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## Okotoks: From Trading Post to Suburb

Lewis G. Thomas

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### Article abstract

In spite of a growing interest in urban history, Canadian scholars have paid little attention to small towns. In this article a small town in southern Alberta is examined during the years 1890-1950, with particular attention paid to the decade of the 1920s. The author argues that a closer examination of such small centres might throw new light on the complex patterns of Canadian development. Small towns like Okotoks provided a means whereby the first generation of Alberta settlers, predominantly English-speaking, Protestant and British oriented, asserted their peculiar values in the life of the province in spite of the arrival after 1896 of new waves of settlers from the United States and continental Europe.

## OKOTOKS: FROM TRADING POST TO SUBURB

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*Lewis G. Thomas*

### ABSTRACT/RESUME

In spite of a growing interest in urban history, Canadian scholars have paid little attention to small towns. In this article a small town in southern Alberta is examined during the years 1890-1950, with particular attention paid to the decade of the 1920s. The author argues that a closer examination of such small centres might throw new light on the complex patterns of Canadian development. Small towns like Okotoks provided a means whereby the first generation of Alberta settlers, predominantly English-speaking, Protestant and British oriented, asserted their peculiar values in the life of the province in spite of the arrival after 1896 of new waves of settlers from the United States and continental Europe.

Malgré un intérêt croissant à l'histoire urbaine, les savants canadiens ont fait peu attention aux petites villes. Cet article examine une petite ville du sud de l'Alberta, de 1890 à 1950, et notamment la décennie 1920-30. L'auteur veut montrer qu'une examination plus détaillée de ces petits centres pourrait faire voir sous une lumière nouvelle les structures complexes du développement au Canada. Les petites villes comme Okotoks fournirent les moyens par lesquels la première génération d'immigrants à l'Alberta--pour la plupart anglophones, protestants et orientés vers la Grande-Bretagne--imposèrent leurs valeurs particulières dans la vie de la province malgré l'arrivée après 1896 de nouvelles vagues d'immigration des Etats-Unis et de l'Europe continentale.

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In spite of a growing interest in urban history, Canadian scholars have paid little attention to the small towns of the west. Historians like J.M.S. Careless have concentrated their attention on major urban centres like Winnipeg and Victoria. Social scientists writing about the west have dismissed the small towns altogether, lumping them in with their rural setting, seeing them as sharing with their farm customers their manners, customs and frustrations, and as distinguishable from the flat plains about them only by their concentration of grain elevators. Even such a sensitive, seminal and perceptive provincial historian as W.L. Morton, makes only two entries in the index of Manitoba: A History, for Virden, a substantial community with a

distinct identity. Winnipeg on the other hand, gets twenty-five of its own and its institutions, including the Blue Bombers, get sixty-four. Any other town or village is lucky to get more than one. It is true that Gladstone gets six, but this is where the Morton roots are and the book is dedicated to the author's parents and children, "Manitobans all."

W.L. Morton has, with the late Arthur S. Morton, done more than anyone to point the way in which historical studies of Canada's prairie west should go. His Manitoba is, among many other excellent things, an examination of the author's own experience within history. There was an earlier inquest on that experience, which Morton made jointly with his sister Margaret Fahrni. This is Third crossing: A history of the first quarter century of the town and district of Gladstone in the province of Manitoba (Winnipeg, 1946).

Following in the footsteps of the Mortons, this paper attempts an examination of the small Alberta town near which and in which I grew up. My Gladstone is Okotoks and my purpose is to suggest that a closer examination of the smaller urban centres of the west might throw new light on the complex patterns of Canadian development. Insofar as the paper has a particular thesis it is to suggest that small towns like Okotoks may have provided a means by which the first generation of Alberta settlers, predominantly English-speaking, Protestant and British oriented, asserted their peculiar values in the life of the province in spite of the arrival after 1896 of new waves of settlers from the United States and continental Europe.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Though this paper draws on my own recollections it depends also upon discussions over the years with my students and colleagues at the University of Alberta and elsewhere. Among those to whom I am most heavily indebted are the late Morden Heaton Long, the late Hilda Neatby, Lewis H. Thomas and William L. Morton. In the recent literature I must mention particularly David H. Breen's doctoral dissertation for the University of Alberta, "The Canadian West and the Ranching Frontier, 1875-1922," completed in 1972; and Roderick C. Macleod, The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement, 1873-1905 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975). The Western Canadian Studies Conferences at the University of Calgary, and the resulting publications, have for ten years provided a stimulus to all those concerned with Canada's western experience. I must also express my appreciation of my involvement for some years in the local history project which issued in the publication of Our Foothills (Calgary: Millarville,

