

Sidelights On Early Medical Teaching In Halifax

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FEBRUARY 25, 1935, marked the sixty-eighth birthday of the Medical Faculty of Dalhousie University. On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Faculty of Medicine, Dr. K. A. MacKenzie prepared an excellent paper dealing with the early history of the medical school, which was published in the form of an editorial in the Nova Scotia Medical Bulletin, June, 1928. From this account as well as from other reliable sources of information, it appears that the Medical Faculty of Dalhousie had a comparatively long period of gestation which terminated paradoxically, in premature birth, a phenomenon not at all uncommon among medical faculties in general.

Any reference to the history of the Medical Faculty of Dalhousie, should take into account certain salient facts to be found in the history of Dalhousie as a whole, since these facts played such an important part in the organization of the medical school.

Founded in 1818, Dalhousie embodied the idea of religious and political tolerance in an extremely conservative community. A building was erected on the site of the present City Hall at Halifax, and was officially *Dalhousie College*. However, no classes were held and the building was used for various purposes, a studio for a painting club, and once, as a cholera hospital. It was not until 1838 that an attempt to bring the college into proper functioning was successful. That year the Rev. Thomas McCulloch, DD., the founder of Pictou Academy, was appointed President. Later, two staff members were appointed and for the first time in twenty years Dalhousie had a President, a staff and, some students. However, political and religious dissention was rife in the community and instead of support for an existing institution, one of the results was the establishment of a new one, Acadia. The whole situation reached a climax in 1843, when Dr. McCulloch died. The Board of Governors decided to close the college as such, and one wing of the building was rented to the post office, while the other was occupied by the Mechanics' Institute, the fore-runner of the Nova Scotia Technical College.

Meanwhile, illiteracy was prevalent throughout the province. School attendance was not compulsory and the closing of Dalhousie seemed to be the death blow to higher education in Halifax region. About 1860 there was a revival of interest in education, and under the leadership of Dr. Charles Tupper (later Premier of Canada), school attendance became compulsory and the need for higher education became generally recognized. By an act of the legislature in 1863, *Dalhousie College* was re-organized, and liberal arrangements were made for the appointments of members of the Board of Governors and the staff in order to make possible one strong non-demoninational university to serve the entire province. A new President was appointed, the Rev. James Ross, and an exceedingly able

staff. The institution was to build its curriculum on the twin pillars of the Classics and Mathematics. Thus we have a brief sketch of an institution forced to languish during the first twenty years of its existence, permitted to function for five years, becoming defunct for another generation, and finally emerging from a "Renaissance". Under such circumstances it is difficult to comprehend the degree of energy and enthusiasm of both the Board and the staff, which was to be expressed one year later in the ambitious proposal to form a Medical Faculty in spite of most discouraging conditions.

Among the new members of the staff of the New Dalhousie was George Lawson, Professor of Chemistry. Professor Lawson came to Dalhousie direct from the Medical Faculty of Queen's College at Kingston. It was he who prepared a memorandum on the Medical School at Kingston for Dr. Charles Tupper then a member of Dalhousie Board of Governors. On November 28th, 1864, Dr. Tupper read this memorandum at a meeting of the Board. "Then Mr. Howe," later the distinguished statesman "and Dr. Avery," whose name is perpetuated by the Avery prize which is still awarded to students of the University, "presented the following Resolution:—Resolved that the Secretary communicate with the Medical Society and enquire if they would be willing to co-operate with the Board in establishing a Faculty of Medicine". This was passed unanimously. After a lapse of several months, we find in the minutes of a Board Meeting held on April 27th, 1864, the following statement: "The Secretary also reported that the Medical Society did not think it expedient at present to co-operate with the Board in the formation of a Medical Faculty in connection with the College". The reasons for this action, on the part of the Medical Society, are not explained in any of the published articles dealing specifically with the history of the Medical Faculty of Dalhousie University. However, an article on the "First Proposal of a Medical School in Halifax", written by D. C. Harvey, Provincial Archivist; and appearing in the Halifax Mail, January 12th, 1933, provides an excellent basis for conjecture on the subject.

