Liquor Laws, Legal Continuity, and Hotel Beer Parlours in Alberta, 1924 to c.1939

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In common with other Canadian provinces, Alberta introduced a system of government liquor control to replace prohibition. Where Alberta differed was in its simultaneous reintroduction of both liquor stores and licensed premises in the form of beer parlours. Alberta's beer parlours had a crucial role to play, both in the success of government control and in the broader economic life of the province. The author uses Alberta's early experiences with government control to explore the role that beer parlours played in the new system. Licensed hotel beer parlours offered the Alberta Liquor Control Board (ALCB) an inexpensive way to allow some form of legal alcohol for sale in most small towns and villages across the province. These beer parlours served to push the population away from illicit liquor sales. At the same time, by locating licensed premises in hotels, the ALCB was also able to monitor hotel standards.

À l'instar d'autres provinces canadiennes, l'Alberta a introduit un mécanisme de régie des alcools par l'État pour remplacer la prohibition. La province s'est néanmoins distinguée par la réintroduction simultanée de magasins d'alcools et de débits de boisson autorisés, les tavernes. Ces tavernes ont eu un rôle essentiel à jouer, tant dans le succès de la réglementation officielle que dans la vie économique de la province au sens large. L'auteure se sert des premières expériences de l'Alberta en matière de réglementation officielle pour étudier le rôle des tavernes dans le nouveau système. Pour l'Alberta Liquor Control Board (ALCB), les tavernes autorisées dans les hôtels ont constitué un moyen peu coûteux de permettre une certaine forme de vente légale d'alcool dans la plupart des petites villes et des villages de la province. Ces tavernes ont servi à détourner la population du commerce illicite de l'alcool. Par ailleurs, en installant les débits de boisson dans les hôtels, l'ALCB était aussi en mesure de surveiller l'application des normes hôtelières.

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IN JULY 1924, Mayor G. H. Webster of Calgary, Alberta, said that Saskatchewan had made a mistake by turning down beer sales on licensed premises in its recent liquor plebiscite.[1] At the time, both Alberta and Saskatchewan were looking for new ways to control liquor following the failure of prohibition. Webster's comment suggests a certain Albertan pride in the province's innovative liquor system, which had reintroduced liquor stores simultaneously with licensed premises. Admittedly, some Calgarians hoped that beer-by-the-glass was a step towards temperance, but there were others, both in Alberta and elsewhere, who felt that beer-by-the-glass would be easier to control than either prohibition or a liquor-store-only system. Regardless of the goals behind Alberta's beer parlours, Webster's comment seemed prescient as province after province eventually reintroduced public drinking. In fact, later that year, British Columbia passed the necessary amendments to its liquor laws to introduce beer parlours.[2] Yet Webster's remark is surprising given both the controversy that surrounded Alberta's return to public drinking and the fact that Alberta's post-prohibition law had only been in effect since May of that year. Nonetheless, Webster insisted that beer parlours were somehow crucial to the post-prohibition system of liquor control.

When Alberta ended prohibition in 1923, it was one of the first jurisdictions in North America to do so. At the time only three other Canadian provinces had ended prohibition: British Columbia had liquor stores; Quebec had both liquor stores and taverns where people could drink beer or light wine; and Manitoba had a system whereby people could buy beer from the government and then have it delivered to their houses.[3] Quebec's system was clearly the outlier, and contemporary observers attributed its more permissive nature to the fact that it was a mainly Francophone province.[4] Yet Alberta, an English-Canadian province, became the only province in Canada to end prohibition by reintroducing liquor stores and licensed premises simultaneously.[5]

1 "Mistake to Turn Down Beer Sales in Saskatchewan," *Calgary Herald*, July 17, 1924.

2 *Government Liquor Act*, SBC 1921, c.30 as amended by SBC 1924, c.30, s.9. For the other provinces, see Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003), pp. 271-277.

3 "Alberta Votes West by 35,000," *Edmonton Bulletin*, November 6, 1923. The first choice vote tally came out to: Clause A (prohibition) – 61,647; Clause B (sale of beer on licensed premises) – 3,936; Clause C (beer stores only) – 3,078; Clause D (liquor stores and beer sales on licensed premises) – 93,680. Of those who voted, 78,268 did not rank their preferences; see Provincial Archives of Alberta [hereafter PAA], RG 76.2, Statement of Votes Polled, November 5, 1923 (undated). For British Columbia, see *Government Liquor Act*, SBC 1921, c.30; Robert A. Campbell, *Demon Rum or Easy Money: Government Control of Liquor in British Columbia from Prohibition to Privatization* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), pp. 1-2. For Quebec, see *The Alcoholic Liquor Act*, SQ 1921, c.31; Heron, *Booze*, p. 272. Technically Quebec never had the extensive prohibition seen elsewhere but the province did briefly limit liquor sales. For Manitoba, see Heron, *Booze,* p. 273.

4 Campbell, *Demon Rum*, p. 1.

5 For a brief period Quebec had a system with no licensed premises; see *Quebec Prohibition Law*, SQ 1919, c.18; *Alcoholic Liquor Act,* SQ 1921, c.31.

Although public drinking in Canada has come under increased academic attention in recent years,[6] little attention has been paid to the situation in Alberta,[7] one of the first jurisdictions to reintroduce public drinking in licensed premises. Perhaps more importantly, few studies have examined the era before government control alongside the government control period. Though government control and, in particular, beer parlours are often understood as a novel development and evidence of a new form of governance,[8] I argue that this perception is not the case. As Mariana Valverde recently pointed out, identifying newer methods of governance does not mean that older forms have been completely replaced.[9] I argue that, at least in Alberta, there was a degree of continuity between licensed premises before and after prohibition and between the goals of the laws governing pre-prohibition, prohibition, and post-prohibition liquor sales. Scholars have been too quick to focus on the differences between prohibition and post-prohibition and, in so doing, have missed the continuities between these different systems. Boards like the Alberta Liquor Control Board (ALCB) may have seemed to be novel forms of governance,[10] but they showed a great deal of similarity to what had come before them.

The continuity seen in Alberta's liquor laws, particularly those dealing with licensed premises, can be explained by the importance of such premises to Alberta as it struggled to settle and develop. Alberta's prohibition-era experiences highlighted the key role that licensed premises, particularly licensed hotels, played in everyday life in the province. Licensed premises were never just about how to control the consumption of liquor—though that was definitely important to their design and operation. Alberta's hotel beer licences, like those seen later in Ontario and British Columbia, also offered a way to regulate hotels.[11] As much as licensing allowed ways for the government to supervise and monitor drinkers, such a goal does not explain the other regulations that attached to licensed premises both before and after prohibition. In addition to controlling liquor consumption,

6 Dan Malleck, "The Bureaucratization of Moral Regulation: The LCBO and (not-so) Standard Hotel Licensing in Niagara, 1927-1944," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 38, no 75 (May 2005), p. 59, and *Try to Control Yourself: The Regulation of Drinking in Post-Prohibition Ontario, 1927-44* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012); Robert A. Campbell, *Sit Down and Drink Your Beer: Regulating Vancouver's Beer Parlours, 1924-1954* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Julia Roberts, *In Mixed Company: Taverns and Public Life in Upper Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009); Dale Barbour, "Drinking Together: The Role of Gender in Changing Manitoba's Liquor laws in the 1950s" in Esyllt W. Jones and Gerald Friesen, eds., *Prairie Metropolis: New Essays on Winnipeg Social History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009), p. 187. This list is not exhaustive.

7 There have been a handful of master's theses on the topic: Diane Kathryn Stretch, "From Prohibition to Government Control: The Liquor Question in Alberta 1909-1929" (MA thesis, University of Alberta, Department of History, 1979); Steven Paul Boddington, "The Alberta Liquor Control Board, 1924-1935" (MA thesis, University of Alberta, Department of History, 1990).

8 Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself*, p. 5; Scott Thompson and Gary Genosko, *Punched Drunk: Alcohol, Surveillance and the LCBO, 1927-1975* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2009), pp. 13-22.

