

Name: Robinson, Clifford William (Hon.)

Riding: Westmorland, County of Moncton, City of

Party: Liberal

Date Elected: BY-EL 29 May 1897 (By ACCL). GE 18 Feb. 1899. GE 28 Feb. 1903. BY-EL 30 Apr. 1907 (By ACCL). GE 3 Mar. 1908. GE 24 Feb. 1917. GE 9 Oct. 1920.

Positions Held: Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, 28 Feb. 1901 - 6 Mar. 1907. Appointed Member of the Executive Council Without Portfolio, 6 Mar. 1907 - 15 Apr. 1907. Appointed Provincial Secretary, 15 Apr. 1907 - 24 Mar. 1908. Leader of the Liberal Party, 31 May 1907 - 1 Jan. 1912. Premier of New Brunswick, 31 May 1907 - 24 Mar. 1908. Appointed Attorney General, 31 May 1907 - 28 Oct. 1907. Leader of the Opposition, 24 Mar. 1908 - 1 Jan. 1912. Leader of the Liberal Party, Dec. 1914 - Jan. 1916. Appointed Minister Without Portfolio, 4 Apr. 1917 - 1 Oct. 1920. Appointed Chairman of New Brunswick Electric Power Commission, 1 Oct. 1920 - 5 May 1924. Appointed Minister of Lands and Mines, 1 Oct. 1920 - 5 May 1924. Appointed to the Senate of Canada, 5 May 1924.

Cabinet Shuffle:

Retired: Resigned as Liberal Leader and did not re-offer in the general election of Jun. 1912. Resigned from Legislature, 5 May 1924.

Defeated:

Died: Died at age 77 in hospital on 27 Jul. 1944 in Montreal, QC. Buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Moncton, N.B.

Notes: Born on 1 Sept. 1866 in Moncton, N.B. Of English ancestry. Robinson received his early education at the public schools of Point de Bute, Saint John and Moncton. He then attended Mount Allison Academy and Mount Allison University, from where he graduated with his B.A. in 1886. Finding employment as a bookkeeper, he worked for the Moncton Cotton Company from 1886 to 1889. Deciding upon the legal profession, Robinson studied law with several firms in Moncton and Saint John. He was admitted to the Bar as an attorney on 13 Oct. 1892, and as a barrister in Oct. 1893. Residing in Moncton, Robinson then began his career in law, practicing first with Charles W. McCann. From 1893 to 1898, he entered a partnership with W.B. Chandler (q.v.), and also practiced by himself. In 1920, Robinson established the law firm of Robinson & Rand with Ivan C. Rand (q.v.).

In addition to his legal career, Robinson also engaged in business and earned a reputation as a successful financial, corporation and real estate consultant. His own business operations consisted of large scale manufacturing and shipping of lumber products, but he was involved in a wide range of business ventures. He was the largest shareholder, and for a time, president, of the "Moncton Transcript," a Liberal-slanted newspaper founded by his father. He later played an influential role in the establishment of the "l'Acadien," a French-language newspaper. Robinson was a director and vice president of the New Brunswick Wire Fence Company Ltd.; a director of the Eastern Trust Company; a director of the Acadia Sugar Refining Company; president of the Record Foundry & Machine Company; president of Robinson, Wright & Company Ltd; and a director of the Moncton Electric Railway, Light, Heat and Power Company. A forward-looking businessman, Robinson regularly invested in new technologies and emerging businesses. Later in life, he was a founding director of the Central Trust Company Limited, established in Moncton in Jun. 1920; was a founding investor of the Petitcodiac Hydro Development Company in 1925; an early investor of the Moncton-based Eastern Canada Air Lines in 1934; was associated with the Moncton Broadcasting Company Ltd.; and helped J.L. Black (q.v.) establish the Moncton radio station CKCW in Dec. 1934.

As one of Moncton's most important citizens in business and law, it seemed natural that he would seek civic office. Robinson was elected as an alderman to the Moncton City Council Board in 1895-1896. The following year, the thirty-one year old was elected mayor of Moncton by acclamation, and was the youngest to hold that office until that time. As mayor, he led the city in a dynamic economic turnaround. He was also a driving force in the establishment of the first Moncton Hospital. In other community affairs, Robinson served as president of

the Board of Commissioners of the Jordan Sanatorium; was a member of the Board of Regents for Mount Allison University; was an honorary president of Moncton's Canadian Club; was a member of the Prince Albert Lodge; was a member of the International Order of Odd Fellows; and involved with local curling and golfing, and other social, fraternal and religious organizations.

