

Highlands Hidden History Revealed: The Decorative Historical Plaque Program

David Locky

The HHS's Decorative Historic Plaque program has recently surpassed its goal of 100 plaques in less than half the estimated time of three years. At 115 plaques the program's success can be attributed to the interest and support of 'heritage proud' homeowners and businesses in the Highlands – thank you! Our hidden history is now visible to residents and visitors alike.

The first 115 plaques span the years 1912 to 1954, with the names, occupations, and dates revealing interesting aspects of the first 50 years of the Highlands' history (Table 1).

Through the Decades

Of all of the decades represented by the plaques it is buildings from the teens that number the greatest: 38 (Table 1). That so many homes from the teens remain is a testament to the pride of Highlands' residents over the past 100 years. It is also a reflection of the promise and prosperity of the early part of that decade when the city was booming.

Things were different in the twenties. Plaques representing that decade number less than half that of the teens: 18. This is a reflection of the post WWI years and other factors in Edmonton that generally slowed development city-wide. The trend did not abate into the thirties with the onset of the Depression; only 16 plaques are represented from this era. After WWII, the late forties were a time of optimism, with 29 plaques on homes and businesses from this era. The fifties were also a time of prosperity in Edmonton; while only half of the decade is represented in the plaque program, 14 plaques from that era grace homes and businesses.

The Occupations

A survey of the first 115 plaques also reveals trends in occupations (Table 1). The teens were the building years in the Highlands, with five carpenters and another eight individuals involved in design, building, and real estate. These include Ada Blvd residents and developers of the Highlands, William Magrath and Bidwell Holgate. Coal mines were also being developed during this era. Manager-owners of three of the many local coal mines settled in the Highlands: Adam Davidson (Beverly Coal and Gravel), Robert Dalzier (Fraser-McKay Coal), and Sheldon Carleton (Humberstone Coal). Numerous miners and engineers are represented throughout the neighbourhood. Among the diverse occupations of the teens are auctioneer, boat builder, chauffeur, druggist, jeweler, pastor, photographer (the controversial Ernest Brown), physician, and perhaps the most mysterious, a "gentleman", Charles Butler (an apparently well-to-do speculator from Calgary).

Many of the above occupations and others such as those in education (public school and university), retail sales, and bookkeeping - accounting continued to be represented throughout the following decades (Table 1). As municipal and provincial governments grew, so did the Highlands, the home to general staff and two aldermen (Herbert Baker and Frederick Mitchell).

The once expansive meat-packing industry was just north of the Highlands. Many long-time workers from Swifts and Canada Packers settled in the neighbourhood, including a cattle salesman and three butchers. With expanded trade and city growth, many in the Highlands worked in transportation, including the C.N.R. and as Edmonton's 'streetcar' motormen. Larger retailers of early Edmonton represented on plaques include Eaton's, International Harvester, and Underwood. Smaller businesses include Hayward Lumber (now part of the Northlands complex), Dower Bros., Woodward's, James Ramsey, and various hardware stores. Plaques from the 40s and 50s in the Highlands reflect the diversification of industry in Alberta at the time, including the burgeoning petrochemical industry and associated companies.

Local Businesses

Established almost 100 years ago, the Highlands Business District is still thriving. Those original businesses reflected on plaques include Jamison's Coffee Bar (with an early drive through window), Highlands Barber Shop, Highland Hardware, Stone's Meat Market, Johnny's Confectionary (later known as the Cozy Corner), and one of Edmonton's first Canada Safeway Grocery stores (Table 1) -- in 1929 a number of Canada Safeway stores apparently opened simultaneously throughout the city.

The Program Continues

As interest in Decorative Historic Plaque program continues to develop, many other interesting individuals and occupations will emerge on plaques. Involved with the program since its inception I am now leaving the Highlands portion to the HHS and commencing with the Edmonton Decorative Historic Plaque program. If you are interested in a Decorative Historic plaque, please contact me for further information at davidlocky@gmail.com; more information will be posted on this page shortly. You can begin the process yourself by viewing the instructions on the Edmonton Decorative Historic Plaque Program page: <http://www.lockyphoto.com/dlocky/historic-plaque-program/>

Please enjoy the Decorative Historic plaques as they continue to appear on buildings throughout the Highlands and other neighbourhoods!

David Locky

Note: This article first appeared in the Highlands Historical Society's newsletter in 2010 and was updated June 18, 2012.

Table 1. First 115 Decorative Historic Plaques by decade, year, and building owner's occupation.