9 Mariana Valverde, "Seeing Like a City: The Dialectic of Modern and Premodern Ways of Seeing in Urban Governance," *Law & Society Review*, vol. 45, no. 2 (June 2011), pp. 280-281, 286.

10 Reginald E. Hose, *Prohibition or Control? Canada's Experience with the Liquor Problem, 1921-1927* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1928), pp. 2-7.

11 For Ontario and British Columbia, see Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself*; Campbell, *Sit Down.*

hotel liquor licences offered the provincial government a way to ensure that each settlement had some form of accommodation and food service at very little cost to the province itself.

In a brief discussion of Alberta's pre-prohibition liquor laws, I focus on the sections of these laws that dealt with licensed premises and argue that they did double-duty as hotel licences.[12] Where relevant, I refer to increasing temperance sentiment and its effect on the liquor laws. I show that, during prohibition, the lack of licensed premises proved detrimental to more than just the province's attempt to control liquor. Finally, I explain why the government licensed hotels and not restaurants. Hotel beer parlours controlled liquor consumption at very little cost to the ALCB, while also offering additional benefits to the province.[13]

The Emergence of Temperance Sentiment and Alberta's Pre-Prohibition System of Liquor Sales

Prior to prohibition, the *Liquor License Ordinance* governed sales of liquor within Alberta.[14] The Ordinance first came into force in 1891, when Alberta was still part of the North-West Territories, and ended the prohibition that had existed in the Territories since 1871.[15] Although the Ordinance would be amended a number of times, both before and after Alberta achieved provincial status in 1905, its basic structure remained the same.

The Territories' decision to end prohibition in 1891 did not mean that the area lacked temperance sentiment. By 1891, the temperance movement was active across North America, including the Territories. Nonetheless, Nancy Sheehan notes that temperance sentiment got off to a slow start in the region, owing much to the difficulty of organizing meetings in such a sparsely populated area and to the lack of features that had made prohibition seem so desirable elsewhere.[16] The historical consensus is that temperance sentiment emerged in response to rapid social changes such as mass immigration, urbanization, and industrialization.[17] When the Territories ended prohibition, it had yet to experience such social and economic upheavals, and it also lacked the public bars that caused temperance activists so much concern elsewhere in North America.[18]

Following the end of prohibition in 1891, the Territories, and later the province of Alberta, began to undergo these rapid social changes. The area received a large number of mostly male Ukrainian immigrants whose customs and drinking patterns proved deeply threatening to the existing, predominantly

12 There was no municipal licensing system for hotels during this period.

13 This argument has been mentioned elsewhere. See Sarah E Hamill, "Prohibition Plebiscites on the Prairies: (Not-So) Direct Legislation and Liquor Control in Alberta, 1915 to 1932," *Law and History Review*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2015), pp. 384, 390-391, 405-407.

14 *Liquor License Ordinance* (1891-1892), No. 18.

15 Heron, *Booze*, pp. 162-163.

16 Nancy M Sheehan, "Temperance, the WCTU, and Education in Alberta, 1905-1930" (PhD thesis, University of Alberta, Department of Educational Foundations, 1980), p. 88.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 87-90; Heron, *Booze*, pp. 163-164; John H. Thompson, "'The Beginning of Our Regeneration': The Great War and Western Canadian Reform Movements," *Historical Papers*, vol. 7 (1972), p. 227.

18 Malleck, "Bureaucratization of Moral Regulation," p. 65; Thompson and Genosko, *Punched Drunk*, pp. 146-147.

British-Canadian population.[19] These mostly male immigrants would congregate in hotel bars for solidarity and to look for work.[20] At the same time as the Territories received this mass influx of immigrants, it experienced rapid political and economic development, including the granting of provincial status to Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905. During Alberta's first decade as a province, its urban centres grew exponentially, with the populations of its major cities doubling or even quadrupling.[21] The economic fortunes of Alberta were, however, uneven as the economic boom of the twentieth century's first decade turned to bust in 1913.[22] Such frantic changes and economic uncertainty made the utopian promises of the temperance movement deeply attractive. Not surprisingly, temperance ideas soon began to take root in the province with the founding of the Alberta Temperance and Moral Reform League in 1907 and the division of the Alberta and Saskatchewan Woman's Christian Temperance Union into two separate provincial groups in 1913.[23]

Temperance influence was, in fact, evident even before Alberta became a province. By the time the Territories introduced legal liquor sales, the temperance movement had succeeded in winning some concessions from government. Though the temperance movement had begun with the aim of winning personal pledges of temperance, such pledges had proven ineffective without some form of legislative sanction as well.[24] As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, there was a gradual shift from emphasizing temperance to calling for the prohibition of alcohol.[25] In Canada, the most common victory won by temperance activists in the late nineteenth century was local option. Local option allowed towns, villages, cities, or regions to vote themselves dry so that no liquor stores or licensed premises could be established in the area. The Province of Canada first allowed for local option areas under the *Dunkin Act of 1864,* which was replaced by the federal *Scott Act* in 1878.[26] Such local option areas tended to be short-lived because individuals who lived in a local option area could still buy liquor

19 Howard Palmer, "Nativism in Alberta, 1925-1930," *Historical Papers*, vol. 9 (1974), p. 184; Frances Swyripa, "Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Ukrainian Bloc Settlement: East Central Alberta Between the Wars," *Prairie Forum*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1995), p. 149.The Ukrainians were unfairly stereotyped; see Gregory Robinson, "Rougher than any other Nationality? Ukrainian Canadians and Crime in Alberta, 1915-1929," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 16 (1991), pp. 147-150. I use the term "British Canadian" as a catch-all term to refer to those Canadians of British descent. I prefer it to Anglo or English Canadian as it is more inclusive, though I recognize that whether and to what extent it would apply to those from Ireland is a more political question, a full discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article.

20 Heron, *Booze*, pp. 105-121; Craig Heron, "The Boys and Their Booze: Masculinities and Public Drinking in Working-Class Hamilton, 1890-1946," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 86, no. 3 (2005), p. 424; Peter DeLottinville, "Joe Beef of Montreal: Working-Class Culture and the Tavern," *Labour / Le Travail*, vol. 8/9 (1981-1982), p. 10.

21 *Census of Canada, 1911* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1912), pp. 2-39; Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1990), p. 78.

22 Bryan P Melnyk, *Calgary Builds: The Emergence of an Urban Landscape, 1905-1914* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985), pp. 35-36; Palmer and Palmer, *Alberta: A New History,* p. 166.

23 "Temperance and Moral Reform," *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 22, 1907; Sheehan, "Temperance," p. 117.

24 Heron, *Booze*, p. 131.

25 To reflect this distinction, I call them temperance activists in the run up to prohibition and Prohibitionists once prohibition ended.

26 Statutes of the Province of Canada, 1864 (27-28 Vict), c.18; *Canada Temperance Act,* SC 1878 (40-41 Vict), c.16.

elsewhere and bring it into the area.[27] Regardless of its effectiveness, local option demonstrated the temperance movement's ability to influence Canada's liquor laws, and provision for it was included in the *Liquor License Ordinance.*[28]

The Ordinance finally introduced public drinking to the Territories through licensed hotels,[29] though it sought to keep such drinking under control. The Ordinance contained various provisions designed both to limit the number of licences available and to ensure that hotels were actually hotels and not just an excuse to get a liquor licence. An example of the former restriction is how the legislation linked the number of licences available to the size of the local population.[30] Examples of the latter requirement include rules regulating the number of bedrooms prospective hotels had to have and stipulating that licensees had to provide food and lodging at a reasonable price.[31] In 1907, both restrictions were revised so that the number of available licences was reduced while the kinds of accommodation hotels had to offer to the public increased.[32] The requirement of public accommodation was not new; in fact, the food and lodging requirement should be read as a codification of the old common law requirement that inns had to provide accommodation to travellers.[33] What was new, or at least different, were the ways in which these public accommodation requirements became more rigorous. These increasing standards emerged as temperance sentiment increased, but also as ideas about cleanliness and morality underwent changes.[34]

The Ordinance did not allow a mass proliferation of licensed premises and sought to ensure that licensed hotels offered more than just a place to drink. That being said, by the time Alberta became a province in 1905, the *Liquor License Ordinance* allowed for some "dining halls" to get a licence for the sale of beer provided they were within 50 feet of a railway and "within the limits of an incorporated city or town."[35] Railway companies could also apply for a licence to "sell wine, ale, beer and spirits" in their dining cars.[36] Both evidence a more relaxed attitude towards liquor, but the difference between which kinds of establishments could serve which kinds of liquor point to an emerging sense that some kinds of drinking in some kinds of places were more desirable than others.

