

Name: Flemming, Hugh John (Hon.)

Riding: Carleton, County of

Party: Progressive Conservative

Date Elected: GE 28 Aug. 1944. GE 28 Jun. 1948. GE 22 Sept. 1952. GE 18 Jun. 1956. GE 27 Jun. 1960.

Positions Held: Leader of the Opposition from 1949-1952. Leader of the New Brunswick Conservative Party, 11 Jul. 1951 - Fall 1960. Sworn in as Premier, 8 Oct. 1952 -12 Jul. 1960. Appointed Minister of Public Works, 8 Oct. 1952 - 1 Aug. 1958. Appointed Minister of Municipal Affairs, 1 Aug. 1958 - 12 Jul. 1960. Leader of the Opposition, 12 Jul. 1960 -Fall 1960.

Cabinet Shuffle:

Retired: Resigned from the Legislature, Fall 1960. Retired from federal politics at the dissolution of Parliament in 1972.

Defeated:

Died: Died at the age of 83 at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital on 17 Oct. 1982. Buried at the Methodist Cemetery, Woodstock, NB.

Notes: Born on 5 Jan. 1899 in Peel, Carleton County, NB. Of Scottish-Irish descent. During his childhood in Carleton County, young Flemming watched as his father, James Kidd Flemming (q.v.), rose to the highest echelons of provincial power only to be swept from the Premier's office by scandal in 1914. Although he had been planning on enrolling in medical school, when Hugh John Flemming saw his disheartened father's growing financial and health problems he changed his plans. Leaving school at age fifteen, he began working with his father's lumber business in Juniper, NB. Over the coming years Flemming would become Secretary, Treasurer and Manager of Flemming and Gibson Ltd. He also served as President of the Bristol Woodworking Company Ltd., President of the Woodstock Woodworking Factory Ltd., Director of the Maritime Trust Company, and associated with J.W. Boyer and Company Ltd., S.W. Bell Ltd., and the Maritime Lumber Bureau. He was a member of the Canadian Lumbermans Association.

On one occasion, the elder Flemming gave his son this advice: ""Make yourself useful."" The younger Flemming took his father at his word, and at a young age followed his footsteps into the political arena. Asked later why he entered politics, Flemming responded naturally: ""it was in my blood."" At only 21 years of age, Flemming began his fourteen year stint on the Carleton County Council in 1921. In 1935 he ran in a federal election, but suffered the only electoral defeat of his career. Although it meant taking less pay than he would in private business, in 1944 he entered the provincial legislature as a representative of Carleton County. Sitting in the Opposition benches, Flemming was the Conservatives' financial critic and distinguished himself as an able debator. Flemming took over the reigns as Leader of the Opposition during the 1949 sitting of the Legislature. On 11 Jul. 1951 he was confirmed as the Progressive Conservatives' choice to lead them in the next general election. Of the 52 Conservative candidates to contest the 1952 election, only Flemming and E. T. Kennedy (q.v.) had served in the Legislature between 1948 and 1952.

In the House, Flemming's pre-written speeches were dull and colourless. On the campaign trail, however, his shyness disappeared and the feistiness inherited from his father - the ever-popular campaigner - shone through. The 6 Apr. 1962 edition of the ""Globe and Mail"" reminisced on Flemming's skill: ""His political sense tells him what to say and how to put it across. Hellfire and damnation is his forte on the hustings."" Flemming raked the J.B. McNair (q.v.) government over the coals for the Liberals' unpopular sales tax and their ineffectual dealing with a New Brunswick Electric Power Commission employees strike. At campaign's end, the man now known throughout the province as simply ""Hugh John"" was elected with a resounding majority.

Cabinet ministers, such as Donald Patterson (q.v.) would later praise the nature of Flemming's cabinet, noting how they ""did work together as a team."" Knowing that to attract industry to the province New Brunswick would need the electricity to power it, Flemming set about on an ambitious electricity development campaign. The

culmination of his efforts, the Beechwood hydroelectric complex on the Saint John River opened in Jul. 1955. Despite high costs and unfulfilled promises of federal assistance by the Louis St. Laurent Liberals, Flemming's government built Beechwood without federal help. Flemming next set out to revamp Ottawa's attitude towards the provinces.

He invited all the Atlantic region's premiers to Fredericton for a 9 Jul. 1956 meeting, an occurrence that would evolve into the Conference of Atlantic Premiers. At the meeting Flemming coordinated the provinces into a cooperative regional front to aggressively demand 'fiscal needs' subsidies, and assistance for resource development from the federal Liberal administration. Until this time the federal government had applied common policy to all provinces, regardless of individual circumstance. Alternatively, Flemming argued in favour of more flexible regionalism, whereby federal assistance was adjusted according to each province's needs.

