

**Name:** Blair, Andrew George (Hon.)

**Riding:** York, County of; Queens, County of

**Party:** Liberal; Conservative Liberal

**Date Elected:** GE 25 Jun. 1878. BY-EL 14 Nov. 1878. GE Jun. 1882. BY-EL 24 Mar. 1883. GE Apr. 1886. GE Jan. 1890. BY-EL 23 Oct. 1890. BY-EL 22 Nov. 1892. GE 9 Oct. 1895 (By ACCL).

**Positions Held:** Leader of the Opposition, Feb. 1879 - Mar. 1883. Elected Premier and Attorney General, 3 Mar. 1883 - 17 Jul. 1896. Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Cabinet Shuffle:**

**Retired:** Resigned his seat in the Legislature in order to enter federal politics, 17 Jul. 1896. Resigned from federal politics, 18 Oct. 1904.

**Defeated:** GE Jun. 1870. GE 16 Jun. 1874. GE Oct. 1892.

**Died:** Died at the age of 62 suddenly on 25 Jan. 1907 at McLeod's Inn at 14 Waterloo Row in Fredericton, NB. Buried in Beechwood Cemetery in Ottawa, Ontario.

**Notes:** Born on 7 Mar. 1844 in Fredericton, NB. Of Scottish-Loyalist ancestry. After his education at Fredericton Collegiate School, at the age of fourteen Blair studied law in the offices of his uncle and John Campbell Allen (q.v.). He was admitted to the Bar as an attorney on 18 Apr. 1865, and as a barrister in Apr. 1866. Blair established a successful practice in Fredericton, and was appointed a Queen's Counsel in 1881. Inheriting a streak of Scottish non-conformity, Blair was self-reliant and independent in thought, often questioning the respect for colonial traditions that prevailed among officials in his Fredericton neighbourhood.

Having grown up within three blocks of the Legislature, a political career seemed natural to the young Blair. After numerous unsuccessful campaigns, Blair was elected to the Legislature in 1878 and when the results were protested he was re-elected later that year. In the House of Assembly, Blair quickly became the centre of an opposition faction, which by 1881 saw itself as the core of an alternative government. Described as a "democrat to the hilt" and often seen as a radical liberal, as early as 19 Feb. 1881, Blair dedicated himself to the abolition of New Brunswick's Legislative Council and numerous other political reforms. During elections and by-elections held in 1882 and 1883, Blair coalesced the coalition of dissidents that had previously formed the Opposition into a cohesive Opposition Party. In so doing, Blair laid the foundation of the modern Liberal Party. Allegedly employing bribery on an unprecedented scale, the new party achieved relative success and formed a strong Opposition to the D.L. Hanington (q.v.) administration in 1883. With the aid of several government defectors and political cleverness, on 26 Feb. 1883, Blair introduced and won a motion of non-confidence, resulting in the resignation of the Premier and Executive Council. Shortly afterward, at the age of thirty-nine, Blair was called upon to become Premier and form a new government.

As Premier, Blair succeeded in making the Opposition ineffective, by persuading several members to cross the floor. To maintain a strong bastion of support for his government, Blair deftly distributed the province's political and financial resources amongst constituencies.

Immediately after being made Premier, Blair built a bridge across the Saint John River, to link Fredericton with the company town of Alexander "Boss" Gibson, a wealthy entrepreneur and one of Blair's biggest supporters. Never one to be enamoured by colonial traditions, Blair so reduced government expenditures for the office of Lieutenant Governor that when Old Government House was closed, the Hon. Sir S.L. Tilley (q.v.) had to arrange for his own accommodations. Blair's administration was also known for several electoral reforms aimed at opening the political system, including the removal of the property requirement for voters.

Although usually tactful and amiable, Blair also developed a reputation as "an activist whose talent for getting things done was matched by impatience with opposition and a proclivity for making enemies." No other Premier garnered such bitter and sustained personal animosity as Blair. By the early 1890s, Blair's enemies included the

press, several former Party members and even his own law partner. In the 1890 election his government's majority was drastically reduced. Only by travelling to Miramichi to entice four Conservatives to his caucus in the infamous "Northumberland Deal," was Blair able to secure another term for his administration.

In the Legislative Session following the election, the Opposition members did not so much attack the Liberal Government as they vehemently attacked Blair personally, accusing him of widespread electoral fraud. Happily for Blair, he was finally able to secure support for the abolition of the Legislative Council, which quietly dissolved on 28 Sept. 1892. In the hastily called election of that year, Blair suffered an embarrassment when he placed second to last in the York County polls. Returned in a Queens County by-election a month later, Blair soon after moved to Saint John with his family.

Blair paid a heavy political price for his liberal-minded support of Acadian ambitions and efforts to draw them into the political fold. Orange Lodges, Temperance Lodges and an evangelical Protestant by the name of Herman Henry Pitts (q.v.) had closed ranks against him in York in 1892. Fearing the destruction of the Protestant character of New Brunswick by Acadian and Catholic ambitions, these new enemies condemned what they interpreted as Blair's pro-Catholic appointments and pro-Acadian stance. When Saint John's A.A. Stockton (q.v.) and Silas Alward (q.v.) broke ranks with Blair's Liberals to become the co-leaders of the Protestant-oriented Opposition in 1889, Blair used the opportunity to consolidate Acadian support behind the Liberals.

In Apr. 1893, Blair survived a formal vote of non-confidence in the Legislature. A few years later he resigned from provincial politics to become Minister of Railways and Canals in the federal administration of Sir Wilfrid Laurier on 13 Jul. 1896, being elected to the House of Commons in 1896 and 1900. One senior civil servant went so far as to rank Blair "next to Wilfrid Laurier in greatness."

Thanks to his wife's skills as hostess, Blair's Ottawa residence became one of the centres of Ottawa society. As a dedicated family man, Blair was tremendously hurt when his daughter drowned while skating on the Ottawa River in 1901. He remained in Laurier's Privy Council until his 20 Jul. 1903 resignation, when his persistent opposition to Laurier's railway schemes created a disagreement with the Prime Minister. Blair then began actively challenging the Laurier government in the House of Commons, giving an impassioned five-hour speech on 11 Aug. 1903 against the government's railway policy.

Fearing that, as a charismatic personality to whom opposition might rally, Laurier saw Blair as a threat. Therefore, with an election looming, Laurier appointed him Chief Commissioner of the Board of Railway Commissioners for Canada on 1 Feb. 1904. Within the year he resigned this position and retired to his Ottawa home. He remained the dominant force in the New Brunswick Liberal Party until his death in 1907.

For more information see also: "Dictionary of Canadian Biography", Volume XIII (Ref 920.071 D554); "The Premiers of New Brunswick" (971.5 D754 NB Coll.); "A Brief History of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick" (329.9715 H868 NB Coll.); "The History of New Brunswick Provincial Election Campaigns and Platforms, 1866-1974" (329.023 W899 NB Coll.); "The Newspaper Reference Book of Canada, 1903" (Ref 920 N277 1903); and the New Brunswick Pamphlet Collections.

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