27 PAA, RG 83.192, file 399, *Review of Liquors and Liquor Legislation in the Various Provinces of Canada* (undated, c.1923), pp. 3, 7; Heron, *Booze,* pp. 159-163.
28 *Liquor License Ordinance,* s.48.
29 *Ibid.*, s.2(6).
30 *Ibid.*, s.24(b).
31 For the number of rooms, see *ibid.*, s.31; for the food and lodging, see *ibid.,* s.65.
32 For the number of licensees, see *The Liquor License Amendment Act, 1907*, SA 1907, c.9, s.6; for the rooms, see s.10. For the increases in other forms of accommodation, see *Liquor License Ordinance, 1905,* CO 89, s.24.
33 Roberts, *In Mixed Company*, pp. 2-3. For a discussion of how this requirement played out in America, see A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, "Travelers, Strangers and Jim Crow: Law, Public Accommodations and Civil Rights in America," *Law & History Review*, vol. 23 (2005), p. 53; Joseph William Singer, "No Right to Exclude: Public Accommodations to Private Property," *Northwestern University Law Review*, vol. 90 (1995-1996), p. 1283.
34 See, generally, Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
35 *Liquor License Ordinance 1905*, s.16.
36 *Ibid.*, s.17.

The Ordinance also allowed for two ways to prohibit the sale of liquor: interdiction and local option votes. The first method was aimed at individuals who drank to excess,[37] while the second allowed entire localities to prohibit the sale of liquor within their boundaries. The Ordinance required that a majority against liquor licences be at least three-fifths of the electorate in an area.[38] That the Ordinance should require more than just a simple majority could be read as a bias in favour of licensed premises or a desire to ensure that the vote was actually representative. The low turnout in the national liquor plebiscite of 1898, for example, offered the federal government a good excuse not to act.[39]

Although the Ordinance may have ended prohibition, it did not end controls on liquor consumption. Granted, there is evidence that Albertans did not always follow the Ordinance's requirements—there are reports of interdicts accessing alcohol, for example[40]—but no system of control is ever perfect. More importantly, Alberta's pre-prohibition liquor laws governed more than just the sale of liquor. By restricting licences to certain kinds of hotels, the pre-prohibition system also regulated the province's hotel business. Under the English common law, liquor licences had a long history of being used as *de facto* hotel licences.[41] The arrival of prohibition in Alberta interrupted this history with consequences that extended beyond the province's hotel business.

The Changes Brought by Prohibition

Alberta's Prohibitionists may have focused on completely eradicating beverage alcohol, but some forms of drinking were more problematic than others. Prohibitionists found public drinking in licensed premises to be particularly objectionable. Not surprisingly, when Alberta's Prohibitionists won the provincial liquor plebiscite of 1915, the resulting *Liquor Act* abolished all licensed premises. The Act still allowed for various forms of private consumption, though this was mainly because Alberta, as a province, could not interfere with the inter-provincial trade of liquor.[42]

The *Liquor Act* contained none of the provisions about hotels that the pre-prohibition Ordinance had, meaning that the province was without hotel regulation as well as licensed premises. A handful of municipalities passed bylaws that related to hotels, but most of these bylaws dealt with public health matters, including cesspits, the location and cleaning of toilets, and appropriate measures for garbage

37 *Liquor License Ordinance* (1891)., s.92.
38 *Ibid.,* s.48.
39 Heron, *Booze*, p. 172-73.
40 See, for example, "Sold Liquor to Interdicted Man," *Strathcona Evening Chronicle*, August 30, 1907; "Death from Broken Neck: Interdicted but Secured All Liquor He Wanted From Friends," *Edmonton Bulletin*, June 7, 1910; "Supplied Interdict with Liquor; Fined One Hundred Dollars," *Edmonton Capital*, March 5, 1914.
41 Roberts, *In Mixed Company*, p. 58 (noting the various economic benefits of nineteenth-century taverns).
42 The inter-provincial trade was eventually shut down with the help of the federal government. See *Canada Temperance Act*, RSC 1908, c.152, s.157 as amended by SC 1922, c.11; *Prohibition of the keeping and exporting of Liquor from the Province of Alberta under the Canadian Temperance Act*, Privy Council Order-in-Council, P.C. 385 March 5, 1923; James H. Gray, *Booze: The Impact of Whisky on the Prairie West* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1972), pp. 190-195. There were, of course, other exceptions such as medicinal liquor and liquor for scientific purposes; see *Liquor Act,* SA 1916, c.4, s.4.

removal.[43] It is notable that those municipalities that passed such bylaws tended to be in the remote, northwestern Peace River district of the province rather than in the larger towns or cities. The Village of Rockyford also passed a bylaw requiring all hotels and rooming houses to keep a register of guests, a measure indicative of the concern that hotels caused due to their potential for anonymity and the transience of their guests.[44]

In February 1916 the Alberta Temperance and Moral Reform League recognized that prohibition might cause a decline in hotel accommodation but thought that the government should force individual municipalities to look after the problem.[45] Later that year, the *Lethbridge Herald* declared that, as the Prohibitionists had removed the hotel bar, they should be the ones responsible for maintaining hotel standards.[46] The following year evidence of the decline in hotel standards emerged when Alberta's business travellers petitioned the government for adequate hotel regulation.[47] Such regulation never occurred. While at least one travellers' association, the North-West Travellers' association, put together a list of approved hotels, such organizations lacked the coercive power of government regulation.[48]

Alberta needed adequate hotel regulation for two main reasons. First, hotels were essential to a developing province because of their role in facilitating local economic and social development. In September 1916, two months into prohibition, the southern Albertan city of Lethbridge suffered the indignity of having the United Farmers of Alberta's (UFA) annual meeting transferred to Edmonton because Lethbridge's hotels did not have enough room for the 1,200 delegates.[49] Lethbridge's hotel shortage persisted throughout prohibition, and the local Board of Trade felt that it was detrimental to the city.[50] As important as hotels were for cities like Lethbridge, they were also crucial for small towns as they provided temporary accommodation for newcomers, travelling salesmen, and migrant labour. The local history of Spirit River, for example, shows that many individuals stayed in the town's hotel when they first arrived in the area.[51] Hotels

43 Village of Spirit River, By-Law No. 6 (1917); Peace River, Bylaw No. 43 (1919); Peace River, Bylaw 14 (1916).

44 Rockyford, Bylaw No. 11 (1921). Compare A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 211.

45 "Prohibition Convention," *Claresholm Advertiser*, February 10, 1916. The League was not the only one to realize that prohibition would be detrimental to hotel accommodation; see "The Alberta Temperance and Moral Reform League Forcing Province to Expend Huge Sum of Money Which Will Accomplish No Benefit to People," *Coleman Bulletin,* May 20, 1915. See also Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself*, pp. 19, 38. For more on the historical importance of licensed taverns in Canada, see Roberts, *In Mixed Company*.

46 Editorial, "Prohibition and Hotel Accommodation," *Lethbridge Herald*, May 15, 1916. See also "Travelling Public Must be Accommodated," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 10, 1916 (arguing for local Boards of Trade to supervise hotel accommodation).

47 "Alberta Hotels Need Inspection and Regulation, Premier is Told," *Edmonton Journal*, February 23, 1917.

48 "Approve Taber Hotels," *Lethbridge Herald*, May 31, 1922.

49 "Big UFA Meeting Transferred to Edmonton," *Lethbridge Herald*, September 23, 1916.

50 See "Accommodation Needed for Calgary Visitors," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 9, 1917; Editorial, *Lethbridge Herald*, January 16, 1918; "Board of Trade Discusses Public Market, Tourist Traffic, Housing and More Hotel Accommodation," *Lethbridge Herald*, September 19, 1919.

