

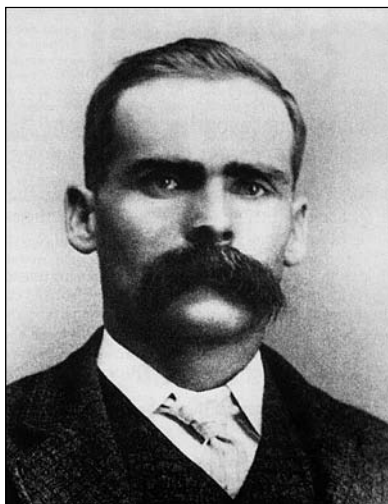
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HERBERT CHARLES WILSON, MD
1859-1909



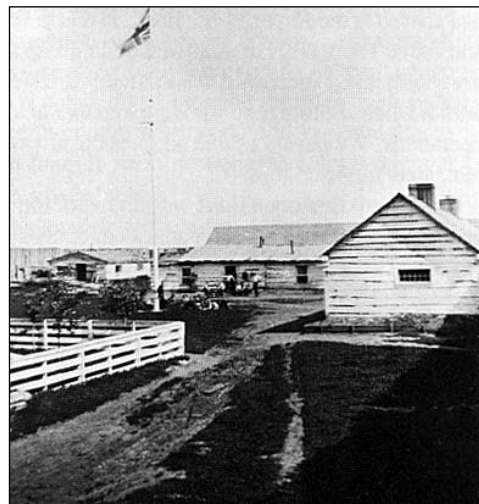
Early Edmonton Doctors, from *Early Medicine in Alberta*, Heber C. Jamieson, 1947

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Frank Oliver
Started the *Edmonton Bulletin* in 1880.
Minister of the Interior 1905-1911



Fort Saskatchewan in 1884 12-4

HERBERT CHARLES WILSON, MD 1859-1909

“...an excellent practitioner with a bright mind.
He was kind and congenial, very well read,
a good conversationalist and an enjoyable speaker”.⁽¹⁾

Introduction

Dr. Herbert Charles Wilson was a competent, well spoken, respected practitioner, who answered Frank Oliver's newspaper advertisement or call “to come to the west” in 1882. Dr. Wilson came as Alberta's first doctor/druggist and remained in full time medical practice for twenty-seven years until his death at age fifty in 1909. He was a community leader who participated in the building or creating of many athletic, community, and political institutions in Edmonton and the NWT. Respected by his constituents and peers, he was elected to the first NWT Legislative Assembly from 1885-1888, re-elected in 1888-1891, voted the first speaker of the NWT Legislature (1888-1891), and served as Mayor of Edmonton twice in 1895 and 1896.

Medically, Dr. Wilson was elected to the first NWT Medical Council (1889). He was the first AMA President from Edmonton (1907/88) and spoke functional Cree, so he could provide care to the Indian patients. He installed one of Edmonton's first telephones (1885). Dr. Wilson's presence still permeates the office he built on Jasper Avenue in 1882, now located in Fort Edmonton in the back of the Daly Drug Store.

From Youth to Medical School 1859-1881

Herbert Charles Wilson was born in Picton, Ontario, December 7, 1859. The son of a banker and broker, he could trace his ancestry to the United Empire

Loyalists. His family sent him to Upper Canada College in Toronto for his senior schooling. When he graduated from high school, he was too young to enter medicine, so he spent a year studying pharmacy at the Ontario College of Pharmacy. Wilson received his pharmacy degree in 1878. Then he entered medical school at Trinity College in Toronto, completing his MD in 1881.⁽²⁾ It was followed by a year as a surgical assistant in hospitals in Toronto.⁽³⁾

Frank Oliver's 1882 Call

The 1882 Oliver ad was published in the new Edmonton Bulletin, in response to the loss of Edmonton's first and until then only physician, Dr. George Verey. Verey came to Edmonton in 1872, brought west by the Methodist ministers George and John McDougall. He taught school, farmed, and practiced medicine from 1872-1881. Unfortunately for Edmonton, Dr. Verey died suddenly in 1881.⁽⁴⁾

