

Alberta — Canada's fastest growing province

Alberta and Saskatchewan are celebrating their seventy-fifth anniversaries as provinces this year. Canada Weekly recently featured the province of Saskatchewan and as promised an article on Alberta appears in this issue.

Alberta is the fastest growing of Canada's ten provinces. Economic progress, spurred on in recent years by energy developments, is rapidly transforming Alberta into a leading North American economic region.

Alberta's modern era began on February 13, 1947. On that day, 27 kilometres (16 miles) southwest of the city of Edmonton, the oil well known as Leduc No. 1 "came in". The Leduc field yielded 1,300 wells and 200 million barrels of oil and signalled the start of a new period of prosperity for Albertans.

Since 1965, the province's gross domestic product has increased sixfold. The city of Calgary now ranks as the third most important financial centre in Canada, after Toronto and Montreal. In 1978, new house construction in Alberta was roughly equal to that of the five most eastern provinces.

History and population

It was not until the latter half of the nineteenth century that European residents began to build permanent settlements in Alberta. The first European settlers to arrive were fur traders and missionaries. Before that, the only inhabitants were the nomadic Indian tribes, which included the Cree, the Blackfoot, the Assiniboine,



Vast reserves of synthetic crude oil are recoverable from Alberta's oil sands.

the Sarcee and the Chipewyan. Two major events — the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1882 and the arrival in 1874 of the North West Mounted Police — contributed to stability in the region.

Alberta was originally an area of the Northwest Territories, created when Canada purchased Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company. It became a province of Canada in 1905. Of its present population of 1,971,600, approximately 45 per cent trace their ethnic origins to the British Isles. The rest of the population claims ancestry in the following proportions: German 14 per cent; Ukrainian and Polish 11 per cent; Scandinavian 7 per cent and French 6 per cent.

During the past few years, a drastic change in population concentration has occurred in Alberta. In 1931, 22 per cent resided in Edmonton and Calgary; today, these two cities account for 50 per cent of the province's population. Of the three prairie provinces, Alberta has had the greatest influx of settlers since 1931. Today, new inhabitants are arriving at the rate of about 4,000 a month.

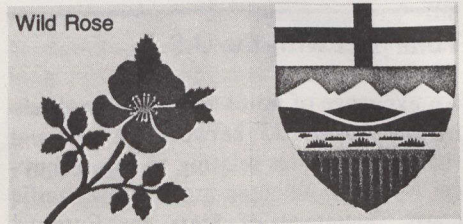
The economy

Alberta's gross domestic product for 1978 exceeded \$25.4 billion, compared with \$4.29 billion in 1965. Allowing for inflation, this represents an annual growth rate of 6.4 per cent.

Investment in Alberta continues at a rapid pace. Estimated total private and public investment for 1978 amounted to \$8.4 billion. In *per capita* terms this represents \$4,238, well above the Canadian average.

The Alberta economy has always been closely linked with the development of a transportation network because the province is landlocked and distant from major markets. The land area is 661,000 square kilometres (293,000 square miles) and the province's varied geographical features — from rugged mountains to prairie, from forest to muskeg — pose unique transportation problems. Modern transportation, however, combined with the increasing value of Alberta's resources, has been a primary factor in the economic transformation of recent years.

Wild Rose



Alberta's floral emblem and crest.

Alberta has vast deposits of fossil fuels — oil, natural gas, oil sands and coal. The value of mineral production in 1978 was estimated at \$9.7 billion. Fossil fuels make up most of this total. In addition, swift-flowing rivers draining into the Arctic Ocean and eastward to Hudson Bay are a substantial hydroelectric power source.

Although crude oil and natural gas have been produced for local consumption for many decades, the largest and most prolific oilfields have been discovered during the past 30 years. Alberta contains over 70 per cent of Canada's remaining recoverable reserves of conventional crude oil, amounting to 5.6 billion barrels, excluding frontier reserves. Most of these reserves are in the central and north-western part of the province. In addition to conventional crude oil, Alberta natural gas fields contain some 800 million barrels (110 million metric tons) of recoverable reserves.

Production of Alberta crude oil and equivalent liquids is approximately one million barrels a day. Of this amount, 18 per cent is consumed in Alberta, 49 per cent in other provinces (primarily Ontario), and 33 per cent is exported to refineries in the northern United States.

Vast reserves

Vast reserves of synthetic crude oil are also recoverable from Alberta's oil sands and heavy oil deposits. The oil-bearing sands underlie four large areas in northern Alberta and are estimated to contain more than 950 million barrels (137 million metric tons) of oil.

The largest oil sands deposit is in north-eastern Alberta, adjacent to the Athabasca River, where the beds are exposed to the surface. The Athabasca area contains some 600 billion barrels (97 billion metric tons) of oil. Two plants, Great Canadian Oil Sands Limited and Syncrude Canada Limited, are producing some 100,000 barrels a day of high grade synthetic oil.

Present estimates show that Alberta's annual production of synthetic crude oil