51 Spirit River History Book Committee, *Chepi Sepe: Spirit River: The Land, the People* (Spirit River, AB: Spirit River History Book Committee, 1989), pp. 401, 568, 702, 747, 755, 844.

proved crucial for all stages of economic development in Alberta: from small towns that wished to expand to cities that wished to become economic centres. Granted, there was little that regulation could do to encourage more hotels—that was a problem with the profitability or lack thereof of hotels. Nonetheless Alberta needed hotel regulation to ensure that what accommodation did exist was adequate for visitors and newcomers.

Secondly, some form of hotel regulation was needed to address the anxiety that hotels caused due to their "distinctive combination of privacy, anonymity, and transience [which] made [hotels] highly sexualized space[s]."[52] As much as hotel bars were threatening because of their association with alcohol, hotels themselves had the potential to undermine the kind of morality advocated by Canadian social reformers of the period.[53] An Albertan example of the threatening nature of hotels can be found in a Royal North West Mounted Police (RNWMP) report from October 1916, which described the investigation of a complaint made by M. J. Hewitt of Chinook about the New Acadia Hotel. According to the report, Hewitt phoned the RNWMP and stated "that there were three girls working at the [hotel] who in his opinion were prostitutes and asked that Constable Fletcher patrol there at once."[54] Fletcher then spent the night at the hotel investigating Hewitt's claims. The women appeared to both live and work in the hotel, and Fletcher reported that "during the evening he saw two of the girls ... walking around in the hall attired in their night gowns and making quite a lot of noise." Fletcher found no proof that these women were prostitutes but, after speaking with the hotel owner, he was able to report that the owner had promised to fire them and make sure they left town. A few days later Fletcher reported that the women had moved elsewhere.[55] The women may not have been prostitutes, but their presence in the hotel clearly posed some kind of sexual threat. Without some form of centralized regulation, the government had no control over who worked in hotels and little coercive power to prevent hotel owners from allowing prostitutes or suspected prostitutes onto their premises. There were prostitution laws, but they tended to operate after the fact; what the government lacked was a way to prevent known prostitutes from even visiting hotels.

In addition to removing the government's regulatory power over hotels, the abolition of hotel bars removed one of the key sources of hotel revenue. As a result many hotels closed or were sold to individuals who were willing to break the law to turn a profit.[56] Even when the hotels did stay open, the quality of accommodation they supplied declined, a trend seen across the Canadian provinces under prohibition.[57] Such declining hotel accommodation was not by itself reason enough to support a return to legal liquor sales. Had a decline in

52 Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel,* pp. 3, 55, 211; Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself,* p. 73.
53 For a discussion of this morality, see, generally, Valverde, *Age of Light*.
54 PAA, RG 66.166, file 1240c, RNWMP Crime Report, Youngstown Detachment, October 21, 1916. All references in this paragraph are to this crime report unless otherwise stated.
55 PAA, RG 66.166, file 1240c, RNWMP Crime Report, Youngstown Detachment, October 31, 1916.
56 Hugh A Dempsey, "The Day Alberta Went Dry," *Alberta History*, vol. 58, no. 2 (2010), pp. 12, 15.
57 "Commercial Men Say Hotel Accommodation Bad Under Dry Law," *Lethbridge Herald*, December 19, 1921; Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself,* p. 38.

hotel accommodation been the only detrimental effect of prohibition, the measure would likely still be in force. The problems of prohibition extended beyond the province's hotel business. Doubtless prohibition had some successes; to give one example, John Burnham points out that, in the United States, illnesses associated with excessive liquor consumption decreased during prohibition.[58] Yet in the United States, as in Canada, prohibition proved itself to be an expensive, unenforceable law that seemed to remove controls on liquor consumption instead of increasing them.[59] The problem was that violations of prohibition were noticeable, while its successes tended to be less visible, as in the example of alcohol-related illnesses.

As a whole, the *Liquor Act* seemed to have the opposite result of what it had promised and what temperance activists wanted. Prohibition removed controls on liquor consumption, it offered no way to monitor hotels, and it seemed to be producing a society in which citizens delighted in breaking the law.[60] There was little that the government could do to address these problems within the confines of prohibition. A 1923 letter from Attorney General John Brownlee expressed the frustration the government felt with the *Liquor Act*. Brownlee noted, "The great trouble with the people of the Province is that they do not realize that this is a Province of tremendous areas with widely scattered communities and that the resources of the Province at present do not permit of an unlimited number of Police Officers."[61] Not surprisingly, in 1923 the provincial government facilitated a vote over the future of prohibition, which saw Alberta overwhelmingly vote in favour of ending the measure.[62]

Alberta's 1923 liquor plebiscite used a four-choice ballot that allowed Albertans to pick and rank the following choices: prohibition; sale of beer on licensed premises; government sale of beer with hard liquor available via prescription; government sale of all liquor and beer on licensed premises.[63] The 1923 ballot is notable for four reasons. First, all of the choices envisage liquor being under strict control. Secondly, two of the choices allow for licensed premises, a feature that, at the time, existed only in Quebec. Thirdly, the three non-prohibition choices all made beer more easily available than hard liquor, reflecting the claims of the Moderationists that beer was a more moderate drink.[64] Finally, the multi-choice ballot itself was unusual.[65] Alberta voted for the last choice and thereby ushered in one of the most apparently liberal systems of liquor sale then in existence in North

58 J. C. Burnham, "New Perspectives on the Prohibition 'Experiment' of the 1920's," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1968), p. 60.

59 Scott Schaeffer, "The Legislative Rise and Populist Fall of the Eighteenth Amendment: Chicago and the Failure of Prohibition," *Journal of Law & Politics*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2011), p. 385; Heron, *Booze,* pp. 235-266.

60 "60 P.C. Men in Alberta Break the Liquor Act," *Lethbridge Herald*, February 15, 1919.

61 PAA, RG 75.126, file 3728, Brownlee to W. H. Erant of Drumheller, November 1, 1923.

62 For a discussion of this plebiscite, see Sarah E. Hamill, "Making the Law Work: Alberta's *Liquor Act* and the Control of Medicinal Liquor from 1916 to 1924," *Canadian Journal of Law & Society*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2012), pp. 261-263, and "Prohibition Plebiscites," pp. 386-402.

63 "Liquor Referendum—Notice to Voters," *Lethbridge Herald*, October 25, 1923.

64 PAA, RG 69.289, file 99b, Moderation League of Alberta, reprinted from *Farm and Ranch Review* (March 1934). For more on the Moderationists, see Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself*, pp. 54-58.

65 Hamill, "Prohibition Plebiscites," pp. 397-402.

America. Three features of the ballot as a whole—control, licensed premises, and a preference for beer—were crucial aspects of the new post-prohibition system.

The Benefits of Hotel Beer Parlours, 1924-1939

Under the *Liquor Control Act* there were three main ways through which ordinary Albertans could obtain liquor. Individuals who were not disqualified from drinking on grounds of age, Indian Status, or interdiction could drink beer in a licensed beer parlour, drink in a club (provided they were members or guests of a member), or buy liquor from a government liquor store, either by visiting a store in person or ordering through the mail. Of the three, beer parlours were the fastest way to obtain liquor, particularly in locations without a liquor store. In addition, a person needed neither a permit nor a membership to drink in a beer parlour, making beer parlours the most accessible. Put simply, licensed beer parlours offered Alberta a way to make beer immediately available in almost every settlement in the province at very little cost to the government. In contrast, liquor-store-only systems required the government to pay for the cost of the stores or for shipping liquor to permit holders. Alberta's licensed premises also offered a way for the ALCB to regulate hotel accommodation and shape how people drank together.

When Alberta voted to end prohibition, the province was governed by the pro-prohibition UFA. The Prohibitionist outlook of the government necessarily affected the shape that the *Liquor Control Act* took. The government may have tacitly admitted that prohibition had failed, but that did not mean it had abandoned Prohibitionist beliefs about the dangers of liquor and the need for it to be strictly controlled. Even though the Liquor Control Act came into force only six months after the 1923 liquor plebiscite, the government found time to prepare an in-depth study of British Columbia's liquor laws.[66] Though this report focused more on the business side of the British Columbia Liquor Control Board, it also examined how that board controlled liquor and whether or not its control was effective.

