

Come with us on a short walk around historic downtown Camrose, rich with a heritage that reflects not only this community but also is a mirror of Alberta's past.

A. Early History – The first known building in Camrose was the log house of Ole Bakken. Complete with sod roof, Ole's home was just north of Stoney Creek (now Mirror Lake) where Hillside Village now sits. Ole came here in 1893 from Norway via North Dakota and Wisconsin. He lived here until 1905 when he moved to Banff. He was buried in the Wang Cemetery north of Wetaskiwin near Coal Lake.

B. Sparling Townsite – In 1904, a year before Alberta became a province, Camrose's original eight blocks were laid out and registered in Winnipeg. The Main Street is 100-foot wide (30.5 meters) from building front to building front, thanks to Francois Adam. He convinced people that a wide Main Street would be important. It's the reason we have cobblestone, trees, planters and benches on 50th Street and still lots of room for parking. Francois Adam is one of the most important people in the development of Camrose. He was involved in founding a hospital, the creation of the Canadian Club and raising money for the construction of a Catholic Church. He operated the Camrose Lumber and Grain Company, owned a Ford dealership and an insurance company.

C. Canadian Club – The Camrose Canadian Club was incorporated in March 1908 by an act of the province as an institution which would "foster good citizenship". The first floor was devoted to billiards, the second floor was the club's reading room. It had a fireplace, pictures, a piano, easy chairs and the best magazines and journals from around the world. Here were held musical evenings, literary meetings, debates, mock parliaments and lectures. One afternoon a week ladies were allowed into the poolroom and that evening they were permitted to use the reading room. They were also invited to all the lectures and special events.

D. Cobblers & Craftsman – Harry Foucar constructed this building in 1925 for his grocery business. When we renovated this store front, the transom windows were uncovered and restored.

E. Precision Vacuum – The building dates back to 1914 as a grocery store. In restoring the transom windows we discovered two panes of glass in each frame. The outer panes are clear glass and the inner panes are etched glass. Some of the etched panes were broken and have been replaced.



Langbell Studio and Precision Vacuum Building

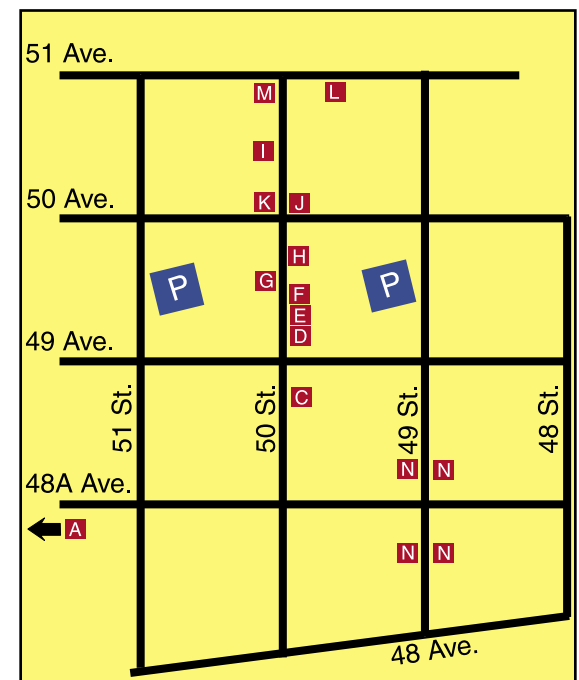
F. Langbell Studio (LaScala Jewellers) – Photographer Chris Langbell came to Camrose in 1904 and in 1910 built a new studio on the top floor of this two-storey building. From across the street you can see the top of a north-facing skylight used to get natural light into the studio. Remember, 1910 was about two years before an electrical generating plant in Camrose. The exterior of the second floor was made from pressed metal, and we found a factory in Missouri that makes a similar product from galvanized steel. Langbell became interested in radio in the early 1920s. In 1928 he built a radio station in this building with the call letters C4HS. For a time he broadcast sermons from the Camrose Baptist Church. In 1955 Langbell sold his photography business to Algar Lyseng and the name of the business was changed to Lyseng Studios.

