

Name: Tilley, Leonard Percy DeWolfe (Hon.)

Riding: Saint John, City of

Party: Conservative

Date Elected: GE 20 Jun. 1912. GE 24 Feb. 1917. GE 10 Aug. 1925. GE 19 Jun. 1930.

Positions Held: Appointed President of Executive Council and Minister Without Portfolio, Sept. 1925 - 18 May 1931. Appointed Minister of Lands and Mines, 18 May 1931 - 12 Jul. 1935. Leader of the Conservative Party, 1 Jun. 1933 - 10 Sept. 1935. Premier of New Brunswick, 1 Jun. 1933 - 12 Jul. 1935.

Cabinet Shuffle:

Retired:

Defeated: GE 9 Oct. 1920. GE 27 Jun. 1935.

Died: Died at age 77 on 26 Dec. 1947 in the Saint John General Hospital. Buried in Fernhill Cemetery, Saint John.

Notes: Born on 21 May 1870 in Ottawa, ON. Tilley grew up amid the highest echelons of political power and influence in Canada. He lived in Ottawa while his father, Sir Samuel Leonard Tilley (q.v.), was a Member of Parliament. When his father was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, Tilley spent his youth on the grounds of Government House in Fredericton. After his education at the Ottawa Model School and Fredericton Collegiate, Tilley enrolled at the University of New Brunswick in 1887, but did not receive a degree. He then graduated from Dalhousie Law School in Halifax in 1893 with an L.L.B. Following his formal education, Tilley studied law in the offices of Sir Frederick Barker, and was admitted to the New Brunswick Bar on 12 Oct. 1893 as an attorney, and on 8 Nov. 1894 as a barrister.

Opening his own practice in Saint John, Tilley also established substantial business interests and became active in numerous organizations. During this time, he acted as director and solicitor for the Saint John Real Estate Company Ltd. Tilley was also president of the Saint John Law Society, and a member of the executive of the Canadian Bar Association. He took an active interest in the militia, attaining the rank of captain with the Princess Louise 8th Canadian Hussars. In 1914, Tilley contributed to the Canadian war effort as Chief Recruiting Officer for the Province of New Brunswick. During the Second World War, he displayed similar dedication to the patriotic efforts as chairman of numerous charitable appeals, including the Canadian Red Cross and the Navy League.

First elected to the Legislature at the age of 42, Tilley began his political career in 1912. After his defeat in 1920, Tilley was returned to the Legislature in 1925. Although they were political colleagues, Tilley and the new premier, J.B.M. Baxter (q.v.) did not get along at all. Baxter could not resist cutting down Tilley, and rumours suggest he may have even provided fodder to the Opposition benches. Nevertheless, Tilley was appointed to Baxter's cabinet as President of the Executive Council and Minister Without Portfolio. Tilley was sent as the official representative of the Province on a Trade and Goodwill Mission to South America between 21 Feb. 1931 to 11 Apr. 1931. During the 450-mile journey, he and other delegates travelled to Cuba, Trinidad, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile to analyze the prospects of increased trade with each of these countries. Returning from the trip, Tilley became Minister of Lands and Mines in the administration of Charles Richards (q.v.).

Upon Richards' appointment to the Supreme Court, Tilley became premier. He governed New Brunswick through the lowest depths of the Great Depression, but was not as able a politician as his highly respected father. A political opponent of his, R.A. Tweedie, later remarked that Tilley ""was one of those politicians who seemed to attract more than a fair share of criticism and ridicule."" A typical scathing attack by the Opposition included this lyrical couplet attributed to P.J. Veniot (q.v.): ""Nothing in my head I bring / Simply to my name I cling.""

Leading up to the 1935 election, Tilley became one of the earliest politicians to recognize the growing importance of radio by using the platform to advertise and extol his government's record, achievements and experienced

leadership. Unfortunately for Tilley, the rest of the election was a disaster. When a letter purported to have been written by the Ku Klux Klan attacked the Catholic Liberal Leader, A.A. Dysart (q.v.), Tilley's indifferent response made him seem uncaring. Compared to a slick Liberal campaign, Tilley's efforts seemed bumbling. Also, the effect of the Great Depression certainly played an influential role in the election, as few incumbent governments in Canada were being returned to office during this period. It was perhaps unsurprising that Tilley's government was sent down in ignominious defeat on election day that year. With he and every other cabinet minister losing their seats in 1935, Tilley turned the reigns of the party over to Frederick Squires (q.v.), who was chosen House Leader of the Conservative Party on 10 Sept. 1935, and retired from politics. Squires was officially named party leader at a leadership convention on 27 Oct. 1937.

Assessing Tilley's career, author Arthur T. Doyle notes, Tilley was seen as "a big, somewhat pompous figure who's impractical political judgments and administrative incompetence made him the butt of jokes throughout his political career." Nevertheless, UNB, the University of Toronto and Maine's Bowdoin College all conferred honorary L.L.D.s upon Tilley during his time as premier.

Upon his retirement from politics, Tilley was appointed county court judge for the Counties of Kings and Albert on 14 Aug. 1935. He served as judge until his retirement from the bench on 11 Jun. 1945 on account of ill health. During the same period, he held the appointment as Admiralty Judge for New Brunswick. Following Tilley's death, Premier J.B. McNair (q.v.) praised his "warm and vibrant personality" at the opening of the Legislature in 1948.

For more information see also: Arthur T. Doyle, "The Premiers of New Brunswick" (971.5 D754 NB Coll.); R.A. Tweedie, "On With the Dance" (971.503 T971 NB Coll.); "An Almanac of New Brunswick Elections, 1870-1980" (324.9715 G233 NB Coll.); and the New Brunswick Pamphlet Collection.

Last Modified: 2005-06-17