At the time, British Columbia only allowed for liquor stores, though not all of its stores were created equal. In areas of the province where the population was almost entirely employed in some form of industry such as logging or mining, the British Columbia liquor board decided to open some beer-only stores, in the hope of pushing the population towards beer. The board could not, however, afford to open a liquor store in every settlement across the province, and here its control broke down. While individuals in British Columbia could order liquor through the mail,[67] there was no incentive for them to order beer instead of hard liquor. British Columbia's liquor board had no way to push its population towards more moderate forms of drinking, nor was it able to monitor *how* its population consumed liquor.

Alberta was, of course, precluded from opening a liquor-store-only system given the results of the 1923 plebiscite. Nevertheless, its report on British Columbia's system sheds light on why beer parlours were considered a good idea. In addition to the potential for control offered by beer parlours, one anonymous

66 PAA, RG 83.192, file 397-398, *Report on the Workings of the British Columbia Liquor Control Act*, December 7, 1923.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 23.

"prominent [British Columbian] official connected with Law Enforcement" asserted that "if Alberta would provide means of obtaining beer by the glass it would be helpful in general liquor law enforcement" and would "to a large extent relieve the government of criticism."[68] Tellingly British Columbia introduced beer parlours one year after Alberta did, largely as a result of the failure of liquor stores to control liquor.[69] Although the report made no mention that British Columbia was on the verge of introducing beer parlours, the anonymous official hints that the mood was shifting in that direction. The governments of both Alberta and British Columbia may have wanted to control liquor, but their populations wanted to drink it, and they wanted to drink it in certain ways. The anonymous official's comments suggested that conceding public drinking would increase liquor controls, perhaps by convincing the public to cooperate with the liquor boards. In theory, Alberta had to introduce some form of licensed premises given the fact that Clause D—government sale of all liquors and sale of beer on licensed premises—was the most popular choice in the 1923 plebiscite.

The question remains: why license hotels and not restaurants? Some restaurants had, after, all been licensed under the pre-prohibition system. The decision to limit licences to hotels emerged as the government hashed out the shape of the new liquor act. Not surprisingly, representatives for both the province's hotel owners and its restaurateurs petitioned the government for licences.[70] The government's decision to license only hotels—and the Act did specify hotels[71]—could be seen as leaving some room for restaurants to remain open because the new law did not allow beer to be served with food. With respect to Ontario, Malleck argues that hotels were "supervisable space[s]" but, given that Alberta's Act specified hotels, Ontario's experiences are of limited applicability here.[72] It may be that the government, in drafting the Act, decided that hotels were manageable spaces, or it may be that the Act simply copied the Ordinance's earlier limits. The decision could have also been a reflection of the fact that hotels provided more public conveniences than restaurants did.[73] Licensed hotels had to have their own restaurants for the public as well. If the government wanted to present licensed premises as having some public benefit, hotels offered a more obvious choice than stand-alone restaurants. Whatever the reason for limiting licences to hotels, the government's decision was in keeping with the other rules and regulations imposed on public drinking; in particular, it evidenced a clear desire to separate beer consumption from all other activities, including eating. Public drinking may have returned in 1924, but only in a strictly quarantined manner.

Many of the legislative provisions surrounding Alberta's hotel beer parlours echoed the pre-prohibition measures for licensed hotels with a few key differences. First, the beer parlours could only sell beer. Secondly, the *Liquor Control Act* also

68 *Ibid*., p. 102.
69 For the failure of liquor stores, see Campbell, *Demon Rum*, pp. 47-50, and *Sit Down*, pp. 19-21.
70 PAA, RG 69.289, file 97c, Conference with Restaurant Keepers, December 3, 1923; AHA to Premier Greenfield, December 14, 1923; Conference with the Hotel Keepers, November 22, 1923.
71 *Liquor Control Act*, SA 1924, c.14, s.32.
72 Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself*, pp. 60-77.
73 See footnote 80 and surrounding text.

stipulated that there could be no stand-up bar inside beer rooms, which meant that patrons had to be served by waiters.[74] Stand-up bars had been common in the pre-prohibition saloons, hence the new ban on them. The Act also prohibited those under the age of 21 (minors) from even entering the licensed portion of hotels and reiterated the earlier law's prohibition on "gambling, drunkenness or any violent, quarrelsome, riotous or disorderly conduct" from beer rooms.[75] The board supplemented the Act with regulations stipulating that no food could be sold in the beer room and that the only woman who could work in there was the licensee or the wife of the licensee.[76] Later in 1924, ALCB Chairman Robert J. Dinning declared that the board would not allow radios inside hotel beer parlours, which further limited the entertainment options of beer parlour patrons.[77] Taken together the legislation and regulations paint a picture of beer parlours as dour places where Albertans could do little else except sit, drink beer, and engage in quiet conversation. By imposing such limits on the beer parlours and their patrons, the government attempted to answer the Prohibitionists' critique that government sale of liquors acted as tacit encouragement to drink[78] and attempted to differentiate the beer parlours from the old saloons.

That being said, the *Liquor Control Act* did grant the beer parlours lengthy opening hours that echoed the pre-prohibition era. The parlours could open from seven in the morning until ten at night from Monday to Friday and from seven in the morning until nine at night on Saturdays.[79] Such hours could hardly be understood as restricted access. While it is not clear that every beer parlour was actually open for 15 hours a day, the fact that it was an option suggests beer could have been almost constantly available for sale once prohibition ended.

Much as the pre-prohibition Ordinance had done, the *Liquor Control Act* and the ALCB's regulations imposed certain standards on hotels. The Act required that to receive a licence a hotel had to provide "sufficient bedrooms, with suitable complement of bedding and furniture, public sitting rooms, and other conveniences, reasonably suited to the requirements of the public likely to make use of the same" as well as adequate toilets.[80] The number of bedrooms a licensed hotel needed ranged from at least eight in places with a population of fewer than 200 people to at least 35 in cities with a population of more than 15,000.[81] This regulation might suggest a corporate agenda, but it echoed the room numbers seen in the pre-prohibition legislation.[82] The Act limited licences to one for the first 500 people and another for the next 500; three licences would be granted if

74 *Liquor Control Act*, s.36 (2).
75 *Ibid.*, s.36(4). See *Liquor License Ordinance* (1891), s.68.
76 *ALCB Regulations* Reg. 13, found in OC 604-24, Alberta Gazette (1924), p .320.
77 "Radio Sets in City Beer Halls are 'Verboten'," *Calgary Herald*, October 24, 1924.
78 Glenbow Alberta Institute Archives, RG M-1708, file 29, Report of Alberta's WCTU Fourteenth Annual Convention, October 6-8, 1926.
79 *Liquor Control Act*, s.37(a).
80 *Ibid.*, ss.33(a)-(b); *Liquor License Ordinance* (1891), s.64.
81 *ALCB Regulations* Reg. 13, found in OC 604-24, Alberta Gazette (1924), p. 320. Compare the urban verusu rural room numbers in Ontario of 12 for urban areas, six for rural areas, described by Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself*, p. 19.
82 *Liquor License Ordinance, 1905*, s.24.

the population was at least 2,000, four would be granted if the population was at least 3,000, and each additional licence thereafter required another 4,000 people.[83] Such requirements were stricter than the pre-prohibition era hotel licences, which should be understood as a reflection of prohibition's attempt to reduce liquor consumption.