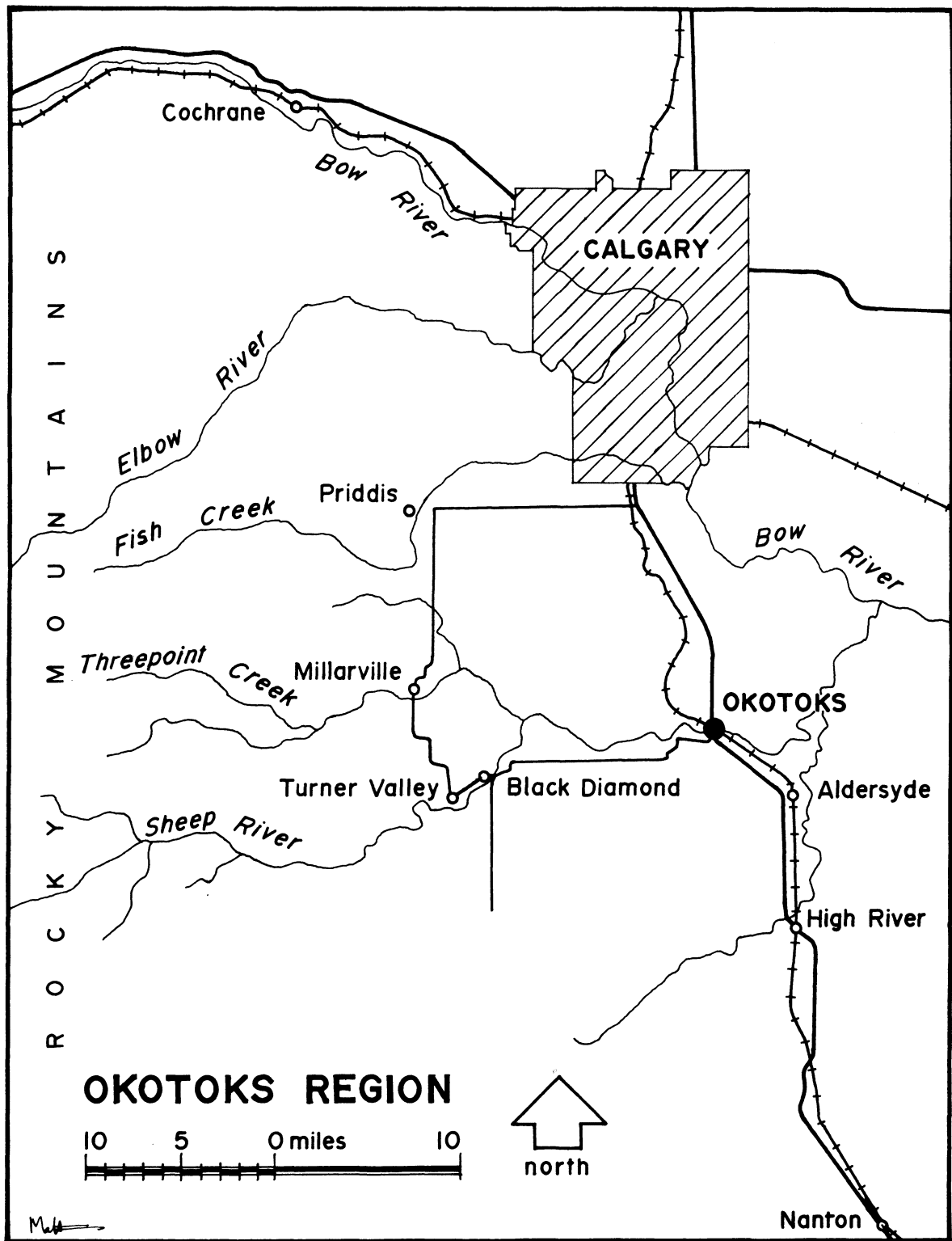
Some autobiographical details are necessary to explain the point of view from which this is written. I was born about eight miles west of Okotoks on a small stock farm to which my parents always referred, following the custom of their particular river valley, as a "ranche." When I reached school age my mother, who had done rather well with some calves my father had given her, bought a small house in the town. She and my father had for some years taught my two older sisters at home. The latter had been sent off on their Shetland ponies to ride the three miles to the nearest local school which had, at the end of the war of 1914-18, been reopened. Neither of my parents was impressed by the quality of education available there; boarding school fees for three children were even then substantial and thus the house in town was an expedient solution to the educational problem.

