

Name: Flemming, James Kidd (Hon.)

Riding: Carleton, County of

Party: Conservative

Date Elected: BY-EL Jan. 1900. GE 28 Feb. 1903. GE 3 Mar. 1908. BY-EL Apr. 1908 (By ACCL). GE 20 Jun. 1912.

Positions Held: Appointed to the Executive Council as Provincial Secretary Treasurer and Receiver General, 24 Mar. 1908 - 16 Oct. 1911. Leader of the Conservative Party of New Brunswick, 16 Oct. 1911 - 6 Dec. 1914. Premier, 16 Oct. 1911 - 6 Dec. 1914. Appointed Surveyor General (Minister of Lands & Mines), 16 Oct. 1911 - 6 Dec. 1914. Appointed Interim Provincial Secretary Treasurer, 30 Dec. 1913 - 22 Jan. 1914.

Cabinet Shuffle:

Retired: Resigned his seat in the Legislature Premier, 6 Dec. 1914.

Defeated: GE 16 Oct. 1895. GE 18 Feb. 1899.

Died: Died at age 58 on 10 Feb. 1927 in the Fisher Memorial Hospital in Woodstock, NB. Buried in the Methodist Cemetery, Woodstock, NB.

Notes: Born on 27 Apr. 1868 in Woodstock, NB. During his early years, Flemming pursued a wide variety of occupations. He taught school for a number of years in Fredericton. He then entered into the grocery business, first as a travelling salesman with White & Titus in Saint John, then becoming proprietor of his own wholesale firm in Woodstock in 1892. In 1895 he relocated to Peel, NB, where he operated a general store. He also entered the lumber industry, eventually establishing the firm of Flemming and Gibson. Based in Juniper, NB, Flemming's company erected modern mills, and engaged in the manufacture and shipping of lumber on an extensive scale.

By the turn of the century, when he was elected to the Legislature, it was apparent that Flemming's true skill lay in politics, not business. He quickly rose to be included in Conservative Party Leader J. Douglas Hazen's (q.v.) inner circle, becoming an important party organizer. In the 1908 election campaign, Flemming was instrumental to the Conservative victory. Well known for his "silver tongue" on the political trail, it was said that Flemming "could set the crowd crazy" with his spellbinding speeches. As soon as Hazen was elected Premier, Flemming was appointed Provincial Secretary Treasurer and Receiver General, two of the most important portfolios. The press quickly labelled the tall, handsome and disarmingly charming Flemming as 'Hazen's Lieutenant.'

In 1911 when Hazen departed provincial politics for the House of Commons, the apprentice became master, as Flemming assumed the premiership. As he entered the first minister's office, New Brunswick was entering an era of prosperity and new hope as symbolized by the Hazen administration's Valley Railway from Saint John to Quebec. Within days of turning the first sod on the construction of the popular public works project on 23 May 1912, Flemming called a general election.

Even heading into the 1912 campaign there was little doubt that the Conservatives would win, but no one predicted how titanic the victory would be. Campaigning on their leader's phenomenal personal appeal, Flemming's Conservatives won forty-four of the Legislature's forty-eight seats. The following year the University of New Brunswick bestowed an honorary L.L.D. upon him.

Without a leader to match Flemming's charisma, the debilitated Liberals hired E.S. (Ned) Carter, P.J. Veniot (q.v.) and Frank Carvell (q.v.) to work behind the scenes. The 'Dark Lantern Brigade,' as they became known, uncovered one of the biggest political scandals ever to rock New Brunswick. In a speech delivered in the Legislature late in the 1914 session, L.A. Dugal (q.v.) directly linked Flemming to graft and corruption. He alleged that the Premier had used his stewardship of the provinces crown lands to extort campaign funds from lumber merchants, and had accepted kickbacks from the Valley Railway. The Legislature and the province as a whole were aghast at the seriousness of the accusations.

Flemming vehemently denied any wrongdoing. Nevertheless, he stepped aside as Premier and went into seclusion. George J. Clarke (q.v.) assumed leadership of the government in Mar. 1914, and immediately appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the charges. When Flemming appeared before the commission to give testimony, he was a broken man. His characteristic eloquence and style had all but disappeared, and he was barely able to deny his involvement. The commission's report could only implicate the premier as a "likely conspirator" in the crown lands scandal, but found him guilty of at least one instance of extortion in relation to the railway. Yet Flemming stubbornly refused to fully resign as premier. It was only after J.D. Hazen, his former mentor, advised him that he did resign. Clarke formally assumed the premiership in mid-December 1914.

Flemming returned to private business in Carleton County, developing his lumber enterprises with his son and future-premier, Hugh John Flemming (q.v.). Despite failing health, J.K. Flemming did not stand on the sidelines of politics for long. Back with a vengeance to vindicate his name, Flemming contested the 1925 federal election for the riding of Victoria and Carleton. Still enjoying immense support from his fervently loyal followers, he won by a landslide. He was re-elected to the House of Commons the following year. Flemming's health had continued to deteriorate, however, and he died in early 1927.

Even in death, "the most persecuted man in the political history of New Brunswick" - as the "Daily Gleaner" once said - maintained his personal allure. In the words of one elderly resident of Woodstock, Flemming's half-mile long funeral procession was the "biggest funeral Carleton County" had ever seen.

For more information see also: "Front Benches & Back Rooms" (329.9715 D754 NB Coll.); "The Premiers of New Brunswick" (971.5 D754 NB Coll.); and "The History of New Brunswick Provincial Election Campaigns and Platforms, 1866-1974" (329.023 W899 NB Coll.)

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