Professor Harvey produces evidence through documents in his possession as Provincial Archivist, which show that strong representations were made to the Provincial Government to establish a medical school in Halifax as early as 1832. He has kindly loaned his own manuscript to the writer with an invitation to use all or any part of it in this article. The first document deals with a report on conditions at the poor house and a petition. It was presented to the House of Assembly in the session of 1832 and was reported on by a committee of which Jonathan Blanchard was Chairman. The first part of the report deals with intolerable conditions which permitted indigent old people, sick children, those with infectious diseases, incapacitated sailors, women in labor and lunatics to be mixed in what was intended to be a poor-house; and recommends that an orphan asylum and a new hospital be built as soon as possible. The document specifically states that the Committee is speaking for a group of petitioners from the medical profession with respect to a new hospital.

It is then pointed out that except for one Apothecary to take charge of the Dispensary, the hospital would receive medical assistance free of any expense to the Public. "The Medical Gentlemen would gladly give their attendance for the emoluments and other advantages which the situation of Hospital Physician would afford. The emoluments would arise from the fees of the students, and the other advantages from their own improvement, and consequent increase of medical reputation". The next two paragraphs read as follows: "This subject the Committee consider deserves the serious attention of your Honourable House; on another ground, it is every way desirable that the Province should be rendered independent of other countries in regard to all the Professions. Already ample provision is made for education for the Bar and Pulpit, and a Medical School is an important Desideratum in Provincial improvement.

This can only be furnished by well regulated institutions for the sick, open to Institutions in Medical Science. Such an institution, even if it is not for some years sufficient to supercede to students the necessity of a visit to other countries, would immediately form a useful initiatory school, and save part of the usual attendance elsewhere; but even with regard to the gentlemen in practice themselves, it is desirable, on public grounds, that they should have every opportunity for improvement, which public Medical Institutions can afford. With all possible facilities for this purpose, it is to be feared that practitioners in this young country may fall behind the general advancement of the age in medical knowledge."

The second document is in the form of a petition and reads as follows:

P. A. N. S. Vol. 311; Doc: 16.

To The Honourable the Representatives of the Province of Nova Scotia in General Assembly now convened at Halifax.

The Petition of Edward Carritt, William Grigor, Alexander James, Samuel L. Bishop, John Stirling—

Humbly Sheweth

That the establishment of Medical Schools in every country are confessedly of great advantage and importance to the health and welfare of the public.

That when properly established they are attended with little expense; and frequently make large contribution to the funds of the Institutions to which they are attached. That, in addition to defraying their own expenses, they are essentially necessary to all persons who enter upon the study and practice of medicine. And that their proper management tends always to relieve the public from the impositions and dangerous pretensions of empirics and persons deficient in medical education.

That the public generally, as well as the medical practitioners of Halifax, at present, lie under many serious disadvantages from want of an Hospital, combined with a proper Medical School, and as the medical practitioners have no means of giving practical instruction to their pupils, parents are deterred from entering their sons as apprentices of medicine, and from this cause the profession suffers materially in the public estimation.

That the public Institutions of every country are the chief source of medical information; and that the public are always best served when Medical Schools are combined with Hospitals for the sick.

That the Poor House has now in a great measure altered its original character, and the number of the sick, and the various and important cases of disease admitted therein, demonstrate in the strongest manner the value and importance of the Poor House as a Medical Hospital.

That your Petitioners view with satisfaction the advantages to be derived from the Poor House as a public Hospital; but at the same time can not but express their regret at the total absence of all medical instruction in this seminary, and the neglect of the resources which it presents as a medical school.

That your Petitioners are desirous of turning these resources to the best advantage, and pray that your Honorable House will adopt a new arrangement in the medical department of the Poor House, and enable your Petitioners to render it more beneficial to the public, and advantageous to the Profession.

