Rotary Club of Camrose

The First 100 Years

The 1940s Pivoting Yet Again

The German invasion of Poland in September 1939 ushered in another war — a war no one wanted after the First World War devastation. By the end of World War Two 1.1 million Canadians had served in the Canadian forces out of a population of 11.5 million people. Although Canada itself was subject to very minimal direct attack, 42,000 Canadians were killed and another 55,000 wounded. The financial cost rang in at $21.8 billion. It's amazing to think that Canada had the fourth largest air force and the third largest navy by the end of the war. The war effort strengthened the Canadian economy as it was digging out of the Great Depression.

But how was Camrose affected? Initially, the local news showed an excitement among younger residents at the prospect of "signing up". The Army Recruiting Train was enthusiastically welcomed. Calgary Power was preparing to protect its power plants. The Red Cross prepared to serve during the war and to support disabled soldiers. The initial buying up of supplies at the start of the war was causing shortages. The fair grounds and former Normal School were repurposed as a training base. By 1941, the Federal Government had brought in a Wheat Acreage Reduction Act and Prairie Farm Assistance Act. This was in response to surplus wheat causing a massive storage problem. The goal was to cut wheat acres in half.

As the war progressed, there was a severe shortage of farm labour particularly at harvest. The initial war excitement turned to sorrow as the lists of dead and injured were reported. By 1946, the guest speaker from Beaver Lumber shared that Canada was earmarking 58% of all lumber production for Great Britain.

During the summer of 1939, the club started on the first Rotary Park, located on 6 lots at the south east corner of 48th Avenue and 47th Street. The initial work on the park was to clear underbrush and erect seats, swings and picnic tables. By the summer of 1942 the park was in use.

When war was declared, the club needed to pivot its work in the community. One of the club's past presidents, Theo Bailey, was a veteran of the First World War and connected the club with a number of war effort needs. Club members helped the Camrose Red Cross raise $3,000 that first year and worked with Theo raising funds for the Canadian Legion War Service.

Next up were the sale of War Stamps and later War Bonds and Victory Loans. Frank Farley was to chair the Rotary war stamps committee. In his words, "the funds were needed to provide a steady flow into the treasury to help finance the country's war efforts". In 1941 the community raised $100,000 and by 1943 the goal was $190,000. The goal seemed to rise with each passing year. The motto of the Victory Loan appeal, "we also serve".

The war caused a multitude of shortages, in part alleviated by salvage operations. The Camrose salvage committee, chaired by Rotarian Theo, included many Rotarians working to collect and sort. The list of items collected was extensive and included rubber, metal, paper, fats and bones. As the war progressed, the club assembled men's clothing for "bombed out London folk" and donated funds to the Food for Britain Fund. This was the first time some of the club's focus shifted to international needs.

The Camrose Normal School, used to train teachers until it closed in 1938, was repurposed as the headquarters for an army training base. In addition, the fairgrounds were taken over to build ten H-shaped huts for the trainees. The old grandstand was dismantled to make room for a parade ground; and buildings were erected for mess quarters, a medical building and a stores room. Thousands of Canadian boys came to No. 131 Canadian Army (Basic) Training Centre – Camrose to receive their basic training. The town put itself out to entertain them. Rotary joined in to provide 12 radios to the Centre and sponsored a marksmanship cup. Over its years of operation many of the officers and soldiers were visitors at Rotary meetings—sometimes as speakers and entertainers and at other times just for fellowship.

The HMCS Camrose was a local connection to the Navy during the war. This small warship in the Corvette Class was used in an escort capacity. The club connected with the ship's sailors and sent a radio and supplied cigarettes.