Hotels that did not have the required number of rooms could still call themselves hotels, but they were not eligible for licences. Such hotels often tried to bring themselves up to the required standard so that they might compete for a licence. The point of the number of rooms was to limit beer parlours, not to limit hotels. Unlike Ontario, Alberta never adopted the language of "standard hotels" versus other hotels; Albertan hotels could call themselves hotels regardless of whether or not they had a beer licence.[84] It is possible that larger hotel chains lobbied for a set number of rooms, but given that there only seemed to be one real chain of hotels operative in Alberta at this time—the Canadian Pacific Hotels—this scenario seems unlikely. Admittedly, some urban hotels had rooms that were little more than glorified closets, but they had to have enough if they wished to continue to be eligible for a licence.[85]

The hotel licensees themselves had to be of good character with no recent convictions for "keeping, frequenting or being an inmate of a common bawdy house."[86] Again the ALCB supplemented the Act's requirements with its own standards. Much as the LCBO would later demonstrate in Ontario, the ALCB had certain ethnic preferences when it came to licensees. Malleck argues that in Ontario a non-British ethnicity did not automatically preclude an individual from being licensed.[87] By way of comparison, when British Columbia first allowed beer parlours, non-citizens were precluded from either owning or working in such premises.[88] Alberta's liquor laws had no specific comments about a person's nationality or citizenship, but the ALCB did adopt a policy against licensing Chinese-run hotels. ALCB Chairman Dinning justified this anti-Chinese policy on the grounds that, in his experience, Chinese individuals did not run a hotel capable of reaching the board's standards.[89] Dinning's rationale was rooted in the anti-Chinese sentiment common across Canada at the time and reflects the belief, widely held among British Canadians, that Chinese individuals were somehow immoral and incapable of becoming good Canadian citizens.[90] Asides from the board's anti-Chinese policy, the ALCB did license individuals of Ukrainian and

83 *Liquor Control Act*, s.33(2).
84 See Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself*, p. 19.
85 See, for example, PAA, RG 74.412, file 1240, Edmonton's Yale Hotel, Report of Inspector on Hotel License Application, November 10, 1933.
86 *Liquor Control Act,* s.33(1)(d).
87 Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself, p.* 202.
88 Campbell, *Sit Down*, p. 81.
89 PAA, RG 74.412, file 2387, ALCB to F. J. Hoelyn, Reeve of Spirit River, May 8, 1924.
90 For a contemporary opinion of Chinese people, see J. S. Woodworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates: The Problem of the Immigrant 1909* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 142-155.

Italian descent,[91] though the majority of licensees, at least in the first year of the ALCB's operation, were of British Canadian descent.[92]

In its first annual report the ALCB noted that "drastic action has been taken against" licensees who placed "beer sales above their duty to the public" and vowed to continue this policy.[93] The following year the ALCB boasted, "The policy of insisting that the sale of beer must be subservient to the comfort of the travelling public has had a salutary effect and, on the whole, the standard of hotels has improved."[94] In short, the ALCB insisted that beer licences were "perks" for worthy hotels, ones that were actually hotels and not excuses for licences. However, such claims do not capture the complexity of what beer licences did for hotels or what licensed hotels did for the ALCB and the province more broadly.

Newspaper reports about hotel beer parlours demonstrate that the parlours were not always as unexciting as they were supposed to be. In 1926 the *Ponoka Herald* reported on the scene just before closing in an unnamed Edmonton beer parlour: "About 160 men and boys were seated, mostly four at a table, smoking, drinking beer, shouting profanity, telling uproarious stories. The air reeked with smoke and the smell of beer. Four women and girls lent variety to the scene." The observer went on to note that the patrons spoke all the languages of Europe.[95] The following year the *Lethbridge Herald* reported that Lethbridge's Arlington Hotel had lost its licence due to the "liquor squad" finding "on one occasion a regular orchestra playing there and men dancing around the tables."[96] The *Herald* also observed that someone else said that the "orchestra" was nothing more than a mouth organ. These two reports show that, despite the board's best efforts, beer parlours could be fun. Though the kind of fun seen in the Arlington was prohibited by the board, it is clear that the beer parlours allowed for at least some form of convivial social space. Consequently, the beer parlours better reflected the social aspects of alcohol consumption that prohibition and liquor-store-only systems missed with their emphasis on private consumption.

As British Columbia found out to its cost in the early 1920s, people wanted to drink together; if the province did not provide the spaces, people would make their own. Campbell's work details the difficulty faced by British Columbia in controlling the shape of private consumption. People would buy liquor and then drink in hotel rooms, for example.[97] Although clearly an imperfect site of control, Alberta's beer parlours offered ways to monitor and shape how people drank

91 The ALCB's first annual report listed the names of licensees; while this list does not necessarily provide an accurate assessment of their ethnicity, there were some Italian and Ukrainian surnames. See Alberta, Legislative Assembly, "First Annual Report of the Alberta Liquor Control Board, 1924" in *Sessional Papers* (1925), p. 50.

92 *Ibid.* This assessment is based on surnames. It should be noted that some immigrants did anglicize their names; thus reliance on surnames is only a rough guide to the likely ethnicity of the licensee.

93 Alberta, Legislative Assembly, "First Annual Report of the Alberta Liquor Control Board, 1924" in *Sessional Papers* (1925), p. 9.

94 Alberta, Legislative Assembly, "Second Annual Report of the Alberta Liquor Control Board, 1925" in *Sessional Papers* No. 13 (1926), p. 7.

95 "26 Women Seen in Beer Parlours of Edmonton," *Ponoka Herald*, February 22, 1926.

96 "Beer License of the Arlington Hotel Here Lost Owing to Music," *Lethbridge Herald*, March 22, 1927.

97 Campbell, *Sit Down*, pp. 19-21, and *Demon Rum*, pp. 47-50.

together. People could still buy liquor and drink it elsewhere, but in providing a ready-made space Alberta had that little bit more control, even though it seemed more liberal than British Columbia.

The idea that hotel beer licences allowed Alberta to bring liquor under more control is reflected in the examples of three hotels in northern, pioneer regions of the province. The first example is the Dominion Hotel in Spirit River, a small village in the Peace River region in the northwest of the province. In 1924 Spirit River had two hotels, the Spirit Hotel, run by the Irish-Canadian Bertha Lee, and the Dominion Hotel, run by the Chinese-Canadian Charlie Wing.[98] Lee had been convicted under the prohibition-era *Liquor Act* for illegally selling beer and was by the ALCB's own account not a suited for a licence.[99] Wing meanwhile ran "[t]he finest hotel in the north country" with levels of service that would have been impressive in Edmonton never mind a pioneer region like Spirit River.[100] The only problem with Wing was that he was Chinese and thus excluded under the board's anti-Chinese policy. When Lee's hotel burned down, Wing's was the only one left in the village. Wing had the unanimous support of the local population, who repeatedly petitioned the ALCB in his favour. Reluctantly Dinning agreed to license Wing, noting "It is apparent that we have no alternative but to issue a license to the Chinaman at this place."[101] Wing would go on to hold the licence until his retirement in the 1940s. A hotel licence, even one given to a Chinese-Canadian, was clearly preferable to the ALCB than not issuing a licence, and a liquor store was out of the question given the size of Spirit River. Liquor stores were considered to be more prestigious, but, given the cost of running such a store, the ALCB simply could not open one in every location. The public could still buy liquor through the mail, but this practice had two drawbacks: there was no incentive to buy more moderate forms of alcohol; and purchasers had to wait for the liquor to arrive, which could push them to the local bootlegger who would have liquor immediately available.

The ALCB would later face a similar licensing dilemma in Spirit River's neighbouring village of Fairview. Fairview repeatedly voted dry until 1932; when the village finally voted wet, the board licensed the Fairview Hotel. Three years earlier the ALCB Hotel inspectors had described the hotel as having been built "solely for the purpose of obtaining a license," implying that it was not a high-quality hotel.[102] Two years after Fairview received a licence, the region's hotel inspector noted that Fairview had always been known for its moonshining activities, although the hotel licensee claimed that such illicit behaviour had declined since he had gotten his licence.[103] The reputation of Fairview as a moonshining region likely played a key role in convincing the board to license a less than satisfactory

98 PAA, RG 74.412, file 2387, Report of Inspector on Hotel Application, May 21, 1924; APP Report, Spirit River Detachment, June 7, 1924.
99 PAA, RG 74.412, file 2387, Report of Inspector on Hotel Application, May 21, 1924
100 "Spirit River is Better Village Being Rebuilt," *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 2, 1922; PAA, RG 74.12, file 2387, Report of Inspector on Hotel Application, November 12, 1925.
101 PAA, RG 74.412, file 2387, Memo from Dinning to J. Forster of the License Department, August 23, 1924.
102 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1308, Review by Dinning during trip to Peace River, June 8-11, 1929.
103 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1308, Report of Inspector on Hotel Application 1935, September 13, 1934.

hotel with a licensee who "has not the personality to make himself popular"[104] to attempt to bring drinking under control.