Frank Oliver, who had started The Edmonton Bulletin on December 6, 1880, highlighted Edmonton's doctor addiction problem in his newspaper.⁽⁵⁾ At a public meeting after his death, Oliver proposed a series of advertisements and telegraph calls across the prairie west, for a physician. The community supported him and helped with the funding of the advertisements.⁽⁶⁾

The first reply was from “Doc” J.D. Lauder, a former NWMP hospital sergeant.⁽⁷⁾ “Doc” Lauder wanted a \$2,000 annual guarantee before accepting.⁽⁸⁾ Fortunately, two other doctors also replied to the

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1. Wilson, Herbert C. Obituary. The (Edmonton) Saturday News, December 17, 1909.
 2. Jamieson, Heber C. “The Early Medical History of Edmonton,” CMAJ 29: 431-436, 1933. Also referenced in the publication for the 32nd annual dinner of the Edmonton Academy of Medicine on December 6, 1933.
 3. Cochrane, W., Hopkins, J.C. *The Canadian Album. Men of Canada*, page 85. Bradley, Garretson, 1891-96.
 4. McDonald, Jac “Edmonton's Tragic first doctor,” Edmonton Journal, January 24, 2004. For more details of the life of Dr. Verey, see H.C. Jamieson's *Early Medicine in Alberta*, pages 15, 16, 38, 112 and the Edmonton Bulletin of November 26, 1881. Dr. Verey died of an “unshakable thirst for alcohol ... compounded ... with the use of chloral”.
 5. Jamieson, Heber C. *Early Medicine in Alberta*, pages 38-41, AMA 1947. The story was printed in a pamphlet for the 32nd annual dinner of the Edmonton Academy of Medicine on December 6, 1933.
 6. (Oliver, F.) Details of the Public meeting. The advertisement appeared in the Edmonton Bulletin of January 21, 1882. The letter to “Doc” John Lauder, the first respondent, was delivered by Rev. John McDougall.
 7. Price, Elizabeth B. “Doc” Lauder, Alberta History 37(4): 28-31, Autumn 1989. See the Dr. Henry George and other profiles for more comments on colorful “Doc” Lauder.
 8. Jamieson, Heber C. *Early Medicine in Alberta*, pages 22, 39.

advertisements and agreed to come to Edmonton without monetary guarantees. One was Dr. L.J. Munro, who came in March 1882 from Winnipeg.⁽⁹⁾ His four year stay was highlighted by his marriage to Frank Oliver's wife's sister. Munro departed in 1886 when his uncle died and left him a medical practice in Wisconsin USA.

To Edmonton in 1882

A second physician, Dr. Herbert Charles Wilson, answered Frank Oliver's Edmonton Bulletin advertisement for a doctor. Dr. Wilson was completing an early form of internship when he read the ad. Wilson had already decided he wanted to treat and look after the aboriginals. He headed west in 1882 on the CPR, which had started construction west from Winnipeg (1881), reached Regina (1882) and would soon reach Calgary (1883). He arrived in Edmonton in late 1882, traveling by rail to Winnipeg, by cart to Prince Albert, and by HBC paddle wheeler up the North Saskatchewan.⁽¹⁰⁾



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Dr. H.C. Wilson's office, behind the Daly Drug Store, now in Fort Edmonton. The Wilson's lived upstairs.

