

# EARLY SYLVAN LAKE BUSINESSES

The earliest businesses that sprang up in Sylvan Lake in the early 1900s catered to the increasing number of tourists that came to the lake. Before the building of any cabins people would camp along the lake in crude accommodations including tents for shelters, bedding usually straw ticks on the ground and kitchens lacking all conveniences.

Before the railway came through in 1912, it was a challenge for visitors from Red Deer to make their way to Sylvan Lake. The roads could be muddy and the trail difficult to follow making it a daylong trip. The Red Deer newspaper in 1906 reported that many people would miss the trail to Sylvan Lake. A Mr. W. E. Trump painted several guide boards set at suitable points to aid travellers navigating their way to the lake.

Here are a few of the earliest Sylvan Lake businesses.

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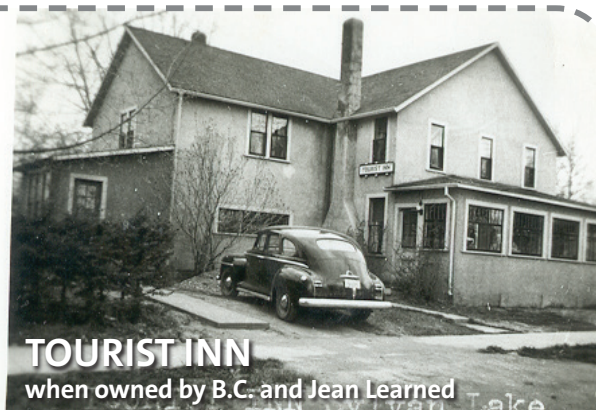
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**SYLVAN LAKE HOTEL**

Alexander Loiselle, one of Sylvan Lake's earliest settlers, built the Sylvan Lake Hotel in 1905. It became the Rutter Hotel when it was purchased by J.C. Rutter in 1911. Mr. Loiselle then built a competing hotel, Alexander Hotel, on the current site of the Sylvan Lake Golf and Country Club parking lot.

The Tourist Inn entertained a long and varied piece of our town's history. Mr. Archambault built it in 1907 as a general store on the west end of Lakeshore Drive. It was the first grocery store and post office. In 1912, he sold it to the Heenan Brothers who continue in the store business as the Lake Front Store.



**TOURIST INN**  
 when owned by B.C. and Jean Learned

It sold again in 1933 to the Meyers family who remodelled it to create a modern home with rooms to rent for boarders and summer tourists. In 1919 they added an ice cream parlour and tea room. In 1941, B.C. Learned and his wife, Jean, bought the premises and operated the Tourist Inn until 1953 when Mrs. Learned died. The building was dismantled in the 1970s for the building of the Lakeland Plaza.



**HEENAN'S OPERA HOUSE**

After running a store on Main Street with his brother Bill Heenan, Russell Heenan built a two-story frame structure to house a barbershop, billiard parlour and dance hall above. This was to become the Heenan Opera House on the south corner of 50th (Centennial) Street and 50A Avenue. The Heenan's Opera House was the location of the historic event on January 24, 1913, when about 50 families organized a meeting to ask the province to be incorporated as a village.

For years Antler Lodge was the hub of activity on Main Street. Built in Red Deer about 1902 – 1903 by Alexandre Loiselle for a boarding house and moved to Sylvan Lake sometime before 1924 where it was home to the new managers, Ogden and Clara Wilkinson. Staff from the bank were frequent boarders of the Lodge. It also housed the AGT Central Exchange where Clara Wilkinson was the first agent. The exchange remained until automatic dialling was introduced in 1963.

Cabins were added to the rear of the Antler Lodge for summer visitors and the storefront on Main Street was rented to various businesses.

**ANTLER LODGE**, View of cabins behind Antler Lodge



Earl S. Grimson moved his hardware store from the hamlet of Stockholm (Burnt Lake) to the N.W. corner of Main Street and Railway Avenue when the railway bypassed Burnt Lake and came to Sylvan Lake instead.



**GRIMSON HARDWARE STORE**

Joe McCluskey operated the first boathouse (1913) and pier (east of the landfill pier). He rented boats for fishing and pleasure. He also operated a motor launch that took paying customers on tours around the lake. In 1928, James P. Simpson bought the business and built a much larger boathouse. In addition to boat and swimsuit rentals, the new business had a popular concession booth. The building was demolished in 1979.



**BOATHOUSE**