View of the Army Training Centre



Trainees parading on Main Street Camrose



HMCS Camrose crew



The HMCS Camrose



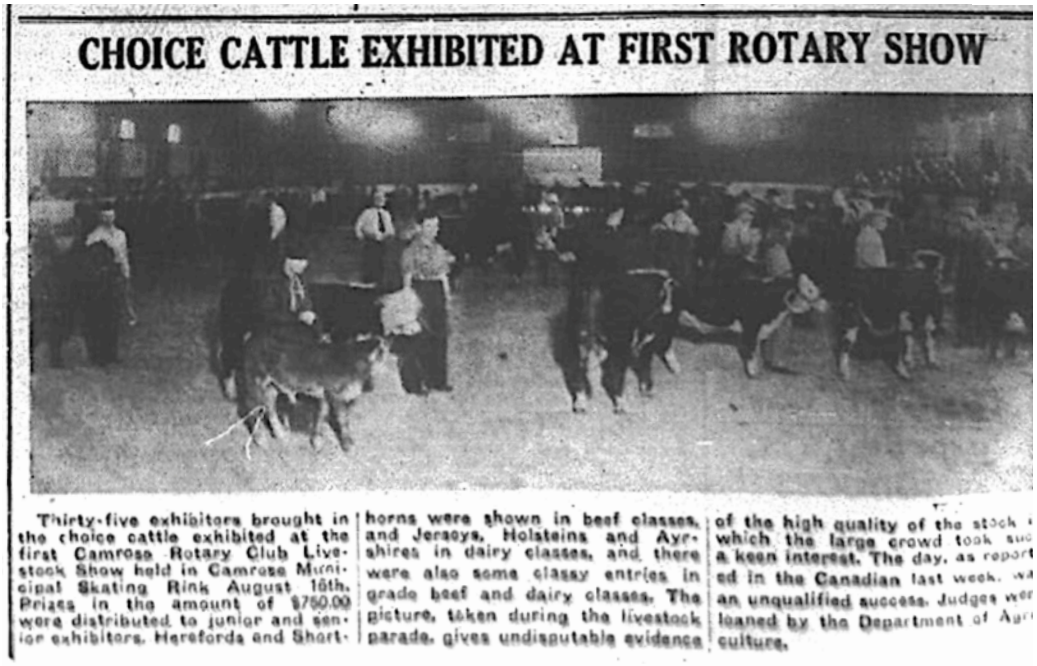
The club didn't forget the local servicemen. Each member chose someone to write to where ever they were stationed. It was quite common for these servicemen to attend Rotary meetings when they were in town on leave. They shared in general terms the missions they had been deployed on.

The club was in a habit of helping the Fair Board with the annual fair. With the fairgrounds used in the war effort the fair was cancelled. In 1944 the club sponsored a livestock show in the skating rink. The object was to "make it possible for junior farmers to see for themselves the fine type of cattle which can be raised in this area and give them opportunity to learn more about stock from experts." The first year there were thirty-five exhibitors. The show was held again in 1945 with sixty-three exhibitors. It included a baseball game and barn dance with proceeds going to the swimming pool fund. This was to be the last year of Rotary's sponsorship as the Camrose Exhibition Society was formed in 1946. The Society held a fair again in 1948 with a grand stand show and parade.

Even with all the war effort emphasis, Rotary continued to support Camrose youth. The club received requests for assistance from the scouts in 1940 and again in 1946. What form that assistance took is unclear. Club historian Frank Farley's 1943 historical summary mentions the club erected a local Scout Hut and assisted in taking scouts to camp at Sylvan Lake. The Camrose History book written in 1980 mentions the first scout troop being organized in 1922, being dormant for a few years and then being revived in 1934 with leadership including Rotarian Tommy Tanner. Mentioned is the scouts move into their new scout building south of the old curling rink in 1937. That association seems to have continued as the local paper mentions the club sponsoring the Boy Scouts in a 1948 edition.

In 1945, the club sponsored a Cam-Teen Club—a youth movement claiming wide attention at the time. 1946 guest speaker, RCMP Sargent Miller, spoke about the direction given through youth movements and activities designed to interest young people, as an important factor in keeping down mischievous behavior. He noted there were no serious problems with youth in Camrose. In 1947, the club was noted as having sponsored a softball team and supervised children's playgrounds.





