

Sidelights on Early Medical Teaching in Halifax

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(Installment II)

(In the previous issue the author sketched the history of early medical teaching in Halifax from the founding of Dalhousie University in 1818 to the opening of the Victoria General Hospital in 1867. He referred to several plans for founding a Medical School, all of which came to naught.)

The question of a medical school in Halifax was not dead. Energetic members of the Board of Governors and staff of Dalhousie, as well as members of the profession, kept the subject a live one. On December 10th, 1867, a group of prominent Halifax physicians met to re-consider the advisability of founding a medical school, and on January 14th, 1868, Dr. Alexander P. Reid, M.D., submitted a proposal to the Board of Governors for a Medical School. His programme was referred to committee and accepted by the Board. By-laws and regulations were framed and adopted, and the Medical School actually came into existence on February 24th, 1868. The first faculty was as follows:

Very Rev. James Ross, Principal (ex-officio) and Matriculation Examiner.
William J. Almon, M.D., President.

Alexander P. Reid, M.D., Dean.

William J. Almon, M.D., and Alexander G. Hattie, M.D., Lecturers on Obstetrics.

Prof. George Lawson, Ph.D., LL.D., Lecturer on Chemistry.

Alexander P. Reid, M.D., L.R.S.C., Edin., Lecturer on Institutes of Medicine.

Edward Farrell, M.D., Lecturer on Anatomy.

Alfred H. Woodwill, M.D., Lecturer on Materia Medica.

Jas. D. Ross, M.D., Demonstrator of Anatomy.

Thomas R. Almon, M.D., Prosecutor to Chair of Anatomy.

The first session opened on May 8th, 1864, and continued until the July. Dean Reid delivered the inaugural address. The policy of the school was in accord with the prevailing vogue of medical teaching in the new world. Students took lectures during a summer session in the primary subjects, then during the winter months became apprentices to practising physicians. The course was completed by sending students away to McGill, Harvard, New York University, and later to Columbia. The number of students attending the first session was fourteen.

On July 27th, 1870, the Board of Governors appointed a committee consisting of Dr. Tupper, Rev. Grant and Dr. Forrest, to enquire into the possibilities of establishing a full medical course. Dr. A. P. Reid gave his assistance to the project and it was found that proper preliminary training and clinical facilities could be arranged. As a result, in 1872

Dalhousie conferred its first medical degrees on the following students: Roderick Sutherland, River John; George H. M. Dewolf, Dartmouth; Charles W. Hiltz, Bridgetown; William MacRae, Richmond; and Finlay MacMillan, Pictou. During these early years each lecturer delivered at least five lectures of one hour each during his week. The fees for each class were six dollars, while demonstrator's fees were four dollars. That the problem of room was really acute is shown in the minutes of the Medical Faculty, where in one instance the Faculty decided that the Professor of Anatomy would "have to vacate the closet" he was now using in order that the said compartment "could be used for a library". Whatever may be said of the crowded conditions with reference to lecture rooms, the building was certainly never designed to house a dissection room. Anatomy was taught in the attic and the only method of approach to the dissecting room was by ladder. The light was poor, there was no ventilation, it was often sweltering hot or wretchedly cold, and, added to these difficulties, was the fact that although an Anatomy Act had been passed in 1870, it was of no assistance to the Medical Faculty. The writer has heard more than one commentary on these conditions and of the way in which the "Gentlemen of Classics and Mathematics" endured the effluvia which permeated the whole building at times. Clinical instruction was extended so as to include the Provincial and City Hospital, the City Alms House, and the Halifax Dispensary.

