

Name: Emmerson, Henry Robert (Hon.)

Riding: Albert, County of

Party: Liberal

Date Elected: BY-EL 28 Sept. 1888. BY-EL 23 Feb. 1889. GE 22 Oct. 1892. GE 16 Oct. 1895. GE 18 Feb. 1899.

Positions Held: Appointed to Legislative Council, 11 Mar. 1891 - 28 Sept. 1892. Appointed Minister without Portfolio, Mar. 1892 - 10 Oct. 1892. Appointed Chief Commissioner of Public Works, 10 Oct. 1892 - 18 Jan. 1900. Premier, 29 Oct. 1897 - 31 Aug. 1900. Leader of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick, 29 Oct. 1897 - 31 Aug. 1900. Appointed Attorney General, 18 Jan. 1900 - 31 Aug. 1900.

Cabinet Shuffle:

Retired: Resigned from the Legislature, Feb. 1891. Resigned as Premier and from the Legislature, 31 Aug. 1900.

Defeated: GE 20 Jan. 1890.

Died: Died at age 60 on 9 Jul. 1914 at his residence in Dorchester, NB. Buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Moncton, NB.

Notes: Born on 25 Sept. 1853 in Maugerville, Sunbury County, NB. Of English-Loyalist descent. The son of a Baptist clergyman, Emmerson received his education from a number of institutions including Amherst Academy, Mount Allison Academy, St. Joseph's College and Acadia College. He then attended a Boston commercial college for bookkeeping training before entering employment with Joseph Read and Company, his grandfather's quarry business. Deciding upon a professional career, Emmerson began to study law in the Dorchester offices of Albert James Smith (q.v.), and another local lawyer. Emmerson then returned to the United States to attend the Boston University law school. He graduated with his L.L.B. in 1877, also winning the institution's prize-essay contest for his essay entitled, ""The legal condition of married women.""

He returned to New Brunswick and was admitted to the Bar in 1878 and established a law practice in Dorchester. Emmerson's practice was soon a lucrative endeavour and he was able to invest in various industrial and business ventures. In this manner he acquired an interest in the ""Moncton Transcript"" newspaper, one of the leading Liberal broadsheets of the day. ""Transcript"" editor John T. Hawke became one of Emmerson's leading supporters. Unsuccessful in an 1887 bid for a House of Commons seat, Emmerson won a provincial by-election and entered the Liberal administration of Andrew G. Blair (q.v.) in 1888. After the results were protested he was returned in an 1889 by-election.

Emmerson proved himself an able and eloquent legislator, earning the respect of the Liberal leadership. In the House of Assembly he was a strong and progressive advocate of women's suffrage, arguing that the refusal to grant property-owning women the right to vote was ""a relic of barbaric prejudice.""

Still hoping to enter federal politics, Emmerson resigned from the Legislature in order to contest the 5 Mar. 1891 federal election. He lost and was subsequently appointed to the Legislative Council. Emmerson's express purpose as Blair's de facto Leader of the Government in the upper chamber was to have the Legislative Council pass the legislation necessary for its abolition. Successful in this endeavour, he remained on the Legislative Council until its abolition in Sept. 1892, at which time he re-entered the House of Assembly.

Having entered the Executive Council in Mar. 1892, Emmerson was appointed Blair's Chief Commissioner of Public Works on 10 Oct. 1892. Following Blair's elevation to federal politics, Emmerson retained the Public Works portfolio in the administration of James Mitchell (q.v.). While his main efforts during this period were directed towards constructing bridges and highways as the duties of Chief Commissioner prescribed, Emmerson remained dedicated to women's suffrage.

On 29 Oct. 1897 he succeeded Mitchell as Leader of the Liberal Party and Premier of New Brunswick. As premier, he was particularly concerned with economic development, agricultural diversification, and the

promotion of New Brunswick as a destination for tourists, sportsmen and immigrants. On 13 Apr. 1899 Emmerson moved a motion seeking to grant women the full franchise, but in a free vote it was resoundingly defeated. Emmerson was one of only seven members to vote in favour of the motion.

After the Emmerson administration was returned in the 1899 general election, the young J. Douglas Hazen (q.v.) became Leader of the Opposition. Hazen enthusiastically accused Emmerson of patronage and personal dishonesty in his actions as Chief Commissioner of Public Works. Emmerson gave up the portfolio in early 1900, assuming the duties of the Attorney General instead. A committee of inquiry also eventually found Hazen's accusations to be unfounded.

Despite his vindication, Emmerson grew increasingly weary of the pettiness of provincial politics. He again sought federal office and resigned the premiership on 31 Aug. 1900. He entered Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Privy Council on 4 Jan. 1904 as Minister of Railways and Canals. It was the portfolio most sought by Maritime politicians as it controlled vast amounts of patronage to distribute via railway works throughout the region. Laurier cautioned Emmerson against growing too comfortable in his new position however. Emmerson's long-time drinking problem and womanizing were well known and Laurier reserved the right to terminate his membership in cabinet if they became public problems.

By 1906 Emmerson was rarely in attendance in Ottawa, often away for long periods of time. His conduct rankled Laurier, and the Prime Minister grew petulant with Emmerson. He demanded that his minister of railways pledge not to consume alcoholic beverage, and requested an undated and signed letter of resignation to be used if he should fail in his promise. By late Mar. 1907 Opposition Members and the Fredericton "Daily Gleaner" began attacking Emmerson as "an intolerable reprobate," and alleged specific incidents of indiscretion by the minister. The newspaper stories were sensationalized further by virtue of Emmerson's national prominence in religious affairs as president of the Baptist Convention for the Maritime Provinces. On 1 Apr. 1907 Emmerson resigned from cabinet and Laurier accepted without delay. Emmerson attempted to sue the "Daily Gleaner" for defamation and libel, but his suit proved unsuccessful.

Emmerson remained a Member of Parliament for another seven years, continuing to press for the amalgamation of many of the Maritimes' branch lines into the Intercolonial Railway proper. In his later years he donated the funds necessary for the construction of a new library to be built at Acadia University. The new structure was called the Emmerson Memorial Library in honour of his father, the Rev. R.H. Emmerson. Acadia also granted the former premier an honorary Masters degree.

Emmerson's many friends regarded him as never having fully realized his potential, hampered at every turn by his problems with alcohol. At his funeral in 1914, nearly 10,000 mourners lined the streets of Moncton to pay their respects.

For more information see also: "Dictionary of Canadian Biography", Volume XIV (Ref 920.071 D554 NB Coll.); "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 "Biographical Review New Brunswick, 1900" (920 J12 NB Coll.)

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