G. Saigon Rose Noodle House – This building was constructed about 1935. Camrose Millinery, Francoeur Cleaners, Eklund and Wallis Radio, Cameo Style Shop and The Craft House are all businesses that have been located here.

H. Main Street Office – The Main Street Office was built in 1947 by Oscar and Guttorm Rosland for their Rosland Meat Market. The business remained at this location and was a downtown landmark until it closed in the early 1990s. For a while this building was a real estate office and then a computer store before becoming the office for the Camrose Main Street Project and City Center Camrose.

I. Wisemen's Way – Jim Dabbs built this structure in 1948 after he returned from WWII. He opened People's Furniture and changed the name in 1949 to Dabb's Furniture. The exterior of the second floor was stucco and the main floor featured carriage glass around very large display windows. Carriage glass is not made anymore but we found a Calgary company that makes a similar product.

J. Horserace Death – Horseracing was a popular event in Camrose with races held on 50th Street during the annual Sports Days. Fifteen-year-old Oscar Jensen of Duhamel had promised his older brother he would not enter the 1915 race. But when he saw the ponies lined up at the starting



line, he rushed to the livery stable, mounted his steed and just as he came around the corner onto 50th Street the starter yelled, "Go!" Oscar spurred his pony but the animal stumbled at the 50th Avenue intersection and fell with the boy trapped underneath. According to a *Camrose Canadian* news item, men rushed from all sides to hold the pony, and lifted Oscar into an automobile and rushed him to the hospital. The lad had been killed instantly with a crushed skull.



Candler Art Gallery

K. **Candler Art Gallery** – The oldest commercial building and still standing downtown, is also the first one built. In 1904 Duncan Sampson arrived in Camrose with plans to build a general store. But the layout for the town site of Sparling was not ready. Sampson wouldn't wait and quickly put up his store. When the town site plans were revealed Sampson was three blocks west of where the Main Street was to be located. He was asked to move his building and was given his choice of lots.



Windsor Hotel

L. **Windsor Hotel** – The Windsor Hotel on 51st Avenue (or Railway Avenue) is actually the second hotel to carry the name. The first was built in 1904 by Camille David and P. A. Miquelon (where the Alice Hotel now stands). The original Windsor

Hotel burned down in February 1919 under suspicious circumstances. . . the hotel business was not as lucrative as before prohibition in 1916. The current Windsor Hotel was created in about 1923-24 by joining two buildings. The west building was built before 1910 as a flour storage facility. The building to the east was a pool hall and later a bowling alley.

M. **Alice Hotel** – The land where the first Windsor Hotel stood was vacant for about nine years before the Alice Hotel was built by Vaclav Matejka, and named after his youngest daughter, Alice. The opening was a very formal occasion with a by-invitation-only dance. The Arlington Hotel and the Heather Brae Hotel are two other hotels of note. The Arlington was built in 1905 by Ole Bakken, the same year as the first Windsor, and just east of the current Windsor. The Arlington was torn down in 1969 by the owners of the Windsor for use as a parking lot. The Heather Brae was constructed in 1906 by Jacob Langbell, the father of photographer Chris Langbell. In 1908 the new owners renamed it the Camrose Hotel. In 1911, new owners went back to calling the place the Heather Brae. The hotel was torn down in 1961. Two other downtown hotels were the Farmers Inn, about where the Battle River Credit Union Head Office is now located, and the Temperance Inn where the west building of the Windsor Hotel now stands.

N. **Special District Historic** – Just east of downtown there's a wonderful collection of homes where many of the people who worked downtown once lived. The Olde Sparling Society has been putting plaques in the front yards of these homes, giving a history of the residents. They are also looking to organize their own walks of the area.

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Self-Guided Walk

Historic Downtown Camrose