CHOICE CATTLE EXHIBITED AT FIRST ROTARY SHOW

Thirty-five exhibitors brought in the choice cattle exhibited at the first Camrose Rotary Club Livestock Show held in Camrose Municipal Skating Rink August 16th. Prizes in the amount of $750.00 were distributed to junior and senior exhibitors. Herefords and Shorthorns were shown in beef classes, and Jerseys, Holsteins and Ayrshires in dairy classes, and there were also some classy entries in grade beef and dairy classes. The picture, taken during the livestock parade, gives undisputable evidence of the high quality of the stock which the large crowd took a keen interest. The day, as reported in the Canadian last week, was an unqualified success. Judges were loaned by the Department of Agriculture.

The club again began advocating for a swimming pool, with the realization the project would need the backing of the whole community. In 1946, a public meeting was held to discuss the project which would cost about $40,000 and be named the Memorial Swimming Pool. Rotary committed $2,500 and Kinsmen $500. A committee was formed, chaired by Rotarian Theo Bailey and a canvass was planned to fund the pool. By the spring of 1947 the location at the southeast corner of 50th Street and 47th Avenue was chosen. The city donated the land and an army hut to use for change rooms. Rotary was busy canvassing the north east section of town. By May, the construction contract had been awarded and work began in June.

The pool's dimensions were to be 35 by 75 feet with filtration, chlorination, heating, dressing rooms, showers and bleachers along with a wading pool. Two thousand people attended the opening late that season.

There were still the issues of the capital shortfall (donations totalled $31,232 by spring 1948) and the operation of the pool to be dealt with. The town received a $7,000 grant in June of 1948 which relieved some of the financial pressure. The club ran the pool in 1948 and 1949 with a hired staff of 4. In 1948, the club donated funds to operate the pool and to cover tickets for underprivileged children. After another community canvass, the club itself donated another $1,000 to retire the capital debt. The operating loss in 1948 was $52. In order to open the pool in 1949 each member was assessed $5. Before the pool opened it required 2 coats of paint and the tightening of all the expansion joints. The Club and Red Cross offered free swimming lessons in 1948.



HELP WANTED!

MALE and FEMALE

JOBS FROM $500.00 DOWN!

EVERY CITIZEN OF CAMROSE AND COMMUNITY NEEDED TO HELP WITH A PROJECT . . .

YOU'VE GUESSED IT!

A SWIMMING POOL

LONG TALKED OF . . .
ADMITTEDLY NEEDED . . .

Give Your Generous Financial Support And Make It A Reality!

PROVIDE SAFE, HEALTHFUL RECREATION FOR OUR BOYS AND GIRLS . . . ACT NOW!

CAMPAIGN OPENS MON. APRIL 8



Camrose Rotary Club

In Co-operation with the Red Cross Society's Safety First Campaign offering

FREE SWIMMING INSTRUCTION

Competent Certified Instructors will be in charge. Open to children, primarily, but applications from adults will also be accepted. Classes organized in age groups. Swimming Pool open for classes only two mornings each week.