Decade	Year	Name	Occupation	
Teens	1912	Harry A. McLean	Accountant	
		Frank Brown	Accountant	
		Robert Robinson	Agent, Imperial Life	
		Clyde Smith	Auctioneer	
		Adam Davidson	Beverly Coal & Gravel	
		John 'Cap' Matheson	Boat Builder	
		Norman Wellman	Carpenter	
		George Gibson	Carpenter	
		William Magrath	Developer of Highlands	
		Bidwell Holgate	Developer of Highlands	
		William Ash	Jeweller	
		Ernest Brown	Photographer	
		Horace Humphreys	Principal, McCauley School	
		Marshall McLuhan	Professor - Media Analyst	
	Alex Potter	Salesman		
	Howard Baker	Salesman, H.B.C.		
	1913	George Green	Carpenter	
		Alex Ross	Clerk, District Court House	
		Charles Coote	Contractor - Builder	
		John Dixon	Emp, James Ramsey Ltd	
		Charles Butler	Gentleman	
		Magrath Coach House	Harry Cox, Chauffeur	
		John Montgomery	Montgomery McQueen Real Estate	
		Frank Roxburgh	Pastor, Beverly Presbyterian	
		William Atkinson	Physician	
		George Clark	Sales, International Harvester	
	1914	Arthur Cowley	Architect	
		Frank Newland	Builder	
		Frederick Pearson	Builder - Contractor	
		James Fraser	Carpenter, C.N.R.	
		Arthur Lloyd	Clerk, Provincial Gov't	
		Sydney Eversfield	Druggist	
		Carleton Sheldon	Humberstone Coal Mine	
Malcolm McLeod		Sales, A.L. Johnson Shoe		
James MacGregor	Superintendent, CPR Depot			
1915	John Hanna	Contractor		
1917	John Wright	Carpenter		
1919	Robert Dalziel	Mgr, Fraser-McKay Mine		
Twenties	1922	Betsy Knowles	Emp, West. Veterans Publishing	
	1923	Clifford Down	Foreman, Fraser-Mackay Collieries	
		Walter Baepler	Professor, Concordia College	
	1924	William Rose	Bookkeeper, Hayward Lumber	
		Gustav Rydman	Foreman, Swift's Packers	
	1925	Jessie Wright	Widow	
		J. May Griffith	Highlands School Teacher	
	1927	William Duggan	Mining Engineer	
		Herbert Baker	Alderman	
	1928	William F. Brown	Businessman - Builder	
		Earle Hay	Clerk, Postal Service	
	1929	Frank Urquhart	Tailor, RCMP	
		Adolf de Bruijn	Accountant, Royal Trust	
		Jean Kern	Bookkeeper, Eaton's	
		Fred Peters	Cattle Salesman	
William Fairfield		Dept Mgr, C Woodward Ltd		
Charles Gimby		Gimby & Coburg Garage		
Howard Parlee	Judge			
Thirties	1930	Canada Safeway	Neighbourhood Grocery	
		John Hepburn	Salesman, Marshall Wells	
		1931	A. Wm. Thomas	Carpenter
			Floyd Lees	Electrician, Provin Gov't
		1932	Stone's Meat Market	Lawrence Stone
			Arthur Hanks	Labourer, Eaton's
	1933	William Ferguson	Streetcar Motorman	
		Meyer Sheckter	Bakery Owner	
		Harry Bowman	Collector, Edmonton Bulletin	
	1936	John Letcher	Engineer, Trudeau's Cleaning	
		Frederick Mitchell	Alderman	
	1938	John Glasgow	Johnny's Confectionary	
		1939	Frank Aaby	Aaby Construction Co
	James Anderson		Employee, City of Edmonton	
	Russell Carter		Mgr, Edmonton Optical	
	William Lammie		Miner, Black Diamond Coal	
	Forties	1940	Ad Berg	Service Mgr, Edmonton Motors
			Philip World	Streetcar Motorman
		1942	James Duncan	Chartered Accountant
			Charles Bohannon	Dept Head, Swifts Packers
1943		Vermer Taylor	Employee, City of Edmonton	
		John Agnew	Corner Drug, Highlands	
1944		Robert Rae	Building Contractor	
		John Slamko	Employee, Swifts Packers	
1945		Kenneth Alton	Alton & Anderson Contractors	
		Jack Brown	Buyer, Werner Hardware	
1946		Herb Horn	Highland Hardware	
		Spence & Betty Jamison	Jamison's Coffee Bar	
1947		James Ward	Butcher, Woodwards	
		Roy Taylor	Dept Mgr, HBC	
	Edward Hubbell	Highland Hardware Prop.		
	Stuart Pearce	Carman, CNR		
1948	B. Nickel	Clerk, City of Edmonton		
	James Third	Druggist		
	Morris Gotfriend	Manager, Banff Hotel		
	David Lamont	Mgr, Empire Marble & Tile		
	Alban Smith	Supervisor, N. Alberta Railroad		
	Jack Unwin	Theatrical Entrepreneur		
1949	Fred Chalmers	Dept Head, Canada Packers		
	Clarence Healey	Emp, Northwestern Utilities		
	Guy Patterson	King's Counsel		
	Archie Holt	Mgr, Dower Bros		
	Glyn Hughes	Oilfield Supply Clerk		
Robert Reay	Postal Supervisor			
Andrew Corby	Public Works Inspector			
Fifties	1950	George Cotter	Cotter Hardware	
		Ivor Williams	Foreman, Underwood Ltd	
		William James	Mgr, Builders Supply Ltd	
		Robert Grierson	Spencer & Grierson Ltd	
	1951	Clarence Greenlees	Teacher, Riverdale School	
		Fred Woytkiw	Hotellier	
	1952	John Fleese	Carpenter	
		William Bonk	Coal Miner - Builder	
		Louis Buray	Contractor	
	1953	Roy Kirkpatrick	Highlands Barber Shop	
Donald Welsh		Carpenter, SR Welsh & Sons		
Melvin Maddess		Paint Representative		
1954	Inouye	Proprietors, Silk-O-Lina		
	Ernest Alther	Carpenter		