

## The Beginnings of Dalhousie Medical School

(1867 - 68) Canada's Fifth School \*



DR. K. A. MacKENZIE '03

The first proposal to form a Medical School in Halifax came from the Board of Governors of Dalhousie University as indicated by the following extract from their minutes. "Dr. Tupper read a memorandum prepared by Professor Lawson relative to the Medical School at Kingston and, thereupon, it was moved by Mr. Joseph Howe, and seconded by Dr. Avery and unanimously Resolved—that the Secretary Communicate with the Medical Society and inquire if they would be willing to co-operate with the Board in establishing a Faculty of Medicine." It is interesting to refer here to the number of great Nova Scotians who were on the Board at this time. President James

Ross, Sir William Young, Hon. Joseph Howe, Dr. Charles Tupper, Dr. Avery and Rev. George Munro Grant, later the distinguished President of Queen's University. The Medical Society did not consider it expedient to proceed at this time for two reasons—(1) the lack of hospital facilities for clinical teaching,—(2) the illegality of obtaining bodies for the Anatomy Department.

The question was kept alive by frequent conferences of medical men. Some were in favour of forming a School and others were opposed. In December 1867, a special meeting of the Society at which were present Drs. Hattie, Slayter, Somers, Reid, Farrell and Woodill approved of the project and after drawing up a provisional slate of teachers, by-laws and regulations, submitted their views to the Board of Governors. The Passing of the Anatomy Act in 1868 removed the most serious objection to the School. This important act was largely due to the efforts of Dr. W. B. Webster, M.L.A. Kings.

On January 14th, 1868 the proposal was brought before the Board of Governors by Dr. A. P. Reid. A Committee consisting of Hon. J. W. Ritchie, Rev. George M. Grant and Professor Lawson was appointed to discuss the question with the members of the Medical Profession. The Committee report favourably and the proposal was accepted by the Board as indicated by the following minutes.

\* The others:—Montreal (French) 1823. McGill, 1829. King, Toronto, 1842. Queens, Kingston, 1854.

"The Board did not feel justified in refusing the offer of the gentlemen who proposed to form a Medical Faculty in connection with Dalhousie University, and the Faculty being ready and desirous to receive stu-

dents in the ensuing Spring, the Board saw no sufficient reason for postponing further action in the matter.

The Medical Faculty was as follows:

Rev. James Ross, D.D. ....	President Ex Officio
Wm. J. Almon, Esq., M.D. ....	President
Alexander P. Reid, Esq., M.D. ....	Dean & Secretary
Wm. J. Almon, Esq., M.D. ....	Lecturer on Obstetrics
Alexander G. Hattie, Esq., M.D. ....	Lecturer on Obstetrics
Edward A. Farrell, Esq., M.D. ....	Lecturer on Anatomy
Professor George Lawson	Lecturer on Chemistry
Alexander P. Reid, Esq., M.D. ....	Lecturer on Physiology & Institutes of Medicine.
A. H. Woodill, Esq., M.D. ....	Lecturer on Materia Medica
James Ross, Esq., M.D. ....	Demonstrator of Anatomy
Thomas R. Almon, Esq., M.D. ....	Prosector & Lecturer on Anatomy

And so the Medical Faculty of Dalhousie came into existence in 1868. Announcements of the opening of the new School were made in the Halifax Papers and the Provincial Medical Journal. A calendar was issued and circulated. The Faculty was prepared to start teaching at once and was given one small room in the old University Building on the Grand Parade where the City Hall now stands. All lectures were given in this one room. The Anatomy room was in the attic, poorly lighted and reached by a ladder. Fourteen students registered in the first class, one from P. E. I., one from New Brunswick and twelve from Nova Scotia.

The first session was opened with an inaugural address by the Dean, Dr. A. P. Reid in the University Hall. It was felt that only primary subjects would be taught. McGill, Harvard and The College of Physicians and Surgeons agreed to accept the attendance of the Halifax School and it was anticipated that other Schools would grant the same privileges.

In 1870 it was decided to proceed

with the formation of a full School, the first session of which began in November 1870, and the first class of five graduated in 1872. Some additions were made to the teaching staff and the more important teachers were given the rank of Professor.

It is interesting to note at this point that in 1843 there were fifteen physicians in Halifax. All but one had Scottish Degrees. 12 from Edinburgh and two from Glasgow. They not only brought the best medical knowledge of the time to their native province but having lived for years in the cultural atmosphere of Edinburgh, they were well fitted to make a unique contribution to the medical and non-medical life of Nova Scotia. Some of these men were still active in 1868.

In 1868, there were thirty physicians in Halifax. Eleven had Scottish degrees. Two were graduates of McGill, and seventeen had American Degrees, Penn. 3 The College of Physicians and Surgeons 7, Bellevue 2, Harvard 3, Chicago 1. Some

of this group were opposed to the formation of the School; some were indifferent and not helpful. The burden of carrying out the scheme fell on the shoulders of fifteen men.

