

## Historical Moment #3 Sunday Feb. 5, 2017

The Centennial Committee is writing a book that details the history of Okotoks United Church. We are linking our history with that of The United Church of Canada and have quoted from [The United Church of Canada A History](#) edited by Don Schweitzer. I would like to share some quotes from this book this morning.

*“In the minds of those who laboured to form the United Church, it was intended to play a decisive role in shaping the moral ethos (guiding beliefs) of Canadian society by infusing the values of Evangelical British Protestantism into Canadian citizens and society through: evangelism, Christian education, social service, public activism and advocacy.”*

*“This intention was reflected in its chosen name: The United Church of Canada. It was intended to become THE church, the NATIONAL church of Canada. ”(pg. Xii)*

Within a few short years of union, the Great Depression occurred.

*“Historian John Webster Grant suggests that the Depression of the 1930’s helped “knit together the strands of The United Church of Canada as no equivalent period of prosperity could have done. The Depression years did unite members of the church, especially through their desire to help one another when in need. ”” (pg. 41)*

*“The October 1929 crash of the New York Stock Exchange resulted in differing degrees of blight among Canadians. Hardest hit were those already living at subsistence levels, namely, people employed in the farming, fishing, transportation, and pulp and paper industries. The worst years were 1930-1933 and 1937-38. The decline in demand for Canada’s export products and the collapse of world wheat prices, combined with severe drought in parts of the Prairies, left many people in dire straits.” (pg.42)*

*“In the 1930’s the church filled hundreds of railway cars with food for the Depression-era hungry, and challenged the hard-line tactics of Prime Minister Bennett. It also approved the use of contraceptives, ordained its first woman minister, and spoke against anti-Semitism. Indeed, by 1935 the church had survived some of the most difficult years in the history of Canada. (pg. 40)*

The population of Okotoks dropped from **760** in 1931 to **561** in 1932. Most likely due to people on the move looking for work. Pat Balderson (a member of OUC) wrote a piece recalling that:



1. Dust storm facing east on Elma Street circa 1930 compliments Okotoks Museum and Archives

*“...During the 1930’s, men from all over the country rode the rails looking for work. Railway police and other police officers would flush them off the trains as it was not a legal pastime. Other times they got off willingly to find food. Many people shared food with these men, some in exchange for work. Others would sell their wares, baskets, trinkets or other things that were recycled in exchange for food. Most towns had hobo camps.*

*There were three known sites in Okotoks. One was just south and west of the library site,*

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*another just south of the traffic bridge on the west side. The third one was west of town at the crossing where there was an ample supply of willow for basketry. These sites were quite homey. Situated in sheltered spots, close to water, with fire pits and anything else to make them comfortable. Like old car seats. (Pat Balderson Sept. 1997)*



2. Caroline and Rev. C.E.A. Pocock  
compliments Okotoks Museum and Archives

After Rev. Kidd left in 1932 the church began to search for a new minister for the pastoral charge which included Okotoks and Aldersyde (added in Nov. 1920). Mary Bailey, OUC member and historian, wrote:

*Several were invited to preach, Alberta weather was not always co-operative, even as now, and we experienced an occasional snow storm in May. One such occasion found the intended speaker arriving in Calgary, to discover that there was no train to Okotoks on Sunday morning. What he also probably did not know, there weren't any roads either, but he hired a driver and started out. There were difficulties met and overcome, and he arrived late, disheveled and wet to the knees to preach a sermon such as only he could preach. **Git,***

***Grit and Gumption** were considered assets in those days, and before he left the church a unanimous invitation was issued and accepted that he be our minister. It was in this way that Rev. C.E.A. Pocock came to us and stayed from June 1932 until 1939". During that time we went through the depression, those lean years that taught us the value of more important things than money. It couldn't have been a pleasant time for him either, but he went about, quiet and wise, treating us weekly to his uplifting sermons.*

Rev. Pocock's daughter, Helen, recalls that:



3. Turner Valley circa 1930's

*"The invitation in those days was to drive you out to Turner Valley to give you a whiff of H<sub>2</sub>S (hydrogen sulfide) and a view of Hells Half Acre- an awesome sight, I might add. It took some time to be able to open a window at night because of the early morning odour drifting in. ... By Mrs. Gerry Fisher (nee: Pocock). Pg 505 Okotoks a Century of Memories*

As for Church life Helen would recall:

*"...an exceptional "Young People's" group competing in the Presbyterian Drama Festivals.*

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Our first board of Stewards was formed in 1933.

On May 20, 1933 Frank and Hannah Barker (grandparents of Norma Hamilton) celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The revered couple were both active members of Okotoks United Church.

On the last Sunday of June, 1937 the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of union here was celebrated during the pastorate of Rev. Pocock... Rev. W.J. Kidd was the guest speaker.

The first history of the United Church of Okotoks was prepared by William Fisher in July 1939.

Rev. Pocock remained with us for seven years. At his farewell gifts from the Aldersyde and Okotoks communities included a Westminster chiming clock, a beautiful white linen table cloth, six lovely glass tumblers and a leather bound hymnal. ([Okotoks Review June 30, 1939](#))

*“Mother and Dad moved to Hanna where Dad intended to retire, but due to many ministers going with the forces, he was persuaded to take over The Highlands United Church in Edmonton. They were happy there, and did retire in Edmonton...When Mother became ill and they moved to Sylvan Lake to be near us. Mother was invalided after several cerebral hemorrhages (strokes) and Dad lived with us. They were ninety four and ninety five when they died.”* (Mrs. [Gerry Fisher \(nee: Pocock\)](#) pg. 505 [Okotoks a Century of Memories](#))