I attended the town school for eight years before I went off to school in Calgary and thence to the University of Alberta. In a sense we never really lived in Okotoks, for we spent most weekends and all our holidays in the country, but we had a very close relationship with it, much closer than other country children who were boarders with town families. It was always our town, just as Calgary was our city, and my own connection with it was reinforced by the fact that in the 1940s my parents lived there for ten years after my father's retirement. The decade in which I knew it most intimately was that which began in 1920 and it is upon that period that I concentrate my attention.

Okotoks lies about 27 miles southwest of the centre of the city of Calgary (see Map 1). I use the word "centre" advisedly, for since the war of 1939-45 Calgary's rapid expansion is pushing its southern limit so steadily forward that Okotoks and much of its rural hinterland are today engulfed by its ex-urban sprawl. This experience is a significant aspect of the town's contemporary history but I shall make few allusions to it. It should, however, be borne in mind that Okotoks and its environs

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Kew, Priddis and Bragg Creek Historical Society, 1975). This experience I value particularly because it brought me into a close association with the Glenbow-Alberta Institute, its Chief Archivist, Sheilagh S. Jameson, and her staff.



are part of the Calgary conurbation.

Okotoks is situated on Sheep Creek or, as the geographers insist on calling it, the Sheep River, a designation that seems to a native tiresomely pretentious when applied to this charming but essentially modest flow of water. Sheep Creek is one of the smaller of the many streams that flow out of the Rockies and their foothills to come together to form the South Saskatchewan and ultimately to drain much of the water of southern Alberta into Hudson's Bay. Sheep Creek's forks lie about ten miles west of the town and the river shapes the landscape of much of its western hinterland. This is a landscape on a much smaller scale than the formidable hills that roll back from sister streams like the Bow and the Highwood, a landscape more domestic than dramatic. The southern bank of Sheep Creek rises precipitously; the "cutbank" that is so familiar a part of the prairie scene. Okotoks lies largely to the north of the river; indeed, the rise of the land to the south is so steep that there is barely room for a park through which passes the sole road that gives access to the country lying to the south. On the north side the banks rise only a few feet above the normal level of the stream and the older part of the town lies on a river flat, not much more than 300 yards wide, between the river and the bench that shelters the valley from the north. Both the steep south bank and much of the flat to the north were well wooded, with some spruce on the northern slope and on both sides cottonwoods of a size sufficient to impress an eye accustomed to the prairie landscape. In this fertile, sheltered and well watered valley, enjoying the higher rainfall and milder winters of the foothills, gardeners soon discovered that domesticated flowers and shrubs grew quite as well as native plants and trees. Even the flats of the valley offered glimpses of the Rockies some fifty miles to the west; from the bench lands north of the town the prospects were superb. Given this combination of the cosy domesticity of its setting and the formidable splendours on its horizon, Okotoks could, more justly than many of its prairie sisters, be described as a "pretty" town.



*View of Okotoks, c.1912. Looking southwest towards Sheep Creek. The John Lineham house is in the left foreground.*  
(Photo courtesy of Glenbow-Alberta Institute).

It is difficult to believe that Okotoks owed its setting to any aesthetic appeal that it made to the engineers who chose the route for the branch of the Calgary and Edmonton Railway that was built south to Fort Macleod between 1890 and 1892. The terrain south of Calgary suggests that a line slightly further to the east would have been cheaper and easier to build and operate; its track would have avoided the stretch of river valley that has always been vulnerable to flooding when early summer rains transform the innocent and sparkling waters of Sheep Creek into a treacherous torrent. There had been a nucleus of settlement at this point long before 1890; indeed, local tradition maintains that a whiskey trader from Fort Benton, then the metropolis of Montana, had, as early as the 1860s, a post east of what became the townsite. The evidence for this early cultural penetration from the United States is flimsy but there is more reason to believe that the crossing at this point

was much used by the Indians. The name "Okotoks" was long held to be a Blackfoot word meaning "stony crossing." "Stony" the crossing was but recent researches establish pretty conclusively that "Okotoks" is really much closer to the Blackfoot for "near the big rock," a reference to the enormous glacial erratic not far to the southeast. The latter, incidentally, was recently saved for posterity by local indignation. This secured the official intervention that frustrated the plans of an enterprising contractor who saw in "the big rock" a promising source of inexpensive road material.