In order to comprehend the position and responsibility of the Dalhousie Faculty of Medicine with reference to medical teaching, it is necessary to recall the three different systems which existed in the year 1870. The first system was known as the "Clinical Type" under which the Faculty of Medicine was derived from members of the staff of some large hospital or group of hospitals, and the hospital was, in effect, the medical school. This was the accepted system in the British Isles and France. The second system, known as the "University Type" placed the Medical Faculty under University control, and was the approved type in Germany, "Medicine" was simply a department of the University. The third system, known as the "Proprietary Type", was based upon the principle that a group of qualified medical practitioners could become an incorporate body, collect student fees, grant diplomas, and operate independently. Anatomy was the only pre-clinical subject for which these schools took any responsibility. Proprietary schools became more and more numerous until there were in all, 460 of them in the United States and Canada. Dalhousie had set up the "University Type" at a time when such old institutions as Harvard, (1783), and Pennsylvania, (1791), who on paper, were University Schools, did not maintain university standards and facilities in medical teaching. Indeed, it was not until the early seventies that Harvard under the leadership of its new President, Dr. Charles S. Elliot, began a series of changes in policy which eventually led to a complete reorganization, and the establishment of the Medical Faculty as a department of the university. In passing it might also be added that the Medical School of Johns Hopkins University under the leadership of

Dr. William Welch was the first Medical School in the United States to be founded (1884) on genuine university principles.

The Board of Governors of Dalhousie had embarked on an exceedingly ambitious and costly experiment. If it failed there were two alternatives, to try an affiliation with either a Hospital or Proprietary system, or, to break away completely from the Faculty of Medicine. Subsequent events show that the initial experiment did fail and that over a long period of years the above mentioned alternatives were all tried.

The story of the founding of the Halifax Medical College is very interesting, and, at the same time complex. Since it has to do with actions taken by the Board of Governors and the Faculty of Medicine, probably the best source of documentary information is to be found in the minutes of the Board and the minutes of the Medical Faculty. One of the first problems which the Faculty of Medicine had to solve, was the question of rooms for lecture purposes, and one finds in the minutes of a Board Meeting held on August 12th., 1870, a report by the Rev. George M. Grant, to the effect that he had met the Senate to discuss the possibilities of a room for the Medical Faculty and had found that one would be available for that session, and later, when the post-office moved out, the Medical Faculty might have the west wing with a separate entrance. Some members of the Board immediately pointed out that if the post-office were moved out of the building, the College would lose \$200.00 per annum.

The problems of crowding and inadequate teaching facilities in 1870, were only aggravated by the decision to put on a full medical course in 1872. The Medical Faculty began to make strong representations to the Board of Governors to supply the necessary funds to allow for a general expansion, including the erection of a building. The Board did not have the money, but that fact in itself, offered no solution to the problem. At a meeting of the Medical Faculty held on March 7th, 1873, it was decided that the best way out of the difficulty would be to obtain an "Act of Incorporation" which would permit the Medical Faculty to hold property under the name of, *The Halifax Medical College*, and at the same time, give the Medical Faculty more control over what they considered to be their own affairs. The reply of the Board was to the effect, that they only retained the minimum control consistent with the working together of the Arts and Medical Faculties for the good of the College; that the proposed Act of Incorporation would necessarily lead to a separation since it was inconsistent with the relations then subsisting; and finally, the Board suggested that "should an act be thought advisable it (the Board) might create a Corporation with the title of The Trustees of the Medical School and Dispensary of Halifax, which would unite both interests and include by name a few of the leading men who might be disposed to assist".

During the next two years many official communications passed between the Board and the Medical Faculty. The Board was unable to assist financially, but it had no objection to the efforts of the Medical

Faculty to raise funds for the purpose of erecting a building and equipping it, provided such properties were to be under the control of the Dalhousie Board of Governors. On the other hand, the Medical Faculty believed that improvement in teaching facilities was imperative, and that, since the onus of financial responsibility was to fall upon them, any buildings or properties that they might acquire should belong to them and be operated by them without interference from the Board of Governors. The crisis was reached in the spring of 1875 when by an Act of Incorporation the Halifax Medical College came into existence with the power to confer Medical degrees.

