

THE HALIFAX MEDICAL COLLEGE, 1875 - 1911



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It seems difficult to realize that a Medical School which died of financial starvation after five years of existence could be resurrected and live. However, that is just what happened. The same group of physicians, determined to teach their art, founded the Halifax Medical College when Dalhousie was forced to abandon its first effort. In 1875 the new school was granted an Act of Incorporation. The Dean was Dr. A. P. Reid and it had a faculty of some seven or eight teachers.

The Provincial and City Hospital was its chief clinical teaching centre. The City Poor House, operated jointly by the City of Halifax and the Province of Nova Scotia provided additional facilities especially in Midwifery. The Halifax Dispensary Ser-

vice gave outpatient experience and home obstetrics. A wooden building was erected at the north east corner of what is now College and Carleton Streets. It was finally torn down and replaced by a modern residence in 1928.

It is well to recall that the single building which was then the Provincial and City Hospital, erected as the City Hospital in 1857, was still an isolated structure in the South Common. The City Poor House was at the site of the present City Hospital. The Exhibition Grounds occupied the site of All Saint's Cathedral. West of this area was the house at Studley and the Oakland Estate. To the south was Gorsebrook. North and East a few houses were scattered along Spring Garden Road and South Park Streets. It would be several years yet before the Forrest Building would be erected to replace the Dalhousie College Building on the Grand Parade. Not a single unit of the present great teaching centre, apart from what has been mentioned, was even considered as a remote future possibility. Hospitals were for the poor; the well-to-do were cared for at home.

The Members of the College Faculty were, with one exception, practitioners in the City or in Dartmouth. That exception was Charles E. Puttner, Apothecary at the Hospital, who was lecturer in Pharmacy. He was the one individual who taught in the College throughout its entire life span. When the Provincial and



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A recent report to the American College of Surgeons described a modern miracle brought about by a simply designed artificial lung made from oil-based plastic. The new lung, a transparent plastic box equipped with motor-driven piston, did the breathing for a patient whose ribs and pelvic bones were severely injured. Pumping air gently in and out of his lungs as in normal breathing, the artificial lung permitted the man's breathing muscles to stop working until his ribs knit. The apparatus is also being used in treating polio and other chest afflictions. Like artificial arteries and bone parts, the plastic lung is a revolutionary and vital development resulting from the use of oil-based plastics in the field of medicine.



ALWAYS LOOK TO IMPERIAL FOR THE BEST

City Hospital opened in 1868 he began his appointment there. He died in 1920 and is buried in Camp Hill Cemetery near the Carleton Street entrance.

Preclinical instruction according to present ideas was sketchy in the extreme except for Anatomy. That subject was taught fully and with great enthusiasm, as it was of paramount importance in the Surgery of that day. Therapeutics had a place of early importance in the Course. In its earlier years there was no bacteriology and pathology was a study of gross specimens. Physiology was in its infancy and biochemistry as a separate entity was unknown. Chloroform as an anaesthetic had been in use since 1849, but it would be still two years (1877) before Dr. Joseph Lister would deliver his first London lectures on Antiseptic Surgery. Surgery was done with the great possible speed and dexterity, but it was invariably followed by the appearance of "laudable pus", so that the hospital atmosphere was, as a commentator remarked, "noisome in the extreme".

Once under way the College made progress slowly. The only source of revenue was the modest fees paid by the few students. These were spent on the upkeep of the College building and the payment of its Custodian. The Faculty received nothing. It met regularly and at the end of a term if receipts did not equal expenditures, the Faculty dug deep in its pockets and made up the deficit.

At the end of its first ten years the College could regard its achieve-

ments with some modest satisfaction. It was a "going concern", and had overcome all early difficulties. Where Dalhousie had failed it had succeeded. It had graduated several classes and granted its degree to a few each year, but it was becoming painfully aware of the need of University affiliation for the benefit of its product. So in 1885 affiliation was effected with Dalhousie and a brighter future was anticipated. But a trifling incident upset everything, an incident which clearly indicates the character and principles of the men who were the Halifax Medical College.

Each year one or more graduates were appointed as Resident House Surgeons to the Provincial and City Hospital. This was a coveted post and the candidates were first submitted to an examination by the Visiting Staff, which by the way, was largely identical with the College Faculty. In 1885 there were two candidates for the vacancy. Both took the examinations and both passed, but one with much higher marks than the other. The man with the lower marks belonged to Halifax, the other was from outside it. The Hospital Board of Management met and found that since both Candidates had passed the examination, it would exercise its prerogative and make its own choice. That choice favored the man with the lower marks.

