



The First 100 Years

The 1950s: A Return to Prosperity in the new City of Camrose

With the backlog of consumer demand for everything from homes to vehicles and farm machinery, to everyday items, the 1950s were a time of rejuvenation. Many retailers opened their doors and the newspapers were full of advertisements to Buy, Buy, Buy.

Camrose saw record construction in both housing and commercial buildings. The 1950s saw the start of CFCW Radio; the Smith Clinic built a quarter million-dollar building; Safeway purchased a half block of land; NADP built a plant; AMA built a Camrose office; the Camrose Canadian opened a new modern facility; and the Camrose Booster began operations. The dial phone was now available in Camrose.

Food security was a huge concern in Europe and the agricultural subsidies introduced during the war continued. This protectionism caused apprehension among local farmers as the European market for agricultural products declined. European demand for wheat dropped to 20% of prewar amounts. The Alberta Department of Agriculture was promoting soil conservation. When speaking to the club, the Deputy Minister proposed an 11th commandment, "Thou shalt conserve the soil that nourishes you".

During 1950, three seismograph units were working in the Camrose area. By 1953, the Camrose Oilfield was the third largest producing oilfield in Canada. The interprovincial pipeline was being constructed between Edmonton and Lake Superior.

There were also significant changes in transportation during this decade. The highway between Camrose and Wetaskiwin was being paved in 1950. The CPR dropped local passenger service in 1959 and that same year Highway 21 was being paved.

Camrose became a City on January 1, 1955 with a population of 6,100.

In 1950, Saint Mary's Hospital faced a financial crisis. Rosehaven won an award as the first institution of its kind by providing a "home for the elderly who suffer mental disorders". The Camrose Police Force took over from the RCMP in 1956. The first traffic light was installed at 50th Avenue and 50th Street.

Health wise, Camrose hosted a TB x-ray clinic in 1950. Five years earlier, the TB rate was 5 in 1,000; now it was 1 in 1,000. School openings in 1950 were delayed because of a polio outbreak, with Camrose and District reporting 7 cases. The Camrose Legion was involved in the March of Dimes and polio vaccinations were taking place. By 1957, the local paper was reporting that polio was largely "licked". A flu epidemic in the fall of 1957 led to a delay in school openings.

In common with many communities, there were lots of fires in Camrose's first fifty years. John Russell School burned down in 1950. The fire chief noted that careless smokers were the number one cause of fires. By 1953, the fire chief reported that the efforts of the Camrose Volunteer Fire department had cut mercantile insurance rates in half. Camrose home insurance was the lowest in the province with the exception of Edmonton and Calgary.

Concerns about whether lasting peace was possible continued to be expressed in the local paper and by speakers at club meetings. The Civil Defense League operated on the premise that modern equipment would bring future wars to North America. It was thought that civil defense would help our nation to recover after a first attack, to get industry back in production and organize people's will to fight. The club hosted a speaker to explain the atom and the power it holds. There was concern about communism in Russia and China. In 1951, when Chester Ronning again spoke to the club after he had opened a Canadian Embassy in Nanking, he remarked at being treated as an enemy alien.

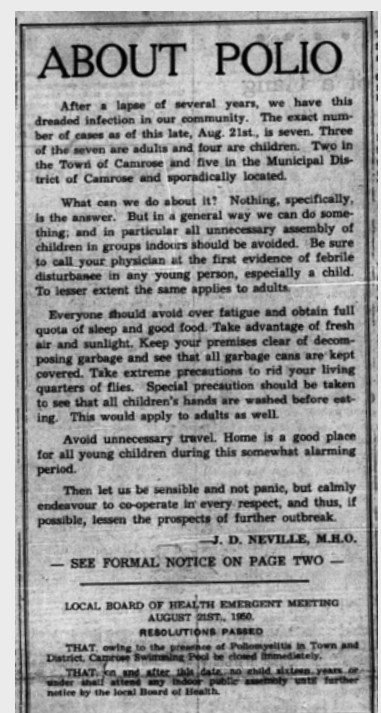
There was great interest in the workings of the United Nations. In 1953, the club sponsored a student to attend the Banff United Nations School to learn about the purpose and activities of the United Nations.