In the early 1880s, even before the completion of the Canadian Pacific in 1885, most of the land in the vicinity of Sheep Creek was leased to ranching interests. The region was however much too close to Calgary, an important point of takeoff for settlement, not to be attractive to the squatters, intending homesteaders who were not content to accept the ranchers' monopoly. Though Sheep Creek was important enough to the ranchers to have a Mounted Police detachment, it was inevitable that land in the vicinity would be opened to homestead. Indeed, as early as 1884 the cattle compact suggested, to a federal government very much under its thumb, that Sheep Creek should be the northern boundary of the area from which sheep should be excluded. From the point of view of the settler who wanted to become a small stock raiser the land along Sheep Creek was exceedingly attractive, quite apart from its relative accessibility, and well before 1890 much of it had been taken up.

In 1886 the little settlement on Sheep Creek had about 20 houses; the Sheep Creek post office was named "Okotoks" in 1891. When the railway line was built south from Calgary to Macleod, Okotoks owed most of its importance to the saw mill established by John Lineham in 1890 to exploit his timber leases much further to the west on the South Fork of the river. Though Sheep Creek was a small stream its floodwaters could carry logs and its flow was sufficient to power what was to prove a highly successful operation. The presence of the Lineham mill may explain why Okotoks did not suffer the fate of many early settlements; the railway ran through it and it did not have to choose between sudden death and a move to a railway-owned townsite. This probably also explains why Okotoks, almost alone among the towns along the Calgary and Edmonton



Railway, does not have streets consecrated to those tutelary spirits of land speculation, Osler, Hammond and Nanton. Through the 1890s it remained the largest settlement between Calgary and Macleod.

Its pace of growth accelerated during the later nineties as western Canada passed into the period of boom that lasted almost until the outbreak of war in 1914, the period which spawned prophecies far wilder than Wilfrid Laurier's, the period when it seemed not only probable but inevitable that as the nineteenth century had been the century of the United States so the twentieth would be the century of Canada. More and more land went under the plough as farmers turned from cattle and horses to wheat as the quickest way of grasping their share in the anticipated bonanza. Okotoks, with its stock-raising western hinterland, remained less dependent on wheat than towns further east in Alberta or in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The gentlemanly settlers to the west turned more and more to raising horses; they were still gratifying this passion for horseflesh in the 1920s and even into the 1930s in spite of the painful indications that they were waging a losing fight against the realities of the marketplace. Also west of the town but to the south of the river the huge lease of the Quorn Ranch, the most ambitious horse-raising venture of all, still maintained into the 1900s a bastion against the plough. To the east of Okotoks mixed farming was general, though grain provided a larger part of the farmers' income than cattle or horses. But all contributed to the rising prosperity and mounting ambitions of the "Biggest Little City in the West."

In the pre-war years, when the car was still a luxurious novelty, when teamsters had not yielded to truckers, and when the railway journey of an hour or more was still the fastest and most convenient way of reaching the neighbouring city, Okotoks was far enough from Calgary to provide a great variety of services. To a large extent its growing population lived by taking in one another's washing, even though it was sustained by a comparatively prosperous hinterland and fed by continuing infusions of immigrants into a country that had suddenly become not only the promised land of Europe but also the last best west of North America. The town had an exceedingly vulnerable economic infrastructure. Its industries, its lumber mill, the flourishing brickworks at Sandstone, a

few miles along the railway to the west, the quarries that supplied sandstone foundations for its more substantial buildings--all depended upon a buoyant construction industry. There were plenty of plots and plans for attracting other industries but none of these, except that for a flour mill, was carried to successful fruition.

Nevertheless, the town provided a complex network of services that made it a highly attractive focus for the life of a large rural area and provided for its inhabitants a pattern of living that offered more than most farms in the way of material comfort, neighbourly interchange and social diversion. The ranchers, happy with their horses and often sustained by nourishing remittances from distant families, might sniff at this society of shopkeepers, but they did not disdain to make use of its amenities, and were frequent guests at its three hotels and even more frequent celebrants in their well supplied bars. The farmers, though generally more conservative spenders, were equally dependent on the services provided in the town and if anything rather more disposed to involve themselves in its social patterns. This established lines of communication that involved much more than a pure buyer-seller relationship.

