

A Century of Service

(Part Two of a Series)

On September 16, 1902, 344 dentists — almost a quarter of all the dentists in Canada at the time — met in Montreal with a vision of a national association that would bond from sea to sea the ideals, aspirations and goals of their profession.

To recognize the contributions of the countless men and women who have done so much to elevate the oral health care and well-being of Canadians over almost five centuries, the CDA is proudly publishing a series of 11 historical articles with particular emphasis on the role and influence of the Canadian Dental Association in the 20th century.

The Birth of a Self-Governing Profession

The latter part of the 19th century was a time of great change in the political structure and boundaries of Canada. At the same time there was significant change in the art, science and political structure of dentistry.

By 1860, two decades after the *Act of Union* of 1840 united Upper and Lower Canada into a country consisting of the provinces of Canada East and Canada West, the total population was about 2.5 million. Another 800,000 people lived in the colonies of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. As this great land rapidly grew in populace and stature there was likewise an increasing awareness of the advantages to be gained by uniting the country into a more cohesive political order.

Nor did this awareness of the advantages of a more cohesive order rest only in the political realm. Dentists concerned with the welfare of the public became increasingly mindful of the need to regulate the practice of dentistry. The exact number of dentists in Canada in the early 1860s is unknown. Directories published in 1858 for Canada East, Canada West, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick listed only 50 permanent resident dentists. The directories did not count the numerous and all too often unqualified itinerants.



1851:
Nelson Goodyear
patents vulcanite
*(Dentistry Canada
Museum)*

Therein lay the problem. Because proper regulations to protect the public were lacking, anyone with a box of dental instruments could claim to be a dentist. These practitioners roamed the country at will and more often than not made outrageous claims of ability. The unsuspecting patient had no way to distinguish good dentistry from bad — the qualified from the quack. The qualified of the day were mainly medical people with some dental training or were graduates of an indentureship program. And an increasing number were graduates of new dental schools in the United States — the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery being the first in the world when it was established in 1840.

This small, dedicated group of the country's qualified practitioners knew something had to be done to regulate their profession. Previous attempts by two Montreal dentists, Aldis Bernard in 1840 and Charles Brewster in 1860, to obtain legislation had failed. Ontario dentists were to be more successful.

Among the high-minded practitioners seeking a new order for dentistry was **Dr. Barnabus Day** (right). Dr. Day, who was born on a farm near Kingston, received his dental training by articling for six months. While continuing to practice dentistry he pursued studies at Queen's University and received a medical degree in 1862. With this background and with encouragement from Dr. Brewster in



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Montreal, Dr. Day called a meeting of Ontario dentists at the Queen's Hotel in Toronto on January 3, 1867. Although only nine dentists attended the meeting the event bears great historical significance. No minutes have survived, but records attest to four critical decisions:

- an effort be made to secure legislation
- dentists become organized
- a suitable constitution be drafted, and
- a further meeting be held in July.

BNA Act: July 1, 1867

Concurrent with Dr. Day's successful meeting with the handful of Ontario dentists in January 1867 was the impending proclamation of the *British North America Act*. A long time in the making, the *BNA Act* gave birth to a united Canada from sea to sea. Its Sections 92 and 93 would influence profoundly not only what Dr. Day wanted for his Ontario dentists but everything involved with dentistry in every corner of the country to the present time. Health and education were designated as prerogatives of each Province.

Ontario Dental Association: 1867

When Barnabus Day and his group of dedicated dentists next met in Cobourg on July 2, 1867, there were 31 dentists in attendance. The main objective of the meeting was the adoption of the constitution and bylaws that gave birth to the Ontario Dental Association. The very first order of business of the newly formed Association was the decision to seek formal government legislation. A committee was struck to draft a bill to be placed before the next meeting in January 1868 in Toronto.

Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario: 1868

Barnabus Day and his ODA committee members worked extremely hard over the six-month period to put together the *Act Respecting Dentistry*. It received first reading in the Ontario legislature on January 30 and second reading February 11 and on March 4, 1868, the bill became law.

By granting full powers for licensing and regulating dentistry to the 12-member elected board of directors of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario, the Act became the first of its type anywhere in the world. Not only did it give the profession the right to govern itself, but it also became a model for similar legislation for each of the provinces in the newly created Dominion of Canada.

Canada and the Profession Grow Together

The creation of the Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867, saw the four provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick usher in a whole new political way of life for their 3.5 million inhabitants. Similarly the creation of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario in 1868 opened the door to self-government for the estimated few hundred dentists scattered throughout the country.

Dental Association of the Province of Quebec: 1869

Only six months after the *Act Respecting Dentistry* received final reading in Ontario, on September 2, 1868, 15 Quebec dentists held a meeting in Montreal to review the Ontario Act clause by clause. This initial meeting led to the April 4, 1869 legislation that incorporated the Dental Association of the Province of Quebec. Dr. Aldis Bernard served as the Association's first president and Dr. W. George Beers as its secretary. None of this was really very new to Bernard: he had first proposed self-regulation back in 1840.



Dr. George Beers (left) who indentured in 1856, was destined to be one of the most influential individuals in the profession. Over his lifetime as a dentist and a specialist, he would serve as author, editor, sportsman, soldier and statesman.

The Ontario and Quebec Boards — and the corresponding bodies in other provinces to this very day — found that the task of separating the qualified from the unqualified was not an easy one. George Beers, at a meeting in Montreal during a discussion on fees, set the tone on what professionalism is all about: *"If we consider dentistry a mere trade, then let us agree to work for a little over cost as the shoemaker who makes our shoes; but if a profession, let us charge for our brains."*

Once dental acts had been passed in Ontario and Quebec, similar legislation in other provinces of the Dominion soon followed — mainly through the individual efforts of a dedicated few. Gullett, in his *History of Dentistry in Canada*, states it well: "In each province, some one dentist was responsible for first gaining support of his colleagues for the objectives of a dental act, and then having the patience and endurance necessary to secure the legislation."

Manitoba Dental Association: 1883

James L. Benson, who was destined to become the "Father of Dentistry" in Manitoba, first went west in 1870 as a militia lieutenant with an Expeditionary Force sent to

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put down the Red River Rebellion led by Louis Riel. He returned to Ontario a few years later and apprenticed to Dr. Jacob Neelands in Lindsay. Returning to Winnipeg in 1877 as Dr. Benson, (left), he established the first dental practice in Manitoba and successfully led 17 other dentists in establishing an

act to incorporate the Manitoba Dental Association. This was achieved on July 7, 1883. Registration was set at \$40.00 and yearly dues were \$2.00. Dr. Benson was elected the first MDA president and served in this leadership position for nine years.

College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia: 1886



Thomas Joseph Jones (left), who was born in Ontario and received his dental education in the 1860s, was also a “Father of Dentistry” — but not in his home province. After practising in Ontario for 20 years and serving as president of the Ontario Dental Society in 1877, he moved to Victoria in 1884. Used to practising within the

boundaries set out by a legislative act, it was natural for Dr. Jones to press for formal legislation in his newly adopted province. The first act in British Columbia in 1886 provided for the appointment of a Board by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council.

In 1908 a new act created the College of Dental Surgeons of British Columbia and provided for the election of a council by members of the College.

New Brunswick Dental Society: 1890

In New Brunswick in 1890, Dr. C.A. Murray of Moncton, along with a small group of dedicated dentists — and after several years of failure — saw their efforts rewarded with an act establishing the New Brunswick Dental Society.

The first elected officers were president A.J. McAvenney, vice-president B.H. Torrens and secretary James M. McGee. **Dr. McGee** (right), of Saint John, was the first of 40 dentists in the province to register under the new act. The fee was to be no more than \$3.00 and not less than \$1.00. Practising without registration was subject to a fine of \$20.00 a day.