Dr. Wilson was a graduate pharmacist, so he started his practice by opening a pharmacy in the front of his office. His medical office was in the back and his bedroom upstairs.⁽¹¹⁾ As could happen in those days, his first order of pharmaceutical supplies missed the Hudson Bay Company boat by one day. So it sat on the dock for the winter. After being frozen for the winter. The vaccine he ordered arrived, ineffective, the next spring.⁽¹²⁾

By prearrangement, Drs. Wilson and Munro secured Dr. Verey's remaining supply of pharmaceuticals. There were enough drugs and preparations to allow advertisements for the sale of selected products like "Henry's Specific for nervous disability and the loss of manly power". With his dual training, Dr. Wilson filled his own prescriptions.⁽¹³⁾ Wilson's pharmaceutical practice lasted until 1886, when he sold it to Philip Daly.⁽¹⁴⁾

MLA, Medical Contracts, Marriage and Medicine, 1882-1891

Little is known of Dr. Wilson's medical practice from 1882 to 1884. He did join the Fort Saskatchewan-Edmonton cricket team in 1883 and was President of it for many years. He also joined the Curling club and Rifle Association.⁽¹⁵⁾

In 1884 Dr. Wilson's political life began when he publicly opposed the establishment of the Edmonton School Board. He felt it was premature. Despite his objections, the plebiscite passed. However, it did whet his appetite to speak out on public issues. In early 1885 he ran for the NWT Council against Frank Oliver. Dr. Wilson was judged to be the more moderate of the two, as Oliver objected to everything that the Lt. Governor and Council did. Oliver suffered his only political loss when Wilson won with 120 to Oliver's 111 votes.⁽¹⁶⁾ The election of 1885 was tem-

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9. (Oliver, F.) Edmonton Bulletin, February 18, 1882. Dr. Munro arrived in Edmonton from Winnipeg before April 8, 1882, as noted in H.C. Jamieson's *Early Medicine in Alberta*, page 40.
10. Jamieson, Heber C. *Early Medicine in Alberta*, pages 41-42.
11. Day, J.P. Dr. Wilson's Office and Daly's Drug Store. Manuscript, 5 pages. January 1974. City of Edmonton Archives. Daly left Edmonton in 1890/92 under shadowy circumstances. Daly's Drug Store and Dr. Wilson's office were relocated to Fort Edmonton Park.
12. Wilson, Violet H. Interview with Naomi Radford, Victoria, March 1970. Violet Wilson was Dr. Wilson's daughter. A copy was deposited in the Provincial Archives #70.170 (three pages) with a list of photos #70.218 (three pages).
13. Penley, Ken *The History of Pharmacy in Alberta*, pages 43, 357, 1993. Confirmed in J.P. Day's Dr. Wilson's Office and Daly's Drug Store, page 2. A contemporary article on the role-relationship of physicians and pharmacists was published in a paper in the Northern Lancet, pages 225-228, 1897.
14. Day, J.P. Dr. Wilson's Office and Daly's Drug Store, page 3. Daly's business ventures in Edmonton and Winnipeg were discussed in some detail.
15. Cochrane, W. Hopkins, J.C. *The Canadian Album*, page 85.
16. Day, J.P. Dr. Wilson's Office and Daly's Drug Store, page 2. Confirmed in the Canadian Parliamentary Guide 1887 page 381.

porarily delayed by the March-May 1885 North-West (Riel) Rebellion.⁽¹⁷⁾ The first NWT Assembly was postponed and did not meet until the end of 1885.

In late 1885 Dr. Wilson arrived in Regina to start his first three year term as an MLA.⁽¹⁸⁾ The next year he became one of the first registrants to practice medicine under the new (1885) Medical Ordinance.

In 1885 the NWT Council was an advisory body to Lt. Governor Dewdney, primarily on money matters. Not satisfied with its role, the Council sent its first delegation to Ottawa to petition for more power for the assembly in 1886. Dr. Wilson was one of the delegates. The petition was partially successful in obtaining control over one of the two territorial grants.

Dr. Wilson had another reason to travel back to Ontario. He planned to marry Emily Lee of Toronto. Her father approved of the marriage but thought she was too young to go west. As a result, he sent Sarah the family cook along with them.