Canada saw its population grow by twenty-six thousand per month and was expected to reach fourteen million by the end of 1950. The war left many displaced persons looking for opportunities to come to Canada. Twelve million people fled from East Germany alone. France was, as noted by one speaker, desperately impoverished as a result of the two world wars, with very high prices and low wages.

What was the Rotary Club of Camrose doing?

In 1953, the club became aware of the needs of the Bethany Home for Children near Gwynne. With a staff of eleven, this home was caring for and educating forty-three children who came from homes where the parents couldn't care for them. It was housed in an ex-army barracks that had been moved in. Funding came from a small fee (if the parents could afford it), donations, and the goodwill of the care and teaching staff who were paid very little.

At first, Rotary was simply helping financially with an outright grant, funds to purchase cribs, and assistance getting a new boiler. That Christmas, the annual Christmas Party was foregone and each Rotarian was assessed a fee to purchase Christmas gifts for the Bethany children. That Christmas gift commitment was to continue for decades. Rotary was not alone in this project as many service organizations and individuals began to support the home.



Although the support continued, it simply wasn't enough. The club wrote to and met with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Social Services on behalf of the home in 1953/54. This resulted in the province's provision of some capital funds, but the home continued to operate the school without provincial grant support. Rotary again appealed to the Minister of Education and the provincial cabinet in 1956/57 to arrange for a school grant through Gwynne School or the Wetaskiwin schools. The trail is incomplete, but presumably that appeal was successful.

The High School Band was noted as being organized, in the first instance, as a "Rotary Baby". The club continued to support the band financially throughout the 1950s.

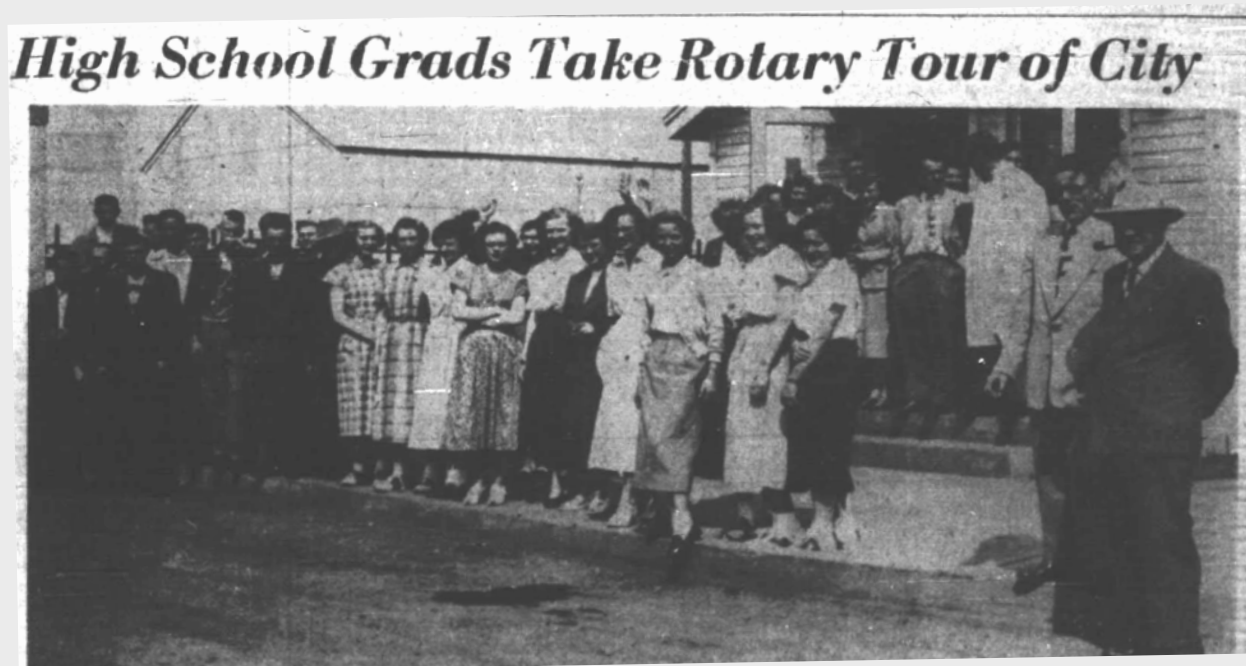
Rotary encouraged the formation of a stand-alone Skating Club. In the 1949-50 season a club of 85 skaters was organized with financial help from Rotary.

