

Biography:

Born into an accomplished family, **Britton Bath Osler** made his mark as the most respected lawyer of his day. After attending the Barrie and Bond Head grammar schools and the private school of the Reverend Arthur Hill in Bradford, he moved with his family in 1857 to Dundas, where he worked briefly as a bookkeeper. He entered the University of Toronto in 1858 and received an LLB in 1862. That year he was called to the bar and set up practice in Dundas. Having achieved success, he became clerk of the peace and crown attorney of Wentworth on 9 May 1874. This was a coveted position for a 34-year-old practitioner to receive, but Osler proved himself worthy of it by his single-minded dedication to crown prosecutions.

He moved to Hamilton in 1876 and was soon acknowledged to be “one of Canada’s rising young men.” In recognition of his services, he was made a provincial qc in 1876 and a federal QC fr years later.

In 1880 he left his crown position and in 1882 he joined D’Alton McCarthy’s law firm in Toronto, subsequently known as McCarthy, Osler, Hoskin, and Creelman. He became a bencher of the Law Society of Upper Canada in Easter term 1880, and a founding member of the Hamilton Law Association in 1879 and first President of the York County Law Association in 1885. Throughout the 1880s he appeared in court on behalf of railways, particularly the Grand Trunk and became president of the Hamilton and Dundas Street Railway and a director of the Trusts Corporation of Ontario.

Osler’s first national exposure came in 1885 when he was asked by the federal government to assist in the prosecution of Louis Riel in Regina. He sized up Riel as the leading villain of the North-West rebellion and was instrumental in securing his conviction. Although Osler was a frequent troubleshooter for the government in the courts, his notoriety in the 1890s came from his prosecutions in a number of spectacular murder trials.

Osler’s health failed in 1900, and he died the following year. His great ability as a lawyer was founded on his thorough knowledge of the law, his familiarity with engineering and medicine, and his stamina, but especially on his presence and force of character in the courtroom.