On the way back from the east, Wilson attended the NWT Council session in Regina and then traveled to Calgary on one of the first transcontinental CPR trains, which started in June 1886. There he hired a double wagon to carry their effects to Edmonton. The Wilsons were traveling one day behind the regular stagecoach so food at the stopping houses was in short supply. That didn't impede the moccasin telegraph from preceding him. Indians and Metis, well aware that Dr. Wilson was back, came out of the bushes to see him and present their complaints. Wilson had secured a Cree dictionary and always carried it to facilitate communication in their language. Eventually he could do so with little difficulty.⁽¹⁹⁾

Dr. Wilson's long absences and the pending departure of Dr. Munro, could have left Edmonton without a doctor, again. Fortunately, Dr. Wilson convinced Dr. H.L. McInnis of Winnipeg to join him in October 1886.⁽²⁰⁾ Dr. McInnis was also a graduate pharmacist. Their joint practice continued until Wilson's death in 1909.

Dr. Wilson had signed a Northern Alberta Treaty Indian medical contract to provide care on the adjacent Indian reservations, shortly after his arrival.⁽²¹⁾ Since these trips were normally some distance, Wilson would don his buffalo coat, cover himself in wolverine robes, set a few hot bricks on the floor to keep his feet warm, and head out on his sleigh. As early as 1886/1887 Wilson applied for and received the NWMP medical contract, succeeding Hospital Sergeant E.A. Braithwaite. It required weekly trips to Fort Saskatchewan. He received the contract on the recommendation of Superintendent A.M. Griesbach. It carried with it a stipend of eighty dollars per month.⁽²²⁾

Always in demand Dr. Wilson had one of the earliest telephones in Edmonton. It followed the arrival of the Bell system on January 10, 1885. In 1889 he built a substantial, architect designed home in Edmonton. The house was a mecca for patients. When Dr. Wilson was away, aboriginal patients would camp in the entranceway. Mrs. Wilson treated them with copious amounts of Castor Oil and then clean up the mess.⁽²³⁾

In 1888 Wilson ran for a second three year term in the NWT Legislative Assembly and was successful.⁽²⁴⁾ His campaign platform was to oppose big land grants to the railways and decrease farm tariffs. Although the Edmonton population was still well under a thousand, the Edmonton district justified two representa-