With a reputation as a conservatively but stylishly dressed gentleman, Robinson was known for his quiet nature and mild-mannered demeanor. He was so well liked that even partisan political opponents such as F.W. Sumner (q.v.) conducted business with him on a regular basis. A staunch Liberal throughout his life, as local historian J.E. Belliveau puts it, Robinson ""was essentially a behind-the-scenes man."" Many prominent Liberals sought to enter electoral politics. In the words of historian Arthur Doyle, although Robinson would have ""a long career in public life, he often appeared to be a reluctant participant, sought after by others because he was a popular and credible candidate."" He had contested Westmorland County in the 23 Jun. 1896 federal election but was narrowly defeated at the polls by Henry Powell (q.v.).

He entered provincial politics with his election to the Legislature in a May 1897 by-election to replace A.E. Killam (q.v.). Re-elected in 1899, Robinson was soon called upon to act as Speaker, which he did for two terms from Feb. 1901 to Mar. 1907. He left the Speaker's Chair in 1907 to accept appointment to the Executive Council as Minister Without Portfolio. A scant month later, he was promoted to become Provincial Secretary in Premier William Pugsley's (q.v.) administration. When Pugsley left the premiership to enter federal politics, Robinson became the Liberal Party Leader and was sworn in as Premier on 31 May 1907. At this time, he temporarily assumed the duties of Attorney General, and continued his responsibilities as Provincial Secretary. Robinson became Premier in the waning days of a weakening government, and soon after his assumption of the office, Robinson was faced with a general election.

Having been in office since 1883, the Liberal Party faced an uphill struggle in the 1908 election campaign. Under the able directorship of J.D. Hazen (q.v.), the Conservatives kept Robinson's government on the defensive and prevented the articulation of a positive platform. The Liberals spent most of the campaign defending its conduct in office, implied incompetence, and allegations of improper conduct. The Tories profitably deployed the Central Railway - a disastrous scheme the government had handled impotently at great expense to the public purse - as an election issue. The Liberal campaign was not aided by the fact that their party had gone through such a succession of leaders in so short a period that 1907 became known in the press as ""the year of three premiers."" On polling day, the Liberals were defeated, an outcome which surprised few.

Robinson remained as Leader of the Opposition until the eve of the 1912 general election. At that time, he resigned the leadership of the party and left his replacement, A.B. Copp (q.v.), to tend a sinking ship. The 1912 election was a debacle, and only two Liberals were elected - one of whom spoke almost no English. With the Liberal Party in complete disarray, Robinson returned to the leadership on an interim basis upon Copp's retirement in late 1914. This time, his role as Leader was largely titular, as the day-to-day functioning of the party lay in the hands of P.J. Veniot (q.v.), Ned Carter, and Frank Carvell (q.v.). Apologizing for not being able to dedicate more time to the position, Robinson resigned as leader again at the Jan. 1916 Liberal convention. A seven-man committee, headed by Walter Foster (q.v.), was appointed to direct the party's affairs.

Although he had not been a candidate in the 1912 election, Robinson returned to active politics with his re-election to the Legislature in 1917. Premier Foster appointed him to cabinet without portfolio in Apr. 1917. In Oct. 1920, he was promoted to become Minister of Lands and Mines. More importantly, however, was his appointment as the first Chairman of the newly created New Brunswick Electric Power Commission. His varied business experience made him a perfect choice for the job. In this role, according to NB Power's official history, ""he was instrumental in establishing the new utility and in resolving land and waterway disputes with private interests."" He remained in this position until his resignation from the Legislature on 5 May 1924.

On that day, Robinson was called to the Senate of Canada. He remained a Senator until his death on 27 Jul. 1944.

For more information see also: ""Prominent People of New Brunswick"" (Ref 920 M163); ""Prominent People of the Maritime Provinces"" (Ref 920 P965.5); ""Speakers of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick"" (328.71505 N532Sp NB Coll.); ""The Canadian Directory of Parliament: 1867-1967"" (Ref 328.71 C212C); ""The Premiers of New Brunswick"" (Ref 971.5 D754); ""Front Benches & Back Rooms"" (320.9715 D754 NB Coll.); ""A Brief History of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick"" (329.9715 H868 NB Coll.); ""The Busy East"" Vol. 8, No. 11; ""Seventy Years of Service: The New Brunswick Electric Power Commission 1920-

1990"" (1990); ""The Monctonians"" (971.523 B444M NB Coll.); ""Biographical Review New Brunswick, 1900"" (920 J12 NB Coll.); and the New Brunswick Pamphlet Collection.

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