The club continued to hold High School debates in 1950 and 1951. Two of the debate topics in 1950 were, "That the communist party be outlawed in Canada" and "Religion vs Science". Entertainment while the judges deliberated was provided by the College Choir and the High School Band and Majorettes. The club charged an entrance fee to the debates and supported the High School Band and Camrose Lutheran College choir with the proceeds.

In 1951, 1952 and 1953 the club arranged a day in Edmonton for Grade 12 students from both the High School and Camrose Lutheran College. The students took a short flight over Edmonton, and visited the University of Alberta campus, the NADP plant and Weston Bakery.

The club was the instigator of a local Relief Fund. The 1950 tag day raised \$1,000. A Salvation Army campaign sponsored by Rotary in 1950 collected \$800.

The club, having a continued commitment to minor sports, sponsored a minor hockey team and little league team. Rotary made other donations to CAA winter sports, Sifton School sports equipment, and the high school rugby team, to name a few. In 1956, Rotary was paying one half the cost of swimming passes for those children who couldn't pay to swim. Kinsmen paid the other half.



In the fall of 1951, the club began discussing ways to improve Rotary Park by installing fencing, building modern rest rooms, two or three shelters and some open tables. The next reference was in 1953, when the park was noted to be well kept and well used. Five hundred dollars were spent to make improvements and a park caretaker was hired. In the summer of 1954, it was reported that more than one hundred people used the park on the previous Sunday. The park committee suggested a comfort shelter and a shelter from the wind and rain as next park improvements.

Later, there was a discussion about moving the old Salvation Army hut to Rotary Park. This structure was also to be used by the handicraft club. Rotary and the handicraft club were considering jointly erecting washrooms there. In May of 1956, it was noted that restrooms were being installed in Rotary Park that summer.

It's unclear if any of these grand plans came to fruition. By 1958, the club was discussing the permanency of Rotary Park with the City. The club was interested in the future development next to the Calgary Power dam before proceeding with any future park upgrades.

After hearing about food shortages in Great Britain, the club arranged to send a dinner to a Rotary club in Kilmarnock Scotland in 1951. The banquet fed forty-eight Rotary members, their wives and other invited guests, and consisted of rows and rows of tins. The menu included chicken noodle soup, Maple Leaf ham and fig pudding. The Camrose club was delighted with the return gift of Scottish shortbread.

A large number of immigrants settled in Camrose during the 1950s. In 1954, the club started a "Get Acquainted Night" to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Rotary International. The purpose of the evening was to help strangers to Camrose get acquainted with other people in town. The guest speaker at the 1955 version had a message for both new and long-time Camrose residents. He encouraged long-time residents to welcome new Canadians (with their skills and their culture) and new comers not to give up the ways and the cultures of their homelands too quickly – to gradually adapt themselves to their new environment.

About three months ago the Camrose Rotary Club selected a club in Britain of about the same size and forwarded a food hamper, emphasizing the meat content, to the Rotary Club at Kilmarnock, Scotland. The letter below details the delight the Scottish Club had out of the occasion, and naturally Camrose Rotarians are pleased over the success of their gesture.