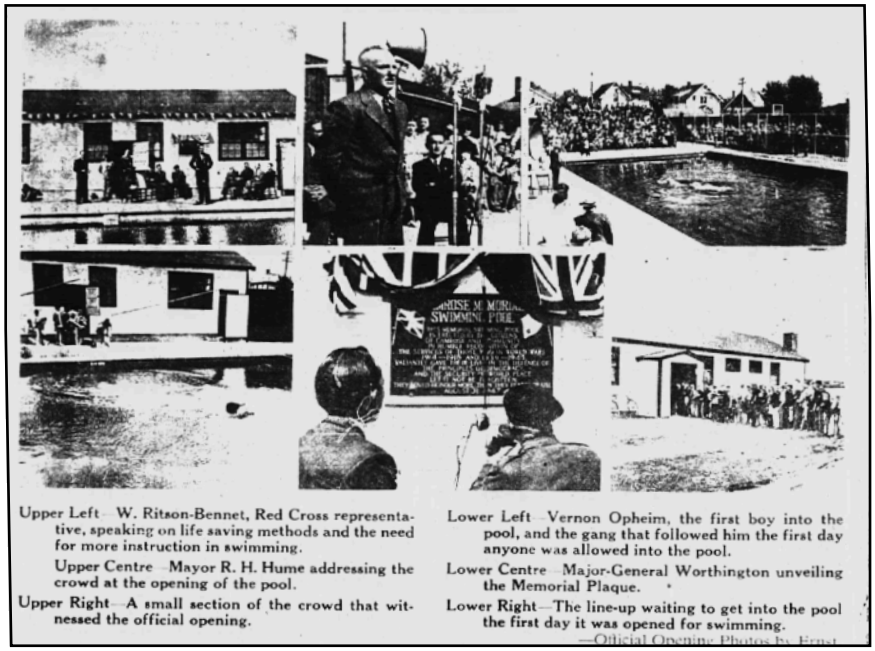
APPLICATION FORM

Name..... Age... Sex.....

I herewith make application for the Camrose Rotary Club's Free Swimming Instruction, voluntarily releasing the Camrose Rotary Club, The Camrose Memorial Swimming Pool Committee, and all instructors from any personal liability or responsibility should any accident or injury result during the period of instruction.

(Signed) .....
Applicant.

To be signed by Parent or Guardian on behalf of applicant of minor age.



Upper Left—W. Ritson-Bennet, Red Cross representative, speaking on life saving methods and the need for more instruction in swimming.

Upper Centre—Mayor R. H. Hume addressing the crowd at the opening of the pool.

Upper Right—A small section of the crowd that witnessed the official opening.

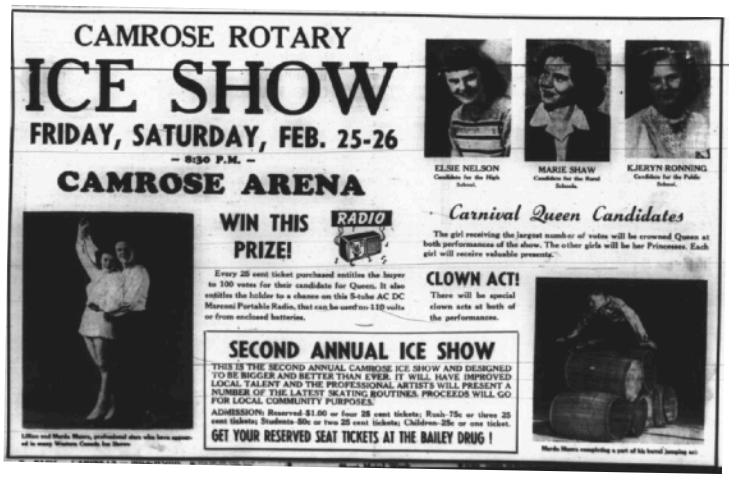
Lower Left—Vernon Opheim, the first boy into the pool, and the gang that followed him the first day anyone was allowed into the pool.

Lower Centre—Major-General Worthington unveiling the Memorial Plaque.

Lower Right—The line-up waiting to get into the pool the first day it was opened for swimming.

—Official Opening Photos by Ernst

Memorial Swimming Pool grand opening



CAMROSE ROTARY

ICE SHOW

FRIDAY, SATURDAY, FEB. 25-26

– 8:30 P.M. –

CAMROSE ARENA

ELSIE NELSON — Candidate for the High School.

MARIE SHAW — Candidate for the Band Schools.

KJERYN RONNING — Candidate for the Public School.