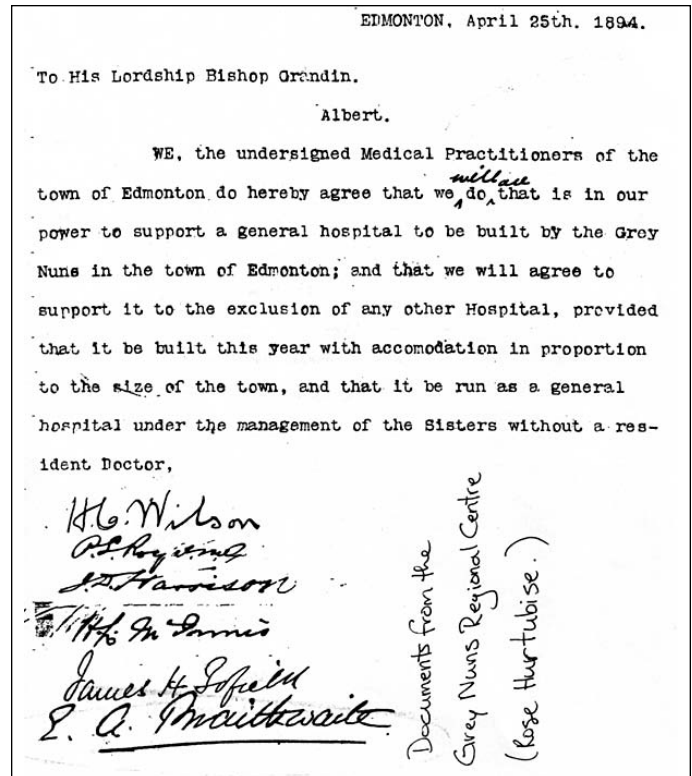
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17. Waddle, W.S. *The Honorable Frank Oliver*, M.Sc thesis pages 121-123, 135-141, UofA, 1950. Also see the Edmonton Bulletin, on July 18, August 29 and September 5, 1885 for Dr. Wilson's and Frank Oliver's Letters to the Electors. Matt McCauley was one of Dr. Wilson's thirty-two nominators. The vote was held September 15, 1885 with 299 votes recorded, as documented in the Canadian Parliamentary Guide for 1887.
18. Magrath, Charles A. The Magrath photo of the 1886 NWT Assembly Council, in C.A. Magrath's *The Galts and How Alberta Grew Up*, page 44 was probably taken in early 1885 and not 1886 as subscribed. Frank Oliver was in the photo, not Dr. Wilson. Copy deposited in the Galt Museum, Lethbridge.
19. Wilson, Violet H. Interview with Naomi Radford, March 1970, page 1.
20. MacRae, Archibald O. Herman Lewis McInnis in the *History of the Province of Alberta*, Volume II, pages 892-893, 1912. Dr. McInnis was also a druggist before he took medicine. He worked as an assistant surgeon with the CPR construction crews in 1884. He also served as an assistant surgeon in the NW Rebellion in 1885. McInnis entered the Manitoba Medical College and graduated in its first class in 1886. Dr. McInnis attended the 1889 CMA convention that was held in Banff.
21. Wilson, Violet H. Interview with Naomi Radford, page 2.
22. Day, J.P. Dr. Wilson's Office and Daly's Drug Store, page 2. Dr. Wilson replaced Dr. E.A. Braithwaite, who obtained Commissioner Herchmer's approval to break his NWMP contract and return to medical school in Winnipeg to complete his MD.
23. Wilson, Violet H. Interview with Naomi Radford, page 2.
24. Wilson, Herbert C. Letter to the Electors, Edmonton Bulletin, Saturday June 23, 1888.

tives to the Assembly. Frank Oliver came in second on the ballot and became the other representative.⁽²⁵⁾ Upon returning to the NWT Legislative Assembly in Regina, Dr. Wilson was elected the first Speaker of the Assembly.⁽²⁶⁾ He kept the post until 1891 when he retired from politics for health reasons.⁽²⁷⁾ In gratitude the Assembly gave him his tall, high backed chair, which his wife donated to the province of Alberta in 1945, two years before her death on February 23, 1947. The chair is now in the Royal Alberta Museum.⁽²⁸⁾

In 1891 the C&E (CPR) railway was completed as far as Strathcona (south Edmonton) and became the most northerly rail terminus on the prairies. By 1892 it linked the communities of Red Deer, Calgary and Fort Macleod, but did not cross the North Saskatchewan river until the High Level Bridge was completed from 1910-1913. The Strathcona rail connection resolved the longstanding competition for civic prominence between St. Albert and Edmonton, in Edmonton's favor. While the growth of Edmonton and Strathcona accelerated, hospital care provided by the two physicians remained onerous. Dr. Wilson still had to make nine-mile hospital trips (one way) to St. Albert to the hospital built by the Grey Nuns in December 1881 for \$10,000.⁽²⁹⁾

From Hospitals to Mayor 1892-1896

While medicine and politics may have been Wilson's forte, surgery was not. Circa 1892 newly arrived Dr. E.A. Braithwaite, together with Drs. McInnis and Wilson, performed the first ovariectomy (removal or



The Petition for the Edmonton General Hospital, 1894 12-6

wedge resection of the ovary) likely in St. Albert. It was not a success and led to a second operation by Dr. Brett in Banff.⁽³⁰⁾

In 1894 Dr. Wilson, together with five other physicians, petitioned Roman Catholic Bishop Grandin for a hospital in Edmonton.⁽³¹⁾ The Bishop supported the request and forwarded it to the Grey Nuns. They

