

WILLIAM ANDREW CECIL BENNETT 1900-1979

William Andrew Cecil Bennett, know to his friends as “Cec” was the longest serving premier of British Columbia – from 1952-72.

Cecil Bennett was born 6 September 1900. He was one of five children of Andrew Havelock and Emma (Burns) Bennett of Hastings, Albert City, New Brunswick. He was proud of his Loyalist heritage. He attended school in Saint John but left at the age of seventeen to work in a local hardware store. Due to the War (1914-18) there were few workers available to maintain essential services. He later took correspondence courses and also learned a great deal about financing.



W m. A.C. Bennett

When he was seventeen he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force but the war ended before he was called up. “Go west, young man, go west” was the slogan in New Brunswick at that time. By the time he was twenty he had gone west to Edmonton and was again working in a hardware store. He took part in church activities, the Youth Group, the Tuxis Boys and taught Sunday School to Chinese young people who in later years expressed appreciation for his friendship at this time. It was at the Young People’s Group that he met Annie Elizabeth May Richards who became his wife in 1927. They could afford no wedding trip as he was only drawing \$100.00 a month from his partnership in a small furniture and hardware store and of this \$25.00 went for rent. In 1930, the Bennetts with their two children moved to British Columbia – briefly to Victoria and then to Kelowna. Bennett had not yet had his thirtieth birthday when he took over his Kelowna store. So began his long association with the Okanagan Valley.

As a young man in New Brunswick, he had developed an interest in politics. In 1941, he was elected to the British Columbia Legislature. In 1952, he pioneered the Social Credit Party in the province and subsequently was elected premier. He made a remarkable contribution to the Province by encouraging the building of roads and hydro dams for electricity. It was an era of great development.

The Loyalist descendant, farm boy, and hardware clerk from New Brunswick holds a unique place in Canadian and British Columbian history.

Sources: S. W. Jackman - Portrait of Premiers, an Informal History of British Columbia, Sidney, B. C. Gray’s Publishing 1969

Derik Pethnick - Men of British Columbia

R.B. Worley - The Wonderful World of W. A. C. Bennett, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart 1971