Carnival Queen Candidates

The girl receiving the largest number of votes will be crowned Queen at both performances of the show. The other girls will be her Princesses. Each girl will receive valuable presents.

WIN THIS PRIZE!

RADIO

Every 25 cent ticket purchased entitles the buyer to 100 votes for their candidate for Queen. It also entitles the holder to a chance on this 5-tube AC DC Marconi Portable Radio, that can be used on 110 volts or from enclosed batteries.

CLOWN ACT!

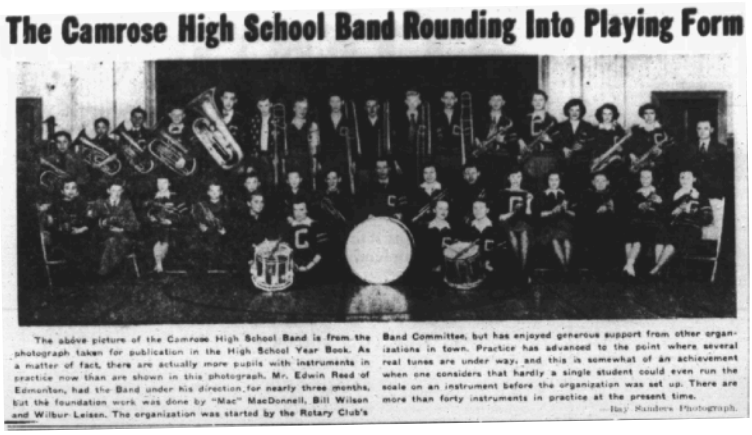
There will be special clown acts at both of the performances.

SECOND ANNUAL ICE SHOW

THIS IS THE SECOND ANNUAL CAMROSE ICE SHOW AND DESIGNED TO BE BIGGER AND BETTER THAN EVER. IT WILL HAVE IMPROVED LOCAL TALENT AND THE PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS WILL PRESENT A NUMBER OF THE LATEST SKATING ROUTINES. PROCEEDS WILL GO FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY PURPOSES.

ADMISSION: Reserved-$1.00 or four 25 cent tickets; Rush-75c or three 25 cent tickets; Students-50c or two 25 cent tickets; Children-25c or one ticket.

GET YOUR RESERVED SEAT TICKETS AT THE BAILEY DRUG !



The Camrose High School Band Rounding Into Playing Form

The above picture of the Camrose High School Band is from the photograph taken for publication in the High School Year Book. As a matter of fact, there are actually more pupils with instruments in practice now than are shown in this photograph. Mr. Edwin Reed of Edmonton, had the Band under his direction for nearly three months, but the foundation work was done by "Mac" MacDonnell, Bill Wilson and Wilbur Leisen. The organization was started by the Rotary Club's Band Committee, but has enjoyed generous support from other organizations in town. Practice has advanced to the point where several real tunes are under way, and this is somewhat of an achievement when one considers that hardly a single student could even run the scale on an instrument before the organization was set up. There are more than forty instruments in practice at the present time.

—Bay Raiders Photograph.

Not to be forgotten was the club's commitment to the Figure Skating Club which was sponsored in 1947-48 and 1948-49. Ninety-two skaters came out the first week. Rotary also ran the Ice Carnival and netted $2,500 in 1948 which was used to cover skaters' costs.

Rotary sponsored a series of three high school debates in 1949. One of the topics was that Canada adopt an open immigration policy. The goal was to encourage public speaking and inter-school cooperation.

There were many references to Rotary in connection with the community band, providing transportation and other support. In 1949, the club provided instruments for a high school band.

The club continued to have special nights. John Douglas from CP Rail showed colour travel films of the Philippines at the 1939 children's night. The films were a big hit with the children along with the paper hats and noisemakers. The Ladies' Night of 1940 included dinner and theatre. Thirty-five guests at the 1941 Sons and Daughters party enjoyed entertainment by various children and a quiz that pitted 3 children against 3 Rotarians. The speaker for that year's Lady's Night spoke about the World War Two Egyptian Campaign.

