

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 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 six-fold. 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, the Sarcee and the Chipewyan. Two major events — the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway 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.

The largest religious denomination in Alberta is the United Church of Canada which was formed in 1925 by a union of Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Also well represented are Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Mormons and members of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Many non-Christian faiths are represented as well.

During the past few years, a drastic change in population concentration occurred in Alberta. In 1931, 22 per cent resided in Edmonton and Calgary; today, these two cities have 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.