

*Pages from History*  
*"Beginnings"*

## Hubert Somerville and The Resource Transfer Agreement

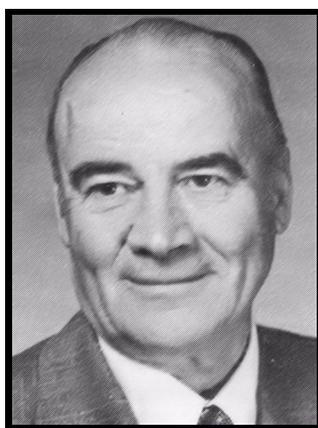
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Over the first 25 years of Alberta's history as a part of the Canadian Confederation, jurisdiction over the province's natural resources, and the right to any royalties that flowed from them, resided, according to the Alberta Act, with the federal government. By the late 1920s, however, it had become "desirable that the Province should be placed in a position of equality with the other Provinces of Confederation with respect to the administration and control of its natural resources as from its entrance into Confederation in 1905." Similar resource transfer agreements, which in general excluded national parks and Indian lands but included water rights, were drawn up for British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and all four were confirmed and given effect in the Constitution Act of 1930.

Natural gas in Medicine Hat, oil strikes in Turner Valley, and vast fields of bitumen bound in the sands of Athabasca: still, Alberta, at the time, was not exactly known as the resource capital of the country. Indeed, with the possible exception of a northern or western gold rush here and there, mineral development in Canada had generally followed the path of European settlement east to west. Ottawa may have been playing nice, or it may not have known what it was giving away.

The first dividends of the transfer were, if useful, only prosaically so: a boxcar full of, as according to the provisions of the Constitution Act, "records, documents or entries" pertaining to said Crown lands, mines and minerals, and royalties. At the station to direct the unloading of this no doubt cumbersome treasure was one Hubert H. Somerville, the future deputy minister of Alberta Mines and Minerals, a leading figure in the founding of the Alberta Chamber of Resources, its president in 1976, and a mover and shaker in one way or another in its doings until his passing in 1998.

*Hubert Somerville as Alberta—Northwest Chamber Mines—Oils—Resources (ACR) President in 1976.*



"We always had good relations from the beginning with government because of him," says former Chamber managing director Don Currie. "It lasted until I left in 2000 and it still goes on." He also believes that Somerville played a role in nailing the resource transfer agreement in the first place, to the enduring benefit of all Albertans. He relates, too, a tale of influence and advocacy told directly to him by Mr Somerville. After meeting with his caucus, the Premier of the day, Ernest Manning, called his energy deputy into his office to inform him of a decision to raise royalty rates. "Not a good idea, sir," Somerville is reputed to have replied. "It's not good politics and it's not good for Albertans." Mr Manning finished his lunch before informing his colleagues that on the respected authority and experience of a man he knew and trusted the deal was now undone.

In his own words, there is little to suggest self-satisfaction for 46 years of instrumental contribution to Alberta's resource industry by the time of his message as president to members of his Chamber. He speaks in the early part of 1977 to issues of federal policy too stringent, to the economic contribution to all Canadians of the further development and shipping of natural gas, of a royalty formula for coal much too elaborate, of the good work he expects from the newly formed Alberta Oil Sands

Technology and Research Authority, and of Dr Murray Trigg, his successor, who will be the first to oversee the organization in its modern incarnation as the Alberta Chamber of Resources.

He does not, as stated, thereafter completely fade from view; he continues to contribute, for example, as a member of the Honorary Advisory Council of Past Presidents. And his legacy, the real opportunity—the riches of wealth and purpose—he unlocked for all who followed, can be diminished in lock-step only with the depletion of the resources themselves.