The family night of 1942 was a Scottish night to honour "Rabble Burns" (AKA Robbie Burns). Members and guests were treated to a piper and drummer from Camp Camrose piping in the haggis, Scottish songs, the highland fling, a magician, and singing by both Robert Johnson and a quartet from Camrose Lutheran College.

One of the most interesting special meetings was called China Day. Rotary International had requested clubs to "pay tribute to the splendid efforts the people of China have made on the battle against the forces of aggression". The club was fortunate to have Chester Ronning, the principal at Camrose Lutheran College, as guest speaker. The newspaper clipping that summarizes his remarks is included.

ROTARY NOTES

"CHINA DAY" OBSERVED

Regular noon luncheon-meeting of Camrose Rotary Club was held on Monday in the Alice Hotel. President Dick Ireland presided and there was a good attendance.

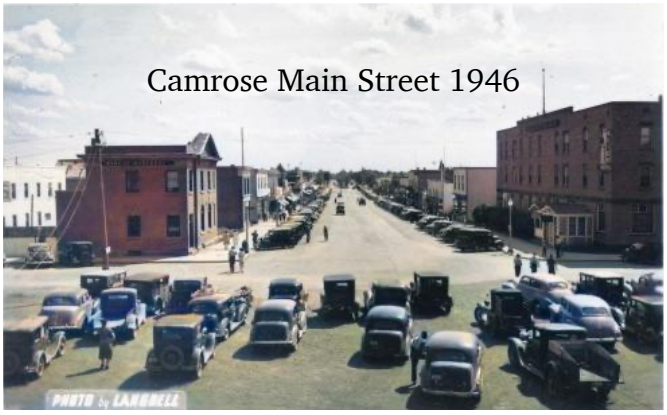
Mr. W. H. T. Mead, former member of the club and formerly District Agriculturist here, was a visitor.

The program, in conjunction with that of other Rotary Clubs throughout Canada and the United States, was given over to the observance of "China Day" in tribute to the splendid efforts the people of China have made, and are making, in the battle against the forces of aggression.

MR. RONNING SPEAKER

Mr. Chester Ronning, principal of Camrose Lutheran College, was the guest speaker. In finding the reason for China's great resistive strength in the face of four and a half years of savage pounding by the highly developed and concentrated armies of Japan, Mr. Ronning reviewed the history of the Chinese people to show, that in his opinion, the secret of their strength lies in their great public morale. The spirit displayed by China today, he said, is inherent in the Chinese people and has come down to them through centuries of struggle against the powers of oppression. China's importance as a potential factor in the outcome of the present world situation, aligned as she is with countries having similar basic ideals, has been recognized and means are being taken through the furnishing of supplies and materials of war by the Democracies to afford her an opportunity to add the strength of her man-power to the defeat of the aggressor nations, Mr. Ronning said. The importance of this added strength, he said, will very soon be apparent to the world.

(Mr. Ronning's father was a missionary in China for many years. The speaker spent part of his boyhood there and went back to China and taught school for several years.)



Camrose Main Street 1946

PHOTO by LANDELL

The club had unique ways of having fun at meetings when they didn't have a speaker. At one meeting in 1939, members gave impromptu three-minute talks on subjects drawn from a hat. Subjects like the economic effect of the war, Al Capone (who was recently released from prison), the desirability of swimming pools, and would one large service club be preferable in a small community. Of course, the club continued its singalong tradition with "Roll out the Barrel" added to the club songbook in 1940.

A meeting in 1940 included a quiz. Members were asked to identify musical selections or quote the next line of poetry or prose. At a later meeting, three members were chosen to speak off the cuff on the topic, "Why I happened to come to Camrose."

One club social included a blind folded pillow fight to settle an imagined difference. A spelling contest was the entertainment at one 1947 club meeting.