At once "the fat was in the fire". The Staff maintained that the better Candidate should have the post; the Board of Management stoutly held the opposite view. Finally, after it had assured itself that the patients would be cared for by non-Faculty

practitioners, the entire Staff resigned from the Hospital in protest. By this act the College cut off its main source of Clinical instruction and shortly afterwards closed its doors. The work of ten years was sacrificed for a principle, but one which seemed so important to the Faculty that it made it without a single misgiving.

The period of storm which attended these events has been referred to as, "the great row of '85". It stirred the City and the Province to their depths. The Legislature appointed a Committee to investigate the operation of the Provincial and City Hospital. So violent and bitter was some of the testimony recorded that one member of the House said it should be burned by the Public Hangman. After the storm came the calm and with it the start of a new and better era. The Provincial and City Hospital was taken over wholly by the Province and in 1887, Queen's Victoria's Golden Jubilee, was renamed Victoria General Hospital. It at once began a building program which increased its capacity by 100 beds. The Faculty of the Halifax Medical College came back as its Visiting Staff, and in 1889 a complete affiliation with Dalhousie resulted. The Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine functioned as an Examining Body, that of the College as a Teaching Body.

At this juncture several young men joined the Hospital Staff and the Faculty who were to carry the College eventually into a new era. Of note among these were Dr. Guy Carleton Jones, who became General Jones in World War I, Dr. A. I. Mader, and somewhat later Dr. L. M.

Silver, Dr. M. A. B. Smith, Dr. N. E. Mackay, Dr. D. A. Campbell and Dr. Murdock. Dr. M. A. Curry who was Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in 1885 was the only medical member of the Faculty at that time to be with the College when it finally closed its doors in 1911. Its Professor of Anatomy, Dr. A. W. H. Lindsay, a great teacher and for many years Registrar of the Provincial Medical Board was a founding member of the Medical Council of Canada.

While the College continued to prosper in some ways it was up to the very end hard pressed for funds. In 1896 its revenues were still from Students' fees and an annual grant of \$800.00 from the Province. A gift of £1000 made by Dr. Cogswell, supported its library. The first instructor in bacteriology, Dr. W. H. Hattie came once a week from the Nova Scotia Hospital to give lectures and demonstrations and carried his own compound microscope. Bacteria were cultured and incubated over night by the simple expedient of accompanying the professor to bed in a pocket in his nightshirt. There were still no salaries of any sort paid and the teaching load was heroically upheld by men who devoted at least one half their time to unremunerative effort, and the rest to carrying on a practice with a horse drawn vehicle as the best possible conveyance. Repairs to the College building were a large item in the annual budget. The Janitor, Mr. Skelly, was required to shingle the College building during one summer vacation as part of his duties and did not relish it at all. Skelly,

by the way, became an integral part of the institution. He was not only custodian without and within, but the Keeper of the Anatomy Rooms and their subjects. An Irishman with a vitriolic disposition, who constantly sucked on a stubby clay pipe, he was a source of good natured fun to generations of students. It would seem that this extended likewise to the Faculty for at one meeting a solemn fact was disposed of and duly recorded: The Faculty had gone on a picnic and had, for the purpose, chartered one of the Dartmouth ferries, spreading the festive board in the vehicular interspace. Skelly was taken along to "sarve the tables", and during the festivities lost his watch. Some member of the Faculty in a moment of exuberance had thrown it overboard. So once again, as in the past, the Faculty "shelled out" but this time for a new watch for Skelly.

Although the College still retained the power to grant degrees it had long since abandoned the practice before the following incident occurred: For many years the Faculty had been repeatedly coaxed by Charles E. Putter to give him a course which would lead to the degree (self conceived) of Master of Pharmacy. On as many occasions he was "put off until next year". Long after he had abandoned hope some bright member of the Faculty revived the idea and went one better. On a never to be forgotten evening, Charlie was given an enormous diploma and in very solemn fashion was granted the De-

gree of Doctor of Pharmacy. He accepted it as a long delayed but well deserved recognition of his talents and carried the title not only to his grave but to be duly recorded on his tombstone.

In spite of the excellence of its teaching, up to a point, the demands of the new Medicine were beyond the powers of the impoverished College to supply. In 1911 it completed the instruction of its last Class, and the Halifax Medical College was at an end. For thirty-five years it had carried on the only medical teaching program in Canada, east of Montreal. It had existed on a "shoe string" budget. In spite of that it turned out a large number of excellent physicians who brought credit to their school both at home and abroad. I think this can be explained by the two dominant factors in the life of the College—its Faculty and its Clinical facilities. Its Faculty had an intense desire to teach, transcending and personal convenience or thought of reward. Moreover they were good teachers and aside from weaker moments, professional idealists. They had an abundance of clinical case material of which they made as much use as possible. They inspired their students professionally and they trained them practically. They were graduated with confidence that they could cope with the demands of practice in that day and generation. If we do as well in our time we need not be ashamed.