MENU

To-night you're the guest of a man of Camrose,
The club that sent foodtins—rows upon rows.

So here is the Menu just eat what you can,
While you murmur a grace to that far away man.

It starts with Chicken Noodle Soup—
The poor wee beasties died of croup.

Then Countless tins of Maple Leaf Gammon—
Now don't go and say "You much prefer Salmon."

And now Fig Pudding, so take a hint,



In 1955, the club tried to start community leagues in Camrose. An organizational meeting was held under the direction of Rotary's multiple community club program. At the first of four initial get-togethers held at Jubilee Park, 200-300 parents and children turned out. It is unclear whether this was a lasting initiative or just an idea that didn't catch on.

To make Camrose the real "Rose City" of the west, Rotary promoted the cultivation of roses in 1956. To that end, they ordered 1,000 hardy rose bushes and began selling them. As a result, 1,100 roses were planted in Camrose that season – 400 red, 400 yellow, 200 pink and 100 white. The funds raised were used to maintain the Rotary Park.

An air cadet squadron ran successfully in Camrose from 1941 to 1945 to train young men for duties during World War II. In 1957, there was a renewed desire to maintain a local squadron. The purpose of Air Cadets had changed to focus on citizenship, leadership, physical fitness, general aviation and stimulating an interest in the activities of the Canadian forces. The war was over, but there was still unease demonstrated by a local reserve battalion and civil defense league. Camrose was working to obtain an airstrip and wanted to have more local pilots.

Rotary was interested in developing leadership and other skills in local youth. This was a time when the club membership included a number of military veterans with the training and experience to actively run the squadron. The air cadet motto "to learn – to serve – to advance" mirrors Rotary's mottos "Service Above Self" and "One Profits Most Who Serves Best".

At that time, boys between the ages of 14 and 19 were eligible to join Air Cadets and had the opportunity to learn all the fundamentals of Air Force training. The Squadron was attached to the Penhold Air Force Training Centre, where the boys were taken periodically for flying training, gunnery practice and other special training. Their training in Camrose included the theory of flight, navigation, photography, engine maintenance, radio, drill, signals and many other subjects.

Rotary's function was mainly to help with the smooth running of the cadet squadron. Practically all the material needed was furnished by the Air Cadets League. The Commanding Officer was Rotarian Frank McMillan, who held that position previously in Grand Prairie. The volunteer instructors were Rotarians Rusty Campbell, Art MacKenzie, Dr. Ladd Parsons, Dr. Bernie Clarke, Jim Dabbs, Ken Patridge and Maurice Broadfoot.

Dennis Twomey Sr. chaired the Air Cadets Civilian Committee along with secretary Einar Overn and members Al Schloss, Dr. I.W. Dunbar and W.L. Knaut. It was hoped that the organizational arrangements might also aid the local Sea Cadets, Reserve Army, and Boy Scouts.



1958 saw the club give out an "Adventure in Citizenship" award to a high school student. That same year the club gave \$250 to a student loan fund to help high school students cover costs.

How was the club raising funds?

In 1949, \$122 was raised with Donkey Baseball, "after the doctor bills were paid and casualties buried". Donkey baseball was a sports fad of the day. In the extreme version, all players except the pitcher, catcher and batter played mounted on donkeys. When a batter made a hit, he mounted a live donkey and made his way around the bases. If the fielders were not on donkeys, they had to crawl on all fours to tag a player out.

A bridge tournament in 1950 provided a lot of fun and cleared \$100. Each person was charged a 50-cent entry fee and 25 cents per game. The elimination games were held in people's homes, with the final game being a public event.

In the early 1950s, the club held a June outdoor carnival in the CPR square (at the north end of main street). It included eleven games and a number of rides for children the first year. The 1952 carnival raised \$2,063, but the 1953 returns had shrunk to \$900. The Chamber of Commerce held its first Jaywalkers Jamboree in 1958. By 1959, the club was operating a photo booth at Jaywalkers.