At this time there were 121 students attending Dalhousie, of whom 33 were medical students. Four medical students were qualified to receive degrees, but the Faculty of the Halifax Medical College had been notified that a separate Convocation for Arts had been arranged, and that, "The degrees conferred on the graduating class in Medicine this session will be signed by the President and the Principal of the College" (meaning the Halifax Medical College). The writer recently had an opportunity to see the degree of J. L. Bethune a member of this class and the father of Dr. C. M. Bethune of the Victoria General Hospital Staff. The document is signed by thirteen individuals, the first two of which are Wm. Young (Chairman of the Board of Governors) and James Ross, D.D. (President of Dalhousie), and the degree is *M.D. C.M., Dalhousie*.

Possibly too much space has been given to the origin of the Halifax Medical College, yet, it must be remembered that for over thirty years this institution had full charge of the teaching of Medicine and Clinical Medicine here in Halifax. Also, it should be remembered that at the present time, 1936, nearly one half of the history of organized medical teaching in Nova Scotia is associated with the same institution. One should also stress the point, that, whereas there was a break of several years between the Board of Governors of Dalhousie and its original Faculty of Medicine, continuity of clinical teaching remained undisturbed.

The New Institution faced a difficult financial situation. The proposed building was to cost \$8,000, the land was purchased at a cost of about \$1,600, and it was estimated that furnishings and equipment would total about \$4,000. The Provincial Government grant of \$1,000 was supplemented by an agreement of the Faculty to waive all student fees earned by them, and the remainder of the project was covered by arrangements for a heavy mortgage on the property. Erection of the new building was started in the spring of 1875 and it was opened for use at the beginning of the next session.

During the next nine years the Halifax Medical College operated and conferred degrees under increasing handicaps. Although it was in every respect a Proprietary school, its ideals were far above the average, and it never enjoyed the lavish prosperity of similar organizations in the United States. In 1885 there was a reorganization of the Faculty of Medicine and a new agreement for affiliation was made, whereby Instruction in

Physics, Chemistry, and Botany were to be given by Dalhousie, while the remainder of the medical curriculum was left under the control of the Halifax Medical College. Dalhousie was to appoint examiners jointly with the Provincial Medical Board and confer the medical degrees. This was probably the best arrangement that could be made at the time, but it was awkward, and it is no less than remarkable that it continued to work until 1911.

In 1905 the Trustees of the "Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching" started a survey of all the colleges and universities (including the professional schools) in the United States, Canada, and Newfoundland. The survey was made for the purpose of acquainting the people of these countries with the truth about their own institutions. A delegation visited the Halifax Medical College, and, when the Flexner Report was published in 1910, the Halifax Medical College along with scores of others was listed as a Proprietary school, and condemned. Fortunately, the investigators reported: "In Canada conditions have never become so badly demoralized as in the United States. There, the best features of English clinical teaching had never been wholly forgotten. Convalescence from a relatively mild over-indulgence in commercial medical schools set in earlier and is more nearly completed". The critical, though nevertheless friendly interest which the Carnegie Foundation took in Canadian institutions as a whole, plus the interest and energy of local individuals, made it possible for the Board of Governors of Dalhousie to negotiate with the Carnegie Foundation for a re-organization and a re-instatement of medical teaching in Halifax. In 1911 the Board purchased the property of the Halifax Medical College outright and undertook to be responsible, through the university for the teaching of medicine in Halifax. It was the "Renaissance" of a Medical Faculty which over a period of more than forty years had maintained continuity in clinical teaching in spite of all adversities. In 1918 the Board of Governors sold the Halifax Medical School property to Mr. Edgar Kaulback and during the next few years the building was used for various purposes, once as a Chinese Cafe, and many times as a polling booth. It was demolished in the spring of 1929 and on its site Mr. Kaulback erected his residence, now 83 College Street.

Surviving members of the faculty, graduates, and many members of the Profession undoubtedly have a strong affection for the old Halifax Medical College. No matter what internal dissensions there were, no matter what the criticism from outside the institution, it stood as a monument to the medical men of Halifax who were determined that the youth of Nova Scotia should have an opportunity to study medicine.

In closing, the writer invites criticism of this article either from the angle of inaccuracy or faulty interpretation of facts, and furthermore, believes that it is only through the publication of articles of a similar type and criticisms, that a real History of the Faculty of Medicine of Dalhousie University can be written.