Nova Scotia Dental Association: 1891



Gullett reports that in the province of Nova Scotia no man worked as tirelessly for as many years to bring about a dental act as **Dr. Alfred Chipman Cogswell** (left) of Halifax. Born in Cornwallis in 1834, Dr. Cogswell first indentured to a dentist in Portland, Maine, and then attended the Philadelphia Dental College for one winter in 1869.

The new act established the Nova Scotia Dental Association with an original membership of 68 dentists. Candidates for licensure had to have been a student for 36 months with a qualified preceptor or had to have studied for 36 months in a dental college.

Prince Edward Island Dental Association: 1891



Though it did not name an association or society as a governing body — probably because there were only seven dentists practising on the Island — a dental act came into force in Prince Edward Island in 1891. The legislation was secured mainly through the efforts of one dentist, **Dr. John S. Bagnall** — the first

native Islander to practice with a dental degree. It was not until 1901 that an association was formed with Dr. Bagnall, Charlottetown, elected president, Dr. F.A. Lefeury, Summerside, vice-president, and J.H. Ayeres, Charlottetown, treasurer.

Amendments in 1904 and 1906 clarified who was entitled to practice on the Island and established an Examination Board. By 1908 the 109,000 residents of Prince Edward Island were served by nineteen dentists.

Newfoundland Dental Association: 1893

Apart from reports of occasional itinerant dentists, the early history of dentistry in Newfoundland is practically unknown. The first resident dentist of record was an American, Dr. Brunet in 1870. When the first dental legislation was enacted in 1893 there were only four or five dentists living in Newfoundland. Although the first act provided for a Dental Board of four physicians or laymen and three dentists, it appeared inactive until 1900 when **Dr. Whitman Smith Goodwin** (left) became the first registered dentist to receive a licence to practice.



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By 1908 with a population of 224,000 Newfoundland still had only five dentists, and at the time of entering Confederation in 1949 there were 17 dentists serving a population of 360,000.

The North West Territories: 1889

The North West Territories Council adopted an ordinance for control of dentistry in 1889, reportedly without consulting the dentists. Dr. Walter D. Cowan, an 1888 graduate of the Baltimore College of Dentistry, came to Regina when it was little more than a village and was the moving force behind the 11 dentists in the Territories seeking amendments to an ordinance which wasn't working very well. Finally, in 1897 the North West Dental Association was empowered to issue registration certificates and govern the practice of dentistry.

The College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan: 1906

The *Dominion Act* of July 1905 created the two new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. The following year a dental act was adopted to create the College of Dental



Surgeons of Saskatchewan. The new act closely followed its precursor, the Territorial Dental Ordinance by retaining the same Council members. **Dr. Walter Cowan** (left) served as the College's first president. In 1917 Dr. Cowan was the first dentist in Canada to be elected to the House of Commons.

Alberta Dental Association: 1906



Knowing in advance that the District of Alberta in the North West Territories was to become an autonomous province, 16 dentists met in Calgary on October 3, 1905, to propose the formation of the Alberta Dental Association. Official Alberta legislation was enacted May 9, 1906. The Association's first meeting was held in Banff in July 1906 with **Dr.**

R.B. Sullivan (above) of Calgary elected the first president; Dr. A.E. Auger, Stettler, vice-president, and Dr. O.F. Strong, Edmonton, secretary-treasurer.

The Canadian Dental Association: 1902-2002 — A Century of Service is a Centenary project of the Canadian Dental Association in collaboration with the Dentistry Canada Fund, the charitable foundation for the dental profession in Canada. Written by Dr. Ralph Crawford, Historian and Past President of CDA, with sincere appreciation to the pioneers and innovators who have contributed so much to the dental profession. Particular thanks to the authors below from whom much of the documented information is drawn:



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- Donald W. Gullett, DDS. *A History of Dentistry in Canada*, 1971
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