In 1954, the club began a "Sunday Night at the Drive-in" fundraiser. The first night's silver collection netted the club \$30. The club brought in an Illusionist to the stage at the High School in 1956 and raised \$200.

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**ROTARY CARNIVAL ALL
SET UP**

Those tents and booths down by the C.P.R. depot are set up for the annual Rotary Carnival. They will be a hive of excitement for four nights, this Wednesday, Thursday Friday and Saturday. The open intent of the Carnival is to raise funds for Rotary's community activities, but in so doing you are given a fair run for your money.

There is the big Bingo booth, rides for the kiddies, refreshment booth, wheels of fortune, etc., etc. You can spend a couple of enjoyable evenings down there, meet your friends and have a barrel of fun.

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SUNDAY NITE MOVIES
— at the —
Kar-Vue Drive-In
Sponsored by the Camrose
ROTARIANS



Shows start at 9 p.m. Gates open earlier. Full-length feature programs will be used.

Silver Collection

All proceeds will be used for Community Betterment. — First project on the list is washrooms at the Rotary Park.

Each Sunday At The Kar-Vue!
" HELP THE ROTARIANS HELP CAMROSE "

What was the club doing for fun?

“Rotary Spice”, a 3-minute talk on a topic (usually about some aspect of Rotary) was instigated. Somewhere along the line, the judge who meted out fines was named “Judge Yahooty”. The name followed the position and not the person. Rotarian Bernie Clarke, created an electronic attendance board at this time when the club strived to have 100% attendance. He flipped a switch for each member in attendance. At 100% attendance the board rang and lights flashed. The club initiated a “Ducker’s Table” in 1954 for members who had to “duck out” early. The table, complete with a duck centrepiece, was located near the door so members could leave without interrupting the guest speaker.

Rotary was honoured to be presented with the HMCS Camrose ship’s bell for safe keeping and to use as a gong. In Rotary, as on ships, the bell represents order, discipline and the time to guide us through the weekly meeting. In 1956, the club held a competitor’s day. Each member was expected to invite a guest in the same line of business or profession.

In a touching tribute to widows of deceased members, the club sent flowers at Christmas, arranged for them to receive the Rotary Magazine and invited them to club socials.

Forty-four club members and spouses enjoyed a flight over Edmonton and the Leduc oilfield curtesy of TWA in 1950. The trip also included a tour of the Imperial Oil Refinery. The group was so large the flight was divided into two groups.

The club had a lot of fun with lady’s nights. The fall 1949 version included a banquet and dance. To ensure members didn’t skip the dance portion, the Rotarian’s ties were confiscated at the banquet and returned later that night at the dance. Ladies Night 1951, was held in the “Oil Centre of Duhamel” with 150 in attendance. It included a chicken dinner, a comedy routine by Rotarians and a dance. The 1953 version was perhaps the highlight of the decade. The club arranged a trip to Edmonton by train for dinner and entertainment at the new, beautifully appointed Glengarry Club.



The club got together with the Camrose Kinsmen and Wetaskiwin Kiwanis on occasion. The 1950 social at Tillicum Beach, hosted by the Kinsmen, included baseball, miniature golf, a hamburger supper and a dance. Each car of Rotarians displayed a banner, “Here Comes Rotary”. There were get togethers for curling, golf and special speakers. In 1950, the Rotary Club hosted a ladies and Kinsmen homestead dinner featuring beans and other things cooked by Rotarians. The entertainment was a series of gag gifts, a Russian act starring Rotarians and music by the CLC Quartet and the High School Band.