The Smith Hotel at Smith, Alberta, offers another example of why the ALCB would license sub-standard, poorly run hotels. Smith was and is a small hamlet in northern Alberta at the confluence of the Athabasca and Lesser Slave Rivers. Despite its size the hamlet had a hotel that the board licensed in 1924. The hotel changed hands twice before ending up in the ownership of Alice Vallie, her husband Arthur, and son Joe. In 1926 the Vallies received a licence in Mrs. Vallie's name, as her husband had been jailed for stealing from his former employer and was thus ineligible to hold the licence himself.[105] Within a year the Vallies stood accused of allowing beer to be carried off the premises, and from then on the complaints mounted: the food was bad; the Vallies only served food if you showed up at meal times; the Vallies locked guests out in the cold; the hotel allowed too much drunkenness; there was fighting in the beer room; the Vallies allowed Métis patrons to get drunk.[106] Yet the ALCB continued to license the hotel.

Given the ALCB's repeated claim only to license the best hotels, its decision to continue licensing the Smith Hotel seems odd. In 1925 one of the ALCB's own Enforcement Officers, Alexander Stewart-Irvine, recommended that the Smith Hotel should not be licensed because "the place is so out of the way that supervision by either the Police or the Board is difficult [and its] patronage would be of an undesirable type."[107] Yet these were precisely the reasons why a place like Smith *should* have a licensed hotel. Smith's population would likely drink whether or not there were any legal outlets in the town. The existence of a licensed hotel would at least push its population towards legal forms of drinking rather than bootlegging. The idea of control was not just about shaping *how* people drank but about directing the source of their liquor. A licensed hotel maintained the illusion of the former kind of control, even if in practice the Smith Hotel fell far short of the ALCB's ideal. The ALCB's willingness to license the Smith Hotel also suggests that the board accepted at least some diversity in the quality of its licensed hotels.

One of the purposes of hotel licences was to encourage a certain standard of accommodation in the province's developing areas; yet attracting the right class of licensee to such areas was not always easy. Even with the promise of a beer licence, hotels remained marginally profitable, making them a less desirable business enterprise. Hence the ALCB continued to license Alice Vallie even though she flouted the laws and her hotel was, according to ALCB Chairman Dinning, "a cheap, third-rate, roadside saloon" and "a ramshackle affair built on muskeg."[108]

104 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1308, ALCB Inspector Rouse to Chairman Dinning, November 14, 1932.

105 PAA, RG 74.412, file 2368, Inspector Kehoe to F.G. Forster, November 14, 1925; Inspector Dorman to F. G. Forster, Supervisor of Licenses, January 8, 1926; "Arthur Vallie Gets 2 Year Prison Term," *Irma Times*, February 15, 1924.

106 PAA, RG 74.412, file 2368, ALCB Chairman to Alice Vallie, December 14, 1926; Report of Inspector on Hotel Application, November 17, 1927; ALCB Inspector A. W. A. Stewart-Irvine to Dinning, November 25, 1927; Dinning to Alice Vallie, December 9, 1927; APP Beer Parlour Inspection Report, High Prairie Detachment, March 26, 1928; Dinning to Alice Vallie, October 17, 1928.

107 PAA, RG 74.412, file 2368, A. W. A. Stewart-Irvine to Dinning, December 3, 1925.

108 PAA, RG 69.289, file 99a, Dinning to Alice Vallie, November 29, 1929; RG 74.412, file 2368, Dinning to the AHA, November 29, 1929.

The board's decision to license the Smith Hotel suggests that having some legal outlet in Smith was preferable to having none. The ALCB did eventually refuse to renew Vallie's licence, but only because the engineer in charge of the government road works in the region had personally complained to Chairman Dinning. The engineer claimed that his men got too drunk in the hotel to work, which hindered the province's attempts to build roads in the area. As desirable as a licensed hotel in Smith was, the ALCB would not allow such a hotel to interfere in provincial development.[109]

The ALCB's tolerance of substandard hotels was not, however, limited to the pioneer regions of the province. As the 1920s and 1930s progressed, it became clear that some of Edmonton's hotels were hotels in name only. Edmonton's Yale Hotel, for example, had bedrooms with only skylights instead of proper windows and frequently came close to falling beneath the required number of bedrooms.[110] In common with hotels in rural areas, as the Great Depression hit, city hotels also experienced a drop in the room trade with some becoming *de facto* rooming houses. Edmonton's Richelieu Hotel even took to housing men on relief in its basement as well as in its rooms.[111] Outside of these hotels, there was little in the way of affordable accommodation in the cities, but housing "relief cases" was hardly profitable.[112] Regardless of the board's rhetoric about hotel standards, they declined during the Depression and the hotel side of the beer parlour was allowed to slip or at least the board "withheld requests which would involve any large cash outlay."[113]

The board also allowed several Edmonton hotels, as well as some rural ones such as the Fairview Hotel, to operate without a restaurant or with reduced service.[114] In both Fairview and Edmonton there were other places where the population could eat. In fact, most towns and villages in Alberta had at least one restaurant run by a Chinese-Canadian.[115] The licensee of the Fairview Hotel cited such restaurants as justification for only serving breakfast.[116] Many of Edmonton's hotel licensees rented out their restaurants and, on occasion, the board frowned on those rented to Chinese-Canadians. On November 26, 1930, for example, Hotel Inspector Dorman noted that a Chinese man ran the Empress's dining room and

109 PAA, RG 69.289, file 99a, Dinning to Brownlee, March 31, 1930. It is not clear whether the cancellation of the Smith Hotel's licence solved the engineer's problem but, if his men still drank, their source of alcohol was likely illegal, meaning they were breaking the law and ran the risk of prosecution under the *Liquor Control Act*.

110 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1240, Report of Inspector on Hotel Application, November 10, 1933; ALCB Chairman to Marie McDonald, Yale Hotel, November 1, 1932.

111 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1124, Acting Chairman to Richelieu Hotel Co., September 26, 1933.

112 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1124, ALCB Hotel Inspector to ALCB Chairman, June 13, 1934.

113 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1124, Acting Chairman to Mrs. Mainfroid, Richelieu Hotel, July 12, 1937.

114 For an Edmonton example, see PAA, RG 74.412, file 1133, ALCB Chairman to R. A. Jelly, Manager Empress Hotel, November 2, 1931 (noting that the board had only allowed the Empress to close its restaurant during the summer).

115 Lily Cho, *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 5, 8-9.

116 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1309, E. McAdam to ALCB Chairman, June 20, 1938; ALCB Chairman to E. McAdam, June 25, 1938; Report of Hotel Inspector on Hotel Application, November 27, 1939; Report of Hotel Inspector on Hotel Application, September 9, 1940.

"puts up very good meals." There is a red pencil mark on Dorman's letter by this comment and a handwritten pencil note dated December 2 stating that the licensee would take charge of the dining room again.[117] The board was not consistent in this effort, but, when coupled with its refusal to grant hotel beer licenses to Chinese-Canadians (with one exception[118]), the restaurant requirement also functioned as a way to provide an alternative to Chinese-Canadian restaurants. Hotel licensees struggled to compete with such restaurants and were sometimes resentful of them. An ALCB Hotel Inspector noted that Fairview's licensee had made himself unpopular by criticizing people for eating at the Chinese-Canadian-run restaurants and not his own.[119] The *Liquor Control Act*'s requirement that hotels have a restaurant may have started as a way to ensure that the public had somewhere to eat, but it became a way to ensure, where possible, that the public had somewhere *white-run* to eat. Of course the board had to balance the need to keep the hotel in business with the desire to have a white alternative to the Chinese-Canadian restaurants; of the two, the former took precedence.