1948 saw the introduction of member fines (mostly gags) imposed by the club's Sargent at Arms, a tradition that continued for six decades.

There were many interesting speakers during the meetings. In 1940, a veterinarian spoke of developing anaesthetics for use in animals.

The enterprise system of teaching was the 1941 topic of the school superintendent, designed to take the competition out of learning with the teacher being part of a study group with students. He also noted that Social Studies had been added to the curriculum.

There were many war related speakers. Stoker Pelan spoke in 1941 about his last year aboard ship. On Remembrance Day that year Theo Bailey vividly recalled scenes from 1914-1918. He asked fellow Rotarians, "if we were doing all we can to carry forward the torch of freedom?". A 1944 guest speaker shared his experience as a fighter pilot and prisoner of war in Italy.

Member and dentist Dr. Ness spoke about preventing tooth decay. He felt the solution was not with the use of tooth paste and mouth wash but in eliminating sugar from the diet because decay is caused by eating "civilized food".

There were two speakers who spoke about the building of the Alaska Highway. The first, in 1942, was an engineer who also witnessed the Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor Alaska. The other, in 1943, spoke of the importance the highway would have in development of the Peace River region after the war. Dr. Twomey spoke about the birds of the Hudson Bay region.

Member Frank Farley spoke about his 9th trip to Churchill since 1931 to study birds. He also spoke about the Churchill River, the spring thaw, the Indigenous people, the caribou herds and the building of the railway. Caribou herds were often 100,000 strong and the trains had to stop until they passed through. The Churchill railway was being constructed at the time of WWI. There was such a shortage of steel that 300 miles of newly laid track were lifted and sent to France.

In 1948, Dr. Ness spoke about a recent trip to Norway, with a stop in England along the way. He reported food and luxuries being reduced to a minimum in England. Norway, on the other hand, had an abundance of food and buoyant spirits. His nephew had been active in the Norwegian underground railway and shared stories about its operation. Also, in that year one of the guest speakers talked about the suitability of potato crops in Southern Alberta.



Rotary Club of Camrose 1946

The club celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1944. The first club president, RJ Sanders, shared his remembrances of the club's early years.

The following year, on the club's 21st anniversary, twenty-six members of the Edmonton Club joined in a "coming of age" celebration. Three charter members were recognized. As part of the entertainment Edmonton Rotarian, Bill Freeman, gave a shooting demonstration right in the banquet room. He was quite a stunt man and shot blindfolded and using a mirror. There were no reports of bodily injuries.

For the club's 25th anniversary in 1949 all past presidents were invited and each one in attendance shared highlights of their presidential year. At that time, the club had 50 members. Perhaps the most eloquent was Frank Farley who talked about the club's many worthwhile endeavors. This part of his presentation touched me most:

"Besides these many useful local projects the Club has been of great value in the matter of better acquaintance of our citizens and especially to the many new people who have in recent years come to Camrose to enter into business. Hardly without exception, these newcomers have been invited to our luncheons, and as a result many new friendships have occurred. This in my humble opinion is just as important as any other activity in which we can be engaged. Without Rotary many of us never meet each other. As for business, we must forget this is a "Young Man's Age", and we are very fortunate in drawing so many of these young fellows into fellowship with us."

Where was Rotary International during these war years? Each year, the district governor spoke about the advancement of international understanding in their presentions to the club. They encouraged the club not to be discouraged and said that greater strides would be made at the end of the conflict. Near the end of the war Rotary International took an active role in drafting the United Nations Charter. That special relationship continues to this day.

We are indebted to past president Frank Farley for keeping track of the early club history. He came to Central Alberta as a young man in 1892 and moved to Camrose in 1907. Frank kept a diary of the weather, bird life, politics and a hundred other things. He referred to Camrose as "the hill of roses".

Thank-you to this group of Rotarians who so ably pivoted to address the war needs but still keep an eye on local family concerns.