The dominant interest of both town and country during the boom period was in real estate. The comparatively early close settlement of the area, the high quality of its land, and its accessibility to the railway operated to push up land prices. The first decade of the twentieth century in the west was essentially an era of speculation, speculation sustained by buoyant markets and a steady rise in the price of real estate, urban as well as rural. The first settlers in the vicinity of Okotoks, those who came in the eighties and the early nineties, were overwhelmingly from the United Kingdom or from English-speaking eastern Canada. Those who survived the hardships of the pioneer period had by 1900 established themselves as the owners of valuable properties. For many of them the conditions of rural living could only be compared unfavourably with the amenities offered by the new communities growing up along the railways. The educational advantages were among the most apparent, but there were many others. At the same time the towns offered opportunities for investment and for entry into the highly attractive speculative activity that preoccupied the prospering westerner from the mid-nineties on. Towns like Okotoks thus became the base for those pioneers who had had enough

of the rigours of life on the land, who had, as it were, made a stake, and were seeking new fields to conquer. There were also those who, having tried farming and failed, sought a new opportunity in less congenial surroundings.

The towns of Alberta generally may thus have provided a base from which the first wave of settlers, overwhelmingly English-speaking, Protestant and British in their background and attitudes, continued to assert a predominance which was threatened by the flood of immigrants not only from Europe but from the United States. Certainly Okotoks saw itself as a stronghold of British tradition, though often these traditions were expressed in terms of an Ontario or Maritime inheritance. To a greater extent than in the case of many other Alberta towns, the hinterland shared its prejudices, but this only fed and reinforced the determination of the townspeople to recreate and maintain a society that conformed to the norms established "back east" or, for the United Kingdom immigrants, "in the old country."

By 1912 the peak of the boom had been reached. The town, which optimistically claimed a population of more than 1,000, though the census of 1911 placed the number at 516, had filled the rather constricted area between the railway and the bench that formed the northern limit of the valley. There were really only two streets, Elma Street and Main or Elizabeth Street, both named in honour of John Lineham's daughters, and most of the lots had houses, a few of them substantial brick structures that reflected at once the affluence and the aspirations of their builders. In the centre of the town several brick business blocks testified to the resources of its leading citizens. The four room school in the east end had proved inadequate; a new and more commodious school had been built on the bench immediately to the north. Then in 1912 the town slipped slowly and painfully into the recession that preceded the war. The Great War completed the devastation begun by the collapse of the boom; as in other areas with a preponderance of British-oriented young men of military age, enlistments and casualty rates were equally high. The price in social dislocation paid by the youthful communities of the west in the aftermath of 1914 has seldom been accurately calculated or even adequately described.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John H. Thompson. The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977). This book is a luminous exception.

Certainly the Okotoks of 1920 was a shadow of the optimistic and bustling town of the first decade. The substantial houses were still there, though many had changed hands and the largest of all had been uncereemoniously divided to house two families. On some of the relatively few vacant lots abandoned excavations gave mute evidence of the sudden disappearance of the housing shortage. On Main Street larger cellar holes spoke of the casualties of fires, an ever present risk in a town that had not provided itself with an adequate water-supply, and cannily depended on the fact that almost anywhere in the valley a shallow well would provide excellent water which the gravel beds on which the town stood protected from contamination by the ubiquitous earth-closets. The lumber mill had closed, the brickworks at Sandstone was falling into decay. No one worked the quarries. The flour mill survived for a time, but it was not rebuilt after its destruction by fire. There was one doctor where there had been three; the lawyers now came occasionally from High River or Calgary to see their clients. Many of the stores had closed, especially those that had attempted a specialized trade. The skating rink, the most ambitious civic enterprise of the pre-war years, still stood but even its roof soon collapsed under the weight of an exceptionally heavy snow storm.

Gradually Okotoks limped forward into a semblance of prosperity that lasted until the onset of the depression of the thirties. The first of the two decades between the wars is usually represented as one of comparative prosperity for Canada; it is doubtful if this was wholly true for the prairie west, where a painful process of adjustment to postwar realities was complicated by the infirm foundations jerry-built in the boom years. Okotoks' recovery to something like normality was assisted by the development of the oil and gas industry in neighbouring Turner Valley, the first significant producing field in Alberta. Nevertheless, although this was good for business in the town and provided employment for its young men, and husbands for some of its young women, it offered nothing like the stimulus provided to Alberta as a whole following the Leduc discoveries of 1947. But as the 1920s wore on older houses were being repainted, a few new houses were built, business premises were refurbished and new ones opened, often to replace those destroyed by the

frequent fires. Cement pavements replaced the old wooden sidewalks, the streets were regraded and regravelled and trees planted along the boulevards. Natural gas superseded wood and coal as a source of domestic heat and the supply of electric power came to be more than sporadically available during the hours of darkness. The provision of watermains and sewers continued to be a matter of debate. The rink was, by a major effort, rebuilt and remained the winter focus of the town's athletic life.