In addition to allowing substandard hotels in Edmonton, the board also tolerated some poorly run beer rooms. Edmonton's Empress Hotel's beer room, for example, was run in a very loose manner that, despite the board's best efforts, never changed or at least not for any length of time. Other hotels might only need one letter from the board to improve matters, but the Empress had a near constant stream of such letters. In addition, the Empress's licensee was a woman who, while a licensee, stood trial for causing a disturbance in a public place, hired a former prostitute as a housekeeper, was divorced by her husband for adultery, and was accused of attacking two people with a knife.[120] The ALCB kept giving her second chances and final warnings but to no avail.

The board's decision to continue licensing the Empress cannot be as easily explained as its decisions about the Smith Hotel. The Empress's patrons could have gone elsewhere to drink or even to rent a room; Edmonton did not lack hotel accommodation or other licensed hotels, even within walking distance of the Empress. Edmonton also had a liquor store and licensed clubs, meaning that legal sources of alcohol were numerous. There were other hotels in Edmonton that the board could have licensed, and other Edmonton hotels during the 1920s and 1930s lost their licences, making the Empress's continued licensing all the more confusing. At times the board seemed motivated by a concern for the licensee's financial situation; certainly she claimed to be at risk of losing money on a number of occasions and used this to lobby the board to make the decisions she wanted.

117 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1133, Inspector Dorman to ALCB Commissioner, November 26, 1930. See also file 1122, Memo by M. M. Downey, Supervisor of Licenses, November 14, 1930 (noting he had refused permission for the licensee to lease his restaurant to a Chinese man).

118 That exception was Charlie Wing, see above.

119 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1309, Hotel Inspector's Report, November 21, 1941.

120 See, respectively, PAA, RG 74.412, file 1131, A.H. Schurer to R.J. Dinning, June 27, 1925; file 1135, Det Insp J.J. Shaw, Special Report of Edmonton City Police May 21, 1937; file 1132, Neil MacLean of ALCB Enforcement Branch to A.H. Schurer, November 11, 1929; file 1134, Detective Hugh Allen, Crime Report, October 9, 1932.

Yet financial concerns did not appear to concern the board overly when it came to changing which hotels were licensed elsewhere.[121]

It is possible that the archival record is incomplete and does not include the reason why the board continued to license the Empress. ALCB Hotel Inspector Kehoe noted that the Empress's licensee was prone to the "sob stuff," and perhaps the board fell for it.[122] What is more important about the Empress and the other hotels discussed above is that they illustrate how hotel licences were not simply perks for the best hotels. Although Alberta's decision to reintroduce beer parlours in 1924 was controversial among the province's Prohibitionists, such premises offered the province multiple benefits. First, the beer parlours offered much more control over how Albertans drank than a liquor-store-only system would have done. The beer parlours reflected the Prohibitionists' desire to control liquor consumption. Yet, at the same time, hotel beer parlours fulfilled people's desire to have some kind of social drinking space. Secondly, the beer parlours worked to push people towards both legal sources and more moderate kinds of alcohol. The former met the ALCB's own goal of reducing illicit sources of liquor, while the latter went some way towards limiting accusations that the saloons had returned. Thirdly, hotel beer parlours allowed for hotel regulation in a way that had not been seen under prohibition. The power of the ALCB to regulate provincial hotels through the hotel beer licence echoed how hotels had been regulated prior to prohibition. Admittedly, the ALCB did not regulate hotels as strictly as it claimed, but by licensing hotels the board encouraged and supported their existence in places that would not have otherwise been able to support a hotel business.

The various requirements imposed on hotels also allowed the ALCB to achieve some unethical goals, such as encouraging white businesses at the expense of those run by Chinese-Canadians. Ironically, the ALCB's insistence that licensed hotels have a restaurant often worked to the licensee's detriment because they could not compete with the town's Chinese-Canadian restaurant. Though the ALCB tacitly admitted defeat about the restaurant requirement on a number of occasions, it always held out hope that the restaurants in question would re-open.

The *Liquor Control Act*'s provisions on hotel beer parlours displayed a degree of continuity both with prohibition and with pre-prohibition laws. The Act mixed a prohibition-era concern for controlling consumption with the pre-prohibition era's ability to regulate hotels. The hotel licence allowed the board to attempt to enforce a particular kind of standard, even in Alberta's pioneer regions. All settlements with a licensed hotel would have some public meeting place, with an acceptable level of sanitation, and a restaurant, all run by a white person of good character. Even Spirit River's hotel had mostly white staff, and the board encouraged Wing to have a white man run the beer room, a move that seems to have been prompted by the police's opinion that drunken white men could not be controlled by a person of Chinese descent.[123] Such standards evidence

121 See, for example, the fate of Lethbridge's Coaldale Hotel, "Liquor Act Revision is Considered," *Lethbridge Herald*, March 31, 1933.

122 PAA, RG 74.412, file 1131, ALCB Inspector Kehoe to Forster, August 4, 1926.

123 PAA, RG 74.412, file 2387, APP Report, Spirit River Detachment, April 25, 1927; Preventive Officer

a desire for a particular kind of society that met the ideals of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant middle classes. Naturally, many licensed hotels fell short of this ideal, but, without the beer licence, a great many of Alberta's hotels probably would not have survived the Depression. The ALCB's decision to relax its hotel regulation during the Depression as well as its tolerance for violations of its standards at other points in the 1920s and 1930s suggest that hotel licences were an economic crutch as well as a way to regulate hotels and how people drank. The economic role of public drinking was almost as important as bringing liquor consumption under control.

Conclusion

For hotel licensees, the privilege of selling beer was a reward for providing various public conveniences that might not have otherwise existed. Hotels were essential to a developing province like Alberta because they offered food and shelter in the pioneer regions. To some extent hotels, particularly those in the more remote regions of the province, functioned as beacons of civilization, even if they often fell short of the standards the ALCB sought to impose. Licensed hotels, then, were much more deeply embedded in the government's broader aims for Alberta than simply shaping how people drank. Beer parlours served to grease the wheels of provincial development by funding the services hotels provided.

Licensed hotels may have been private businesses, but they also served government ends. Not only did Alberta's licensed hotels help defend the government's monopoly on selling liquor; they also helped provide at least some of the services essential to a developing province. The latter benefit was more obvious in the remote, developing regions; however, in the larger cities and towns, licensed hotels offered cheap housing, particularly for men who might have otherwise been homeless. In many of the province's smaller towns and villages, the local hotel licensee had a government-granted monopoly on legal sales of alcohol in the area, because the hotel was the only place where people could immediately obtain legal liquor. As such, Alberta's beer parlours had much in common with the old taverns and inns that also had a monopoly on liquor sales in return for providing accommodation and food.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Alberta's post-prohibition beer parlours is their similarity with what preceded prohibition. From 1891 to 1916, the North West Territories and later Alberta used liquor licences to regulate its hotels. The pre-prohibition licensing provisions read as a codification of the common-law requirement traditionally imposed on taverns and innkeepers. Admittedly, the *Liquor Control Act*'s provisions and the ALCB's regulations about licensed hotels were much more detailed and prima facie stricter than those that had governed pre-prohibition hotels, but greater oversight did not make such provisions a complete novelty in the province.

If anything Alberta's post-prohibition beer parlours should be understood as a mix of pre-prohibition and prohibition ideas about liquor consumption. Beer

Stewart-Irving to ALCB Chairman, April 26, 1927.

parlours reflected the pre-prohibition practice of using liquor licences to guarantee adequate hotel accommodation, but also the prohibition-era belief that liquor consumption was dangerous and needed to be strictly controlled—hence the great lengths to which the post-prohibition liquor laws went to stipulate what people could and could not do in the beer parlour. The actual enforcement of beer parlour behaviour was, however, largely left to individual licensees under the supervision of the local police and the ALCB's own hotel inspectorate. Individual licensees tolerated different kinds of behaviour and obviously sought to make their beer parlours as enticing as they could within the confines of the law. Such actions on the part of licensees should not be understood as deliberate attempts to subvert the ALCB's control but rather as actions typical of any business. As much as hotel licenses and the ALCB's regulation of them might seem to be evidence of a centralized, panoptical gaze, the government and the ALCB often seemed to place more value on the economic role of licensed hotels and the services they provided.