Dr. D. McN. Parker first used ether in 1847 and Dr. W. M. Almon first used chloroform in 1848. This year 1868 was ten or fifteen years before the adoption of Listerian methods which opened the door for Major Surgery. Surgery, as of then consisted of amputations and superficial tumors. Minor surgery such as wounds, circumcision, opening of abscesses, trimming of wounds, extraction of teeth, hernia if strangulated,

venesections were done. Trocars were used to tap ascites, leg oedema, hydrocele and chest. The Potain Aspirator was in use and a distended bladder was relieved by a trocar. Fractures and dislocated joints were treated. Anatomy was well studied. Physiology was beginning. Chemistry was well taught. The major subject was Materia Medica based on the London Pharmacopia. Only a few drugs had established virtues. Cinchona in Malaria, Mercurry in Syphilis, Iron in Anaemia, and Digitalis in dropsy and heart failure. The other numerous drugs some of which had been known for centuries were



**THE FIRST CLASS OF DALHOUSIE MEDICAL SCHOOL**

**Front Row (left to right)**

John F. Smith. James Weir, Harvard 1872

**Second Row (left to right)**

William J. Clarke. Duncan Campbell, Harvard 1869. Thomas MacKenzie, Harvard. Abner Hodgson, Harvard 1869. Roderick Sutherland, Dal 1872

**Third Row (left to right)**

Peter Henry MacMillan. Ewan Cameron, P.E.I., Pictou. Daniel MacIntosh, Harvard 1871. Edward B. Chandler. G. H. Marshall DeWolfe, Dal. 1872.

used empiracally. External applications had a wide use; plasters, poultices, liniments, salves, fly blisters, inhalations, heat and cold, red flannel, etc. The hypodermic syringe was known but had a limited use as the chemists had not yet made soluble hypodermic tablets of active principles. The clinical thermometer came into use about 1866. Physicians had a fair knowledge of the clinical symptoms of most of the infectious diseases. Vaccine for smallpox was the only valuable immuniaztion substance.

The physicians had no X-ray, no bacteriology, no laboratory aids in diagnosis, no instruments of precision such as ophthalmoscope, laryngoscope, eystoscope. The microscope was in use but it was years later that the oil immersion microscope came into use.

Obstetrics was gradually drifting away from the midwives and became an important part of general practice. Date of forceps use is questionable.

### MEDICAL TRAINING IN NORTH AMERICA IN 1868

In 1850, there were about seventy registered physicians in Nova Scotia. Fifty had old country qualifications; Edinborough 29, Glasgow 8, Aberdeen 2, St. Andrews 1. About ten had diplomas from London or Ireland. Twenty had degrees from the recently organized American Schools: The College of Physicians and Surgeons, N. Y. 6, Penn. 8, Jefferson 3, Harvard 3. These were registered under the Medical Act of 1829. There were still many unregistered practitioners, as there was still no pressure

put on those who had only apprenticeships or were self styled physicians. In 1868, the additions were almost all American. Four came from McGill, Harvard 30, The College of Physicians and Surgeons, N. Y. 15, Penn. 13, Jefferson 4, Bellevue 4. Training in London and Edinburgh was in a healthy and advanced state. Nova Scotia needed more physicians, but the Nova Scotian boys with medical ambitions could not afford to go to Europe, so they grasped the opportunity to get diplomas from the American schools, which were struggling to improve their teaching, still far below the British Standards. Anatomy was well taught and there was some good didactic teaching but clinical teaching for various reasons fell far short of what was desirable. Certificates of apprenticeships was accepted as part of the course. Student paid their fee, usually one hundred dollars, and were given a schedule of lectures which they might attend. Control of attendance was poor. Examinations were held at stated intervals and if the student was successful, he was granted a degree. It was possible for a student to get a degree with little hospital training and without ever having seen a woman in labor. The Microscope was rarely used.

This was the background of medical training when Dalhousie decided to launch a program which would be not much inferior to existing schools and which would offer the possibility of improvement in the future.

### IN SUMMARY

It is clear that the proponents of the Medical School were a remark-

able group. Eleven of the fifteen completed fifty years of active professional life. They were all General Practitioners. The specialist had not appeared on the scene. Biographies are too long to be included in this paper but a few of their achievements may be mentioned. Four played a leading role in the organization of Canadian Medical Assoc. Tupper was first president and he was succeeded by Parker. Black was a Vice-President and DeWolfe was secretary. Parker read papers before the Mechanics Institute and is probably the only Nova Scotian to contribute to the Edinburgh Medical Journal. Almon became a Senator. Gilpin did not practise much and was mainly interested in Science. He was one of the founders of the Nova Scotia Institute of Science and contributed thirty-five papers. Somers contributed twenty papers to the Institute and was well qualified to be the first professor of Physiology. Cogswell became a Consultant in London, Eng. and wrote medical and lay articles. He is remembered as the donor of money which established the Cogswell Library. Books from the Cogswell fund are purchased each year for the Medical and Dental library. Black was the first man to use a stethoscope in Nova Scotia. DeWolfe took a special interest in mental diseases and was the first Superintendent of the Nova Scotia Hospital, then named Mount Hope. Farrell and John Black shared honors with Dr. John Stewart of Pictou as the pioneers in major surgery following the use of Listerian methods. Slayter reported five cases of successful

Cataract operations in 1868. It should be noted that they did all their writing in long-hand as the typewriter had not been invented.

Having noted some of the conditions of medical training in 1868 and noted the professional and intellectual qualities of founders the question may now be asked. Was it a wise and worth while move to establish a Medical School in Halifax in 1868? Alberta in 1913, and British Columbia in 1952 gave substantial financial aid to their medical schools. It was not possible at any time for Nova Scotia or the Maritime Provinces to do likewise. The answer to our question is clear if one surveys the present set up. Look at our hospitals, The Victoria General, Children's Hospital, Halifax Infirmary, Infectious Disease Hospital, Tuberculosis Hospital, Grace Maternity Hospital and Camp Hill Hospital. Look at the Public Health Centre, Pathological Laboratory, Medical Science Building and Forrest Hall still housing the Departments of Anatomy and Biology. Glance at the Nova Scotia Sanatorium and the larger hospitals in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, all of which are taking a hand in the teaching of Dalhousie students and graduates. Look at the latest Dalhousie Calendar and read the list of teachers—one hundred and sixty-six. Finally get to know the physicians of to-day who are proud to call themselves Dalhousie Graduates. The answer to our question is—it was certainly worth while and the Founders builded better than they knew.