The population declined to 448 in 1921; it rose gradually during the 1920s to 760 in 1931; in the last half of the decade the town was growing faster than the province. It was still overwhelmingly Protestant, overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon in origin (see Table I). There were few Americans, even fewer than before the war. There was almost no one who could be described as "foreign." There was one French Canadian, a former Mounted Policeman who had moved into the Alberta Provincial Police and thence into the management of the new hotel that was built after the repeal of prohibition and named, characteristically, in honour of the then Governor-General. There were no Indians. There were two Chinese business establishments, a restaurant and a laundry. Their proprietors played no part in the social life of the town, though it must be said that when two Chinese boys appeared at the local school there was no overt sign of racism. There were no Jews in Okotoks, though two brothers farmed west of the town. Anti-semitism was so lacking in expression that, until I found myself in a Calgary boarding school, I had no idea that being a Jew was in any way

TABLE I:

ETHNIC ORIGINS OF POPULATION OF SUB-DISTRICT  
OF OKOTOKS, 1901, AND TOWN OF OKOTOKS, 1911-1931.

Year	British	French	German	Dutch	Others	Totals
1901	583	6	30	40	12	671
1911	452	14	18	4	28	516
1921	407	6	11	14	10	448
1931	599	22	34	12	93	760

SOURCE: Censuses of Canada, 1901-1931.

different from being a Baptist. They were simply two groups who happened not to be Anglicans.

If there was little evidence of outspoken racism, there were plenty of indications of a rigid, stratified and complex class structure. Not that anyone ever talked about class; it was even then one of the great Canadian unmentionables. A decent reticence was universally preserved but the implications are clear enough in the retrospect of memory. Nowhere was this structure more clearly exemplified than in the local churches (see Table II). In its heyday, Okotoks had no less than six congregations: Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic and the Disciples of Christ. By 1921 the latter had disappeared altogether, the congregation of St. James' Roman Catholic Church was almost entirely drawn from the country adjacent to the town and dependent upon the ministrations of an itinerant priest, the Baptist Church was closed and the Presbyterians, in the pre-war years much the most numerous group, had, long before the formal emergence of the United Church of Canada, joined in a union with the Methodists, who had a larger and more impressive church building. St. Luke's Presbyterian Church, for a time sporadically used by the Anglicans as a parish hall, in due course became a chopping mill. The United Church congregation was in the 1920s by far the largest but that of St. Peter's Anglican Church was still able to support, not in great luxury, a resident priest, though he, unfortunate man, also served a

TABLE II:

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF POPULATION OF  
SUB-DISTRICT OF OKOTOKS, 1901, AND TOWN  
OF OKOTOKS, 1911-1931.

Year	Roman Catholic	Anglican	Presbyterian	Methodist	United Church	Baptist	Others	Totals
1901	36	114	281	87	--	91	62	671
1911	27	132	145	111	--	62	39	516
1921	8	140	176	47	--	58	19	448
1931	33	174	24	--	429	36	64	760

SOURCE: Censuses of Canada, 1901-1931.

number of points in the predominantly Anglican foothills region to the west.

Because it is the congregation most familiar to me I shall attempt a description of St. Peter's in the 1920s. I shall say little about its clergymen; they succeeded one another with some rapidity. The immediate postwar period was not a happy one for the Anglican Church in the west; until a new and exceptionally able and vigorous bishop appeared on the scene the Diocese of Calgary attracted few priests who could be described as outstanding. The incumbents of St. Peter's were scarcely among those few. The congregation had, however, a life of its own and somehow struggled on, fulfilling its part in defining the values and standards of the community it served.