When Progressive Conservative John Diefenbaker was elected Prime Minister, Flemming found a sympathetic ear. The two had become quick friends when Flemming had nominated Diefenbaker for leadership of the federal PC Party on 19 Dec. 1956, and the new Prime Minister was eager to listen to the grievances of the east. Flemming's initiative evolved into the Atlantic Adjustment Grants.

Throughout his premiership Flemming strove to be fiscally responsible, and with eight consecutive budget surpluses he had been able to keep the province's debt down. Leading up to the 1960 election, however, because of federal cutbacks Flemming's government had been forced to accept their share of health costs. Following precedents set in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, Flemming adopted a hospital premium tax to make up for the shortfall. These 'user fees' were wildly unpopular with the electorate, and in the 1960 general election the Progressive Conservatives were defeated. Flemming remained in provincial politics for two months before Prime Minister Diefenbaker called him to ask him to join the federal government. After consulting his wife, Flemming decided he could better serve New Brunswickers as a federal cabinet minister than he could as Leader of the Opposition. Thus, he resigned his seat in the Legislature and contested a federal by-election.

After being elected to the House of Commons, Flemming was appointed to Diefenbaker's Privy Council, becoming Canada's first Minister of Forestry on 11 Oct. 1960. In 1962 he also held the portfolio of National Revenue. Under his purview the Atlantic Development Board was created, later evolving into the Department of Regional Economic Expansion. To the national press, he was the ""enigma of the Diefenbaker cabinet,"" performing quietly but soundly. When the Conservatives were relegated to the Opposition benches, Flemming continued to vocally advocate local control over regional development programs. Flemming remained a Member of Parliament until 1972.

Flemming's wife Aida, made a contribution to New Brunswick in her own right. She was active within the SPCA and helped to establish a public library in Fredericton. But she is most revered for her commitment in developing the Kindness Club during the 1950s. Her modest initiative promoting the care of animals has now developed into an international organization. Aida Flemming was also voted as the Atlantic Woman of the Year in 1962, and was awarded the Order of Canada in 1978. Hugh John Flemming often credited his wife for having a positive influence on he, his politics, and his career.

Even in retirement Flemming never slowed. He assumed the role of New Brunswick's elder statesman and lent his name and fame to many worthy charitable causes. He and his wife maintained a busy schedule of attending and supporting countless community events and projects, as well as continuing to run the affairs of Flemming Industries. He was honoured by Woodstock, NB, when that community celebrated 'Hugh John Day' on 16 Jun. 1973. In observing the declining state of current day political orators in 1976, Flemming blamed the ""lack of enforcement of parliamentary rule that speeches shall not be read."" He noted that public speakers of the 1970s paled in comparison to the likes of J.B. McNair (q.v.), F.C. Squires (q.v.), and Flemming's father.

Although one of the most widely respected politicians in the province's history, Flemming's importance reaches far beyond the borders of New Brunswick. His initiatives as Premier made him an influential figure in the evolution of federal-provincial relations and a catalyst for future change. Such was his popularity upon his death in 1982 that two funeral services had to be held: one in Fredericton and one in Woodstock. Aida Flemming outlasted her husband, dying on 25 Jan. 1994 at age 97.

For more information see: ""The Premiers of New Brunswick"" (971.5 D754 NB Coll.); ""The History of New Brunswick Provincial Election Campaigns and Platforms, 1866-1974"" (329.023 W899 NB Coll.); ""The Atlantic

Provinces in Confederation"" (971.5 A881 NB Coll.); ""Promises, Promises..."" (324.9715 G233 NB Coll.); R.A. Young, ""Planning for Power: The New Brunswick Electric Power Commission in the 1950's,"" *Acadiensis*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1982): 73-99; Charles R. Allen, ""Hugh John Flemming, Premier of New Brunswick"" in ""Maritime Advocate"" Vol. 43, No. 2 (Oct. 1952); ""Hugh John Flemming...now leader of Conservatives"" in ""Maritime Advocate"" Vol. 41, No. 12 (Aug. 1951); ""Hon. Hugh John Flemming"" in ""Atlantic Advocate"" Vol. 50, No. 7 (Mar. 1960); Michael Wardell, ""Aida Flemming"" in ""Atlantic Advocate"" Vol. 60, No. 4 (Dec. 1969); ""Genial Hugh John"" in ""Atlantic Advocate"" Vol. 64, No. 1 (Sept. 1973); Brian Banno, ""Hugh John Fleming Recalls VIP Acquaintances"" in ""Atlantic Advocate"" Vol. 66, No. 11 (Jul. 1976); and the New Brunswick Pamphlet Collection.

There were also two articles written by Flemming: ""Roads Are The Link"" in ""Atlantic Advocate"" Vol. 48, No. 11 (Jul. 1958); ""Developing New Brunswick's Industrial Potential"" in ""Atlantic Advocate"" Vol. 49, No. 11 (Jul. 1959); and ""Forestry in the Atlantic Region"" in ""Atlantic Advocate"" Vol. 51, No. 11 (Jul. 1961).

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