Rotary continued its annual Farmer's Night tradition. In 1951, the roads were blocked, yet twenty-three guests arrived to hear about the topic of "Alberta Agriculture Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow". The presenter noted that the development of agriculture in Western Canada was a great experiment in which the burden fell on farmers. With machinery and modern farming methods, the future would tend to hold down the farm population but would improve life on the farm. Farms would increase in size and become more like big business ventures. At the 1954 Farmer's Night, forty farmers listened to the CJCA Agriculture editor speak on the topic of farming in Britain compared to Canada.

The club's 35th anniversary in 1959 was attended by one of the original charter members, Dean FP Harrington and two members who joined in 1924, HU Johnstone and Chas Duggan. Members and guests enjoyed a dinner with music by Hugh Irving. The evening closed with a dance to the music of The Shamrocks, a live five-piece band from Edmonton.



Speakers were always an important feature of meetings. They served to entertain and inform members on what was happening in the world. A selection of perhaps the most interesting or relevant speakers of the 1950s follows:

With all the oil activity in the Camrose area, a member of an oil survey party was guest speaker at a July 1949 meeting. He spoke of the methods used to determine the location of oil and the earth's structure and why it was important for North America to find oil. A geophysical survey is a combination of geology and physics.

"Newspapers are but one branch of freedom of speech" was the comment of a 1952 guest speaker. It was scarcely 100 years ago when newspapers, as we know them, were permitted to function. The first newspapers were made from rags whose supply was limited and very expensive. The coming of wood pulp, improvements in printing presses and linotype permitted rapid expansion of newspapers. At the time, the Lethbridge Herald was the only privately-owned daily paper in Western Canada.

A 1953 speaker shared his thoughts on the China problem. "Communism in the eyes of China", he said, "offers many things that have been promised the people of China many times. China's attitude towards the west is not good. That attitude can be traced to actions of western powers over the years, who many times have plundered, broken and fallen down in the eyes of the oriental."

The club heard from a recent political science graduate from London University in England, now working in the University of Alberta Extension Department, at a 1953 meeting. In his words, "America is in the position of a young adolescent, rich in power, but with no experience, who may cause trouble before she settles down. Canada is looked upon as a very able and likely go between the U.S and Britain. Britain, though waning, still has a great deal to teach the world, a great deal to contribute."

Calgary Power's first plant was a little water wheel unit built in 1898, utilizing water that flowed over the Eau Claire Sawmill dam. It generated 280 hp. The 1954 speaker continued on to explain that a man using a hand pump for eight hours can pump the equivalent of what a one horsepower motor can do in one hour. Calgary Power took over the Camrose town-owned power plant in 1929 when the rate was 12 cents per kw hour. In 1954, the rate was \$2.

A few weeks after Camrose became a city, the club honoured Francois Adam, the "Father of Camrose", who was then 98 years old. Francois helped to found Camrose in 1905.



Late in 1955, the club heard about juvenile delinquents. The speaker's credentials were of interest – Superintendent of Neglected Children's Branch of the Alberta Attorney General.

The club heard a presentation about civil defense and the possibility of a hydrogen bomb raid on Edmonton. The 1957 presenter shared that radioactive fallout can travel up to sixty miles. The current plan was for Camrose to serve as a reception area for at least six thousand Edmontonians in the event of such a raid.

The Univac, an electronic computer, was the subject of a University of Alberta Commerce professor in 1957. He noted that it had proven to be a marvel in the transportation industry and was even more startling in its application to business management.

The secrets of butchering had to be the most unique presentation of all time. The speaker arranged for a butcher to carve a quarter of beef at the meeting. The exercise was intended to show that the average beef dresses out at 56%. He explained the additional charges incurred, the wastage, the underpricing of some of the cheapest cuts and the resulting build-up of price on some of the choicest cuts.

The 1950s saw the passing of a few long-time members. The eulogy for one member is perhaps indicative of how we can remember this committed group of Rotarians over the first 35 years.

“He preferred to remain in the background, but was always keenly interested in anything that would lead to the betterment of the community. His support to any worthwhile enterprise was always readily given.”



Rotarians have fun entertaining the District Governor

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