One family played a unique part in its leadership, as indeed they did in the life of the town as a whole. The nearest thing to a squire that Okotoks had was Colonel Alfred Wyndham, a well-connected Englishman who came to the west to serve in the suppression of the Riel Rebellion of 1885 and remained to ranch, retiring to Okotoks in 1910 and dying there in 1914. His wife, Caroline, whose Family Compact connections were as impeccable as those of her husband with the English and Irish nobility, lived on until 1933. Their numerous progeny and their grandchildren in turn passed in and out of the Wyndham house but the permanent residents in the 1920s were Mrs. Wyndham, her bachelor son, retired from the Mounted Police, her cousin and contemporary Jane Seymour and her spinster daughter, who ran this rather extraordinary establishment. The Wyndhams' style of life was quite unlike that of the town at large. To begin with, none of them had by the 1920s gainful employment. What was even more distinctive, the Wyndhams dined regularly at seven; the rest of the town took its main meal in the middle of the day and was sitting down to its supper not long after the tea things had been removed from Miss Seymour's sitting-room. The latter was the nearest thing to a salon that Okotoks could boast. For a good part of the decade "Cousin Janie," then in her eighties, was in effect confined to her chaise longue. She had tripped over a large and affectionate Labrador called "Tory," and the broken hip that had resulted never mended. Her intellectual vigour was, however, unimpaired, as was her appetite for bridge, backgammon,



*Miss Jane Seymour, 1924. (Photo courtesy of J. Vanderpant).*

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books and conversation.

Across the street at St. Peter's (which everyone in the 1920s still called "the English church") the Wyndhams were regularly in the two front pews on the epistle side, the ladies of the family in one, the gentlemen in another, with Miss Seymour in her wheel-chair at the chancel steps. In churchmanship the Wyndhams were distinctly High; both Mrs. Wyndham and Miss Seymour had been baptized by Bishop Strachan. He had indeed called Jane Seymour "his little Jacobite," some indication of the elevation of her political views. Yet as parsons came and went, some High, some Low, some Broad, some merely confused, no word of criticism of the incumbent ever passed the family's collective lips. Miss Wyndham somehow kept a Sunday School in being, maintained the altar linen in good order, polished the altar vessels and arranged whatever flowers came to hand. Her brother Alec was a perpetual Rector's Warden; he dealt with





*St. Peter's Anglican Church, Okotoks. Taken while the brick veneer was being applied. The Wyndham stable is in the background. (Photo courtesy of Ms. Stella Bryce and Mr. Maurice Ardiel).*



*Interior view of St. Peter's Anglican Church, Okotoks. Decorated for the Harvest Festival, c. 1930. (Photo courtesy of G.L. Kelson).*

the recalcitrant furnace and rang the bell for every service. And at every service, no matter what the liturgical posture of the current rector, he marched stiffly up to the altar, paid it his reverence and lit the altar candles. There was, in the duck of his head and the precision of his about-turn as he made his way back to his pew, something that said to even the most evangelically inclined that this much at least of Catholic faith and practice would be maintained at St. Peter's.

The congregation was a cross-section not only of the town but of the surrounding countryside. It included the doctor, the editor of the newspaper and an Englishman, of genteel antecedents and some substance, who carried an increasing responsibility for the direction of the affairs of the town on the basis of sheer character and his conviction of the individual's responsibility for the welfare of his fellow men. Some of the merchants also attended, bank employees and teachers came and went, but in the church and its organizations many of the most faithful supporters were drawn from less prestigious occupations. The parish also drew heavily both for its congregation and for its financial support upon the farms nearby. Its people in the 1920s were predominantly of United Kingdom birth or their children. There was, however, a strong minority with an eastern Canadian, and particularly an Ontario, background. The High Church sympathizers were drawn largely from those of the English whose religious attitudes had been formed in Anglo-Catholic parishes "at home"; the exception was one of the merchants, a Baptist by upbringing, an agnostic by conviction, an Anglican by marriage and a ritualist by preference. The Wyndhams, who gave the High Church wing much of its effective force, represented both eastern Canadian and "Old Country" traditions. In matters of church policy they could work very effectively with allies drawn from other layers of the town's social structure. In spite of divisions of class and churchmanship the congregation formed a tightly knit and cohesive group, sustained by mutual loyalties and a mutual respect that cut sharply across the alignments of social class or cultural background.

Though the Anglican population of Okotoks was proportionately rather larger than in other small southern Alberta towns, it was still apt to see itself as a beleaguered minority in relation to the much more

numerous congregation of the United Church. It was indeed declining in numerical terms (from 31 per cent in 1921 to 23 per cent in 1931) but scarcely in its sense of identity. The division between the Anglicans and the United Church was very sharp indeed; the two congregations watched each other carefully and there was some consternation when an Anglican soprano yielded to the allurements of the much superior United Church choir or a well-off Presbyterian from the country appeared with suspicious frequency at St. Peter's. This division did not however effectively isolate the two groups from one another. In the town's organizations, less numerous than in the pre-war years but still very active, they worked together without much evidence of interdenominational bickering. The gradual liberalization of Protestant attitudes to such matters as card-playing, dancing, smoking and drinking made itself evident in this period. Anglicans, whose views on these matters had been rather less rigid, accommodated themselves with ease to this change in the social climate. One could, I suggest, make a case for a taste for auction bridge as a social indicator in a small Alberta town of this period. An analysis of the membership of the two women's bridge clubs of the time, for which my sources are regrettably incomplete, would, I think, result in a pretty even balance between the two persuasions. If one assumes that these two clubs approximately represent the élite, and I think they really thought they did, the conclusion would be that membership in that élite was not dependent on adherence to a particular religious position, though an Anglican's chance of being included within it was slightly better.

