

Railway Travel, Tea Stains and Legislative History

A strange piece of material from an historic trip through central and southern Alberta by members of the province's first legislature, staff and others has found its way back to the legislature more than 100 years after it was produced – antique tea stains still intact.

Valerie Footz

In December 2011, Phyllis Telford arrived in the Alberta Legislature Library with a curious object to donate. She carefully unfolded a piece of cloth covered in signatures and explained that it was handed down in the family from her grandfather, Robert Telford. Robert Telford was elected in Alberta's first general election in 1905 and served as the Member for Leduc until the end of the Second Legislature in 1913. Unclear what it was, but certain it held some value, Phyllis Telford donated it to the Legislature Library.

Research by Library staff revealed that the cloth is signed by the Lieutenant Governor, Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and family members, Senators, journalists, Assembly staff, and Canadian Pacific Railway staff. This cloth appears to be a napkin or part of a table cloth complete with tea stains.

After holding its First Sitting of the First Legislature from March 15, 1906 to May 9, 1906, the new legislators embarked on an extensive railway tour of the central and southern Alberta. As reported in the *Lethbridge Herald* on August 16, 1906, Lieutenant Governor George H.V. Bulyea stated the purpose of the trip was "to supply members of the Legislature who had to do with the government of the province, with personal knowledge of this part of the province."

From August 7 to 11, most of Alberta's 25 elected Members and other distinguished guests rolled through 78 locales and made 18 stops adhering to an exacting itinerary. The trip concluded back in Calgary with Minister of Public Works William H. Cushing remarking "I think the trip should have ended in Banff instead of starting there. We would then have had a chance to recuperate."



Valerie Footz is the legislature librarian at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Participants on the tour of central and southern Alberta included most of Alberta's 25 elected Members and other distinguished guests. Here some of the members of the tour pose during one of the 18 stops.



At some point during the trip, the cloth was signed by many of the Members and the dignitaries including:

- George H.V. Bulyea (Lieutenant Governor of Alberta) and his Official Secretary
- Charles W. Fisher (Speaker)
- Alexander C. Rutherford (Premier)
- Arthur L.W. Sifton (then Chief Justice of Alberta's Supreme Court who later became Premier in 1910)
- John Cowell (Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta)
- Senators Leverett DeVeber and Peter Talbot

Interestingly, Robert Telford did not sign. The cloth has been framed by a textile conservator and hangs just inside the doors to the Alberta Legislature Library.