

A Brief History of CMS and Its Evolution

Honouring Access, Belonging, and Community

In April 1966, a diverse group of individuals from local cooperatives and the Unitarian Church in Calgary united with a shared vision: to establish a memorial society that would empower families and individuals to plan practical, dignified, and affordable funerals, burials, and cremations. This initiative aligned with the broader movement of memorial societies across Canada, advocating for informed, pre-planned end-of-life decisions rooted in equity, accessibility, and community care.

The effort was championed by Harold Webber, Alberta's Supervisor of Co-operative Activities, who believed a cooperative model would ensure fairness and member-driven decision-making. This vision led to the formation of the Calgary and District Funeral Co-operative Ltd., officially registered under the Co-operatives Act. The society was built on the cooperative principles of mutual support, economic participation, and democratic governance, with leadership from major cooperative organizations such as the Alberta Dairy Pool, Co-operators, Calgary Co-op, and the Alberta Wheat Pool. At the first annual meeting in September 1966, Gil Jamieson was elected Chairman, and the society secured its first contract with Foster's Funeral Home—laying the foundation for a member-focused, community-driven approach to funeral planning.

Growth Through Accessibility and Cooperation

By 2012, CMS had grown significantly, expanding to over 25,000 members across southern Alberta. Recognizing the need for greater accessibility, CMS transitioned to an online business model, streamlining membership management and ensuring more Albertans could access affordable and transparent funeral planning services.

In 2020, CMS rebranded as the Cooperative Memorial Society, reinforcing its identity as a community-centered, inclusive, and cooperative-driven organization. This shift introduced social media outreach, enhanced resources, and digital tools to help members navigate end-of-life planning with confidence and support. The rebrand reflected CMS's ongoing commitment to equity, education, and empowerment—core cooperative values that ensure everyone has the opportunity to make informed choices.

Between 2021 and 2022, CMS further strengthened its impact by absorbing memberships from two other Alberta memorial societies, unifying its services under a province-wide cooperative umbrella. This expansion fostered a greater sense of belonging, bringing together members from across Alberta and ensuring all had access to compassionate, affordable funeral planning.

Innovation and Leadership for the Future

In September 2024, CMS embraced another milestone by launching its new domain, coopmemorial.org. This transition reflects CMS's long-term vision of greater accessibility, inclusivity, and cooperation in funeral planning. While calgarymemorial.com remains a meaningful part of CMS's history, the new domain underscores its broader commitment to serving Albertans province-wide, reinforcing its role as a trusted, member-first organization.

On November 1, 2024, CMS made history again by appointing its first Executive Director, Terry Geib. A dedicated board member since 2009, Terry played a key role in modernizing CMS's operations, expanding its reach, and enhancing member services. Under her leadership, CMS successfully transitioned from paper records to an online CRM system, introduced online commerce, and strengthened digital engagement—all critical steps in making funeral planning simpler, more transparent, and more accessible for members.

As CMS continues to evolve, it remains deeply committed to its founding cooperative values of access, belonging, and community. Every step forward is guided by the belief that end-of-life planning should be practical, affordable, and accessible to all. With a strong foundation and a forward-thinking approach, CMS proudly carries on its mission—ensuring that no member faces these important decisions alone.