Much the same group dominated the Colonel Wyndham Chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, though few of its members belonged to the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Prohibition was in the 1920s a declining cause though in the 1900s the issue had divided the town. When the provincial government of the United Farmers of Alberta proposed to replace prohibition by government control, the issue was debated in the Okotoks High School. Significantly the affirmative team was Anglican; the negative United Church. Though drinking ceased to be illegal it remained for the most part a domestic practice. Certainly few if any respectable women entered the local beer parlour. Nor did

women smoke in public places in Okotoks, and few even indulged in private, though United Kingdom example was gradually breaking down this taboo.

There was a close contact between the town and its rural hinterland, a contact that went beyond the relationships imposed by the service function of the town and which was based on a degree of social congeniality. The churches particularly, and the schools to some extent, fostered close affinities between country and town families who shared a common background. Sports activities, particularly curling, brought town and country people together. The annual Okotoks Agricultural Show was another meeting ground, with representatives of both town and country on its Board of Directors. Many Okotoks people, especially those who in retrospect constituted the town's élite, attended the Millarville Races, a classic country race meeting that was the high point in the social life of the horsemen whose properties lay to the west.

Political action also involved close cooperation. Okotoks and its hinterland was before 1921 predominantly Conservative. John Lineham, whose lumber interests had fed its prosperity in the 1890s, represented it in the territorial legislature. He may be taken as a representative of the Eastern Canadian strain in the dominant group in the region, where his numerous relatives remained after his death in 1914. His place as the leading Conservative was taken by George Hoadley, a Yorkshire born rancher and horseman, whom Okotoks in 1909 returned to the legislature as one of three Conservatives elected to that predominantly Liberal body. When in 1921 the U.F.A. dislodged the Liberals from office, he ran as a U.F.A. candidate and succeeded in carrying his constituents with him. An able and effective cabinet minister, he represented Okotoks until the Social Credit sweep of 1935. His personal prestige and popularity and his Conservative antecedents combined to bring elements in both the town and the country into the U.F.A. fold that elsewhere would almost certainly have been comfortable enough in the traditional parties. Though his support was somewhat stronger in the country than in the town, his uninterrupted electoral success reflected the way in which the older strains in the settlement of the province managed to maintain their influence against the American and continental European strains that were numerically increasingly predominant.

Okotoks and its environs formed a society that was horizontally as well as vertically stratified. The horizontal lines are not easy to discern, for they are drawn through a community that was, in Alberta terms, more than ordinarily homogenous in ethnic origin and religious affiliation. They had relatively little to do with economic status, at least in the immediate sense of relative income. They had a great deal to do with the quality of life which individuals enjoyed or to which they aspired. Perhaps the most rigorous line of all was that which divided the clean from the dirty. Certainly the horizontal stratification was largely determined by social congeniality, itself very much a matter of common values. Yet in spite of its horizontal fragmentation this was a closely knit society. Whatever the private discriminations, the town's institutions, and particularly the churches, cut across the strata and held the population together in mutual respect and esteem. This was by no means a one way relationship, from the top down. From time to time Miss Wyndham, among her many roles a member of the school board, would trudge sturdily up the hill to conduct a personal investigation of the school. The school janitor knew that, if his work was well done, he could rely upon her substantial support against any uncooperative trustee, teacher or pupil. The hierarchy of the structure, and the hierarchy of values upon which it was based, largely derived from older societies in eastern Canada and the United Kingdom, were both in the 1920s beginning to break down. What I would suggest is that a further and closer examination of the small towns of Alberta, and perhaps of western Canada, might reveal that these were the bases from which the settlers before 1895, and those later settlers who shared their attitudes and convictions, maintained their values, not to mention their prejudices, well into the twentieth century. I would further suggest that this may be a neglected area of investigation that is relevant, not only to the establishment of the western identity, but also to the Canadian experience.