt took the next step and manufactured a pure white hat.

The first white hats were made for oilman Bill Herron, whose family wore them in the Stampede parade. Hundreds of Calgarians wore Smithbilts to the 1948 Grey Cup game in Toronto. In the 1950s, Mayor Don Mackay established the lasting tradition of presenting a white Smithbilt to visiting dignitaries. Since 1962, the Calgary White Hat Awards have recognized excellence in the hospitality industry.



From Smithbilt advertisement in E. & P.N.R. Morrison, Calgary, 1875-1950

Besides its factory, Smithbilt operated retail stores in Calgary and Edmonton. The factory moved to a new location around 1960, and the Shumiatcher family retained ownership of the business until 2002.