25. Queens Printer *Canadian Parliamentary Guide for 1889*, page 396. Dr. Wilson received the most votes (395) and Frank Oliver the second most votes (350) in the June 30, 1888 election.
26. Queens Printer *Canadian Parliamentary Guide for 1889*, page 396. The election for the Speaker was held October 31, 1888.
27. Morgan, H.J. "Hon. Herbert Charles Wilson," in the *Canadian Men and Women of the Time*, pages 1090-1091, Briggs, 1898.
28. Wilson, Emily C. Donation of NWT Speakers Chair. *Edmonton Journal*, January 22, 1945. Dr. Wilson's wife, Emily Charlotte Wilson died on February 23, 1947.
29. Jamieson, Heber C. *Early Medicine in Alberta*, page 40. Sister Therese Castonguay in *A Leap of Faith: the Grey Nuns Ministries in Western and Northern Canada*, Volume 1, page 46, 1999, indicated a "new frame building, attached to the mission, was completed (January 7, 1870) and more patients could now be accommodated...When Dr. McDonald arrived to visit on December 31 of that year, he soon decided to offer his services to the population of St. Albert". She commented that "surgical operations were not unusual occurrences in the burgeoning hospital." The building was an addition to the original (1863) mission and used for multiple purposes: orphanage, hospital, mother house, church. No details on Dr. McDonald in St. Albert have been uncovered. Janet C. Ross-Kerr in *Prepared to Care*, pages 3-6, UofA 1998, confirmed the 1870 addition. She noted a separate hospital was constructed in St. Albert in 1881. It was the first public denominational hospital in the province.
30. Braithwaite, Ernest A. "Early Days of the RNWMP," pages 37-38, January 1942. Manuscript deposited in Glenbow, Calgary. Reprinted as "Reminiscences of a Hospital Sergeant," *Alberta History* 39(1): 15-25, Winter 1991.
31. Wilson, Herbert C., et al Letter to Bishop Grandin, April 25, 1894. Deposited in the Archives of the Grey Nuns, Edmonton. The other signators were Drs. P.S. Roy, J.D. Harrison, H.L. McInnis, J.H. Tofield and E.A. Braithwaite. The application for a 1896 NWT Hospital grant was also countersigned by Frank Oliver. In December 1896, 31 patients were admitted to the hospital.

answered the call and constructed a thirty-five bed hospital at a cost of \$30,000. The Edmonton General Hospital (EGH) opened August 6, 1895 as Edmonton's first hospital. Edmonton's population at that time was 1165 excluding Strathcona. Dr. Wilson remained on the Edmonton General Medical Board until at least March 30, 1899, along with Drs. Braithwaite, McInnis, and Harrison.⁽³²⁾

Dr. Wilson's participation in the petition and medical support for the EGH was well timed. He ran for the position of Mayor of Edmonton in 1895 and was successful. In 1896, he was re-elected by acclamation. However, on October 6, 1896, he resigned, when Matt MacAuley convinced the city council, at a meeting in Dr. Wilson's absence, to decline to pay his four hundred and sixty-five dollar bill for a ninety-day trip to Ottawa. MacAuley's argument was that there was no itemization of Wilson's expenses.⁽³³⁾ One of the reasons for the trip was to petition Ottawa for assistance to build the future High Level Bridge.



Edmonton General Hospital, Opened August 6, 1895 ¹²⁻⁷

Trips to the east for a physician were always multi-purposed. Wilson was no exception and probably spent some of the time continuing his medical education.