That they will attend the Poor House Hospital for an hour daily, deliver instruction to the pupils on the *Principles and Practise of Medicine and Surgery*, and perform all medical duties in the same manner, as performed in the Hospitals of Great Britain. And by so doing they are of opinion that many pupils will be attracted to the establishment, and by the fees collected for medical instruction, the expense of the medical department will be greatly reduced, and ultimately defray its own expenses.

That your Practitioners look with regret upon the present medical system followed in the Poor House as a grievous monopoly; and calculated to render a public Hospital a source of private interest and convenience; and as the important medical duties of the Poor House are now so numerous, they are of opinion that no single practitioner extensively engaged in private practise can alone perform the multiplied services which are required.

That your Petitioners consider themselves and their pupils altogether excluded from the privilege of the Poor House and that their visits there can only be made by invitation of the present medical attendant and as a matter of favor.

That your Petitioners and their pupils can derive no advantage from the Poor House under its present management, and in consequence of reasons which have been already stated, pray that your Honorable House will be pleased to open its medical department to all medical practitioners, who being regularly qualified, shall be disposed to give their attendance.

And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray, etc., etc.

EDWARD CARRITT
WILLIAM GRIGOR
ALEXR. F. JAMES
SAML. L. BISHOP
JNO. STIRLING.

(See Journals of Assembly for Nova Scotia, 1832.)

Thus, it will be noted that thirty-two years before the Dalhousie proposal, at least two different plans for a Medical School had been up for serious discussion with the Provincial Government. One of them made a plea for a new hospital in order to establish good teaching facilities; the other believed that the old Poor House would be sufficient, providing it were made open to all practitioners and their students. What provision for teaching existed during the next thirty-five years, is obscure. In 1820 there were two private hospitals, but no one seems to know where they were located or how long they were in existence. In 1829, under the date of November 27th, the *Acadian Recorder* states:

"We are happy to perceive by an advertisement, which we insert in another part of our paper, that a Dispensary which has been projected by two of the medical practitioners in this town, and which has already had two meetings of its subscribers for the arrangements of bye-laws and other regulations, is in a sufficiently formed state to open for the accommodation of the poor on Monday next. We understand that a room will be opened in a central part of the town for an hour each day, etc., etc. (the Halifax Visiting Dispensary).

Construction of a City Hospital was begun in 1857 and finished in 1859. It appears that plumbing, gas and heating arrangements were defective to the extent that the building was abandoned as a hospital in 1860. During the next six years it was used for various purposes, including a military store house. In 1867 it began to function as the Provincial and City Hospital. From this time on the institution continued to grow, and in 1887, in honor of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, it was rededicated as the *Victoria General Hospital*. The poor-house, sometimes known as Bridewell Hospital, was built on the site of the First Baptist Church, at the corner of Queen Street and Spring Garden Road, in 1790, but its value as a teaching hospital during the years preceding the organization of the Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine is doubtful. There is also documentary evidence to show that there was a hospital of 32 beds, the Hospital for Inebriates. It was in existence during the sixties and early seventies, but, both the site and the duration of its activities are obscure. For thirty-two years the "Medical Gentlemen" of Halifax had been struggling along with the problem of medical teaching, troubled by inadequate hospital facilities, the questions of student fees and other emoluments, and last but certainly not least, the importance of religion and politics. One can hardly escape the conjecture that dissention and jealousy was present in the Profession, that any meetings or attempts to pour oil on the troubled waters came to naught because of individual or clique ambitions, and that, because the members of the Profession were "Gentlemen" there are no available documents or records to enlighten us on the true facts of the situation.

The Dalhousie proposal probably failed because of the same fundamental reasons which had prevented the organization of medical teaching in the past.

(This is the first of a series of four articles, kindly prepared by Prof. Bean for this journal. The second installment will appear in our October number.—Editor).