



## Sir Charles Tupper, MD

The only physician to have served as Prime Minister of Canada (1896), Sir Charles Tupper had a profound impact on the profession of medicine in Canada and on the country itself as one of the fathers of Confederation. As a young physician in Amherst, Nova Scotia, Dr. Tupper travelled great distances on horseback to treat his patients, many living in remote outposts in frontier conditions. Medical historian John D. Comrie in his *History of Scottish Medicine* (1932) credits Dr. Tupper with performing 116 obstetric operations before he was 22. In those early decades of the 19th Century, medical practice often involved arduous physical challenges for physicians and patients alike.

Dr. Tupper later held leadership roles in the growing city of Halifax as chief medical officer, as a member of the surgical staff of the provincial and city hospital, and as president of the Medical Society of Nova Scotia. Turning his attention to politics, Dr. Tupper was elected into the Nova Scotia Assembly in 1855 and served as Premier from 1864 to 1867. Despite powerful opposition, Dr. Tupper helped pass the Free Education Act and eventually led Nova Scotia into Confederation. The founding president of the Canadian Medical Association in 1867, he served for three consecutive terms. He also chaired the committee responsible for creating Dalhousie Medical School.

Now 100 years after Dr. Tupper's death, medical science and practice have progressed to levels beyond imagination for those who worked in primitive conditions without electric lights, reliable diagnostic technologies, or even something as basic as effective treatments for pain and infection. Yet the work of early medical pioneers like Dr. Tupper helped lay the foundation of institutions that sustain scientific progress today.

Dr. Tupper, in his long career as a federal cabinet minister, remained ever a physician and was known for keeping his medical bag under his seat in the House of Commons. In the case of Dr. Tupper, during his political tenure as John A. McDonald's "right hand man," there was indeed a doctor in the house.

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