NWT College, AMA and Academy Affairs 1886-1908

Dr. Wilson was actively engaged in establishing the rudiments of organized medicine in the NWT. He was a member of the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the NWT, having been registered since 1886. In 1890 he was elected to the first NWT Medical Council, when the NWT College was established.⁽³⁴⁾ He was a charter member of the 1902 Edmonton Academy of Medicine, known then as the Northern Alberta Medical Association. Dr. Wilson became the second President when Dr. W.M. MacKay became ill, shortly before the second meeting.⁽³⁵⁾ He joined the Alberta Medical Association when it was formed in 1906. Dr. Wilson was elected the second President of the AMA and the first from Edmonton in 1907/08. He followed Dr. R.G. Brett who was the first President of the AMA and College in 1906/07.⁽³⁶⁾

The Wilson Family

Dr. Wilson was described as an excellent practitioner with a bright mind. He was kind and congenial, well read, a good conversationalist, and an enjoyable speaker. He was never bitter nor violently partisan.⁽³⁷⁾

Apparently Dr. Wilson had a long-standing nervous disorder and made trips to Japan for health reasons in 1908 and 1909. While he appears to have suffered from some unrecorded malady, his death was officially listed as caused by a stroke on December 17, 1909 at the age of fifty.⁽³⁸⁾

The Wilson's had three children: one son and two daughters. Their son, Charles, was sent to Upper Canada College in Toronto. Charles returned to

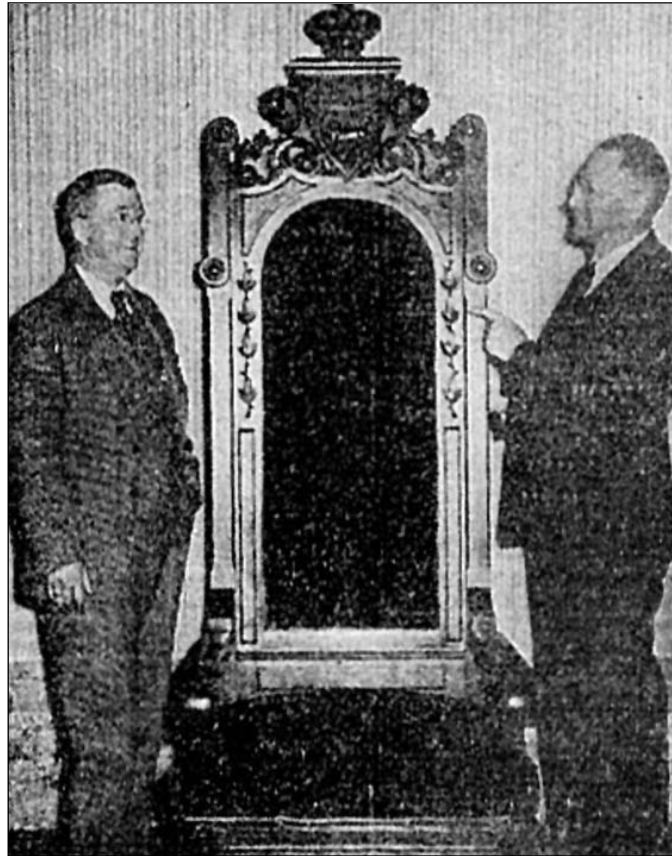
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32. Harrison, J.D. et al Edmonton Journal, March 30, 1899. Apparently a controversy arose over the Sisters admitting patients directly to the hospital. The public letter of concern signed by the doctors was refuted by Reverend Pere Leduc on April 10, 1899. The hospital had already been inspected and accredited for the NWT Council grant in 1898 by Dr. G.A. Kennedy.
33. Wilson, Herbert C. Letters to the City Clerk A.G. Randall with attachments on September 9, 15, 22, October 10, 1896. MacAuley had received \$600 for a twenty-eight day trip in 1894; Dr. Wilson and Father Lacombe received \$400 each for a ninety day trip in 1895.
34. Jamieson, Heber C. *Early Medicine in Alberta*, page 43. Wilson's election was confirmed in *The Northern Lancet* 2: 173, 1890.
35. Letts, Harry *Edmonton Academy of Medicine: a History*, pages 1-3, 1986.
36. Jamieson, Heber C. *Early Medicine in Alberta*, pages 64, 72, 199. Dr. Wilson did not attend the AMA annual meeting in Banff on August 11, 12, 1908, because of ill health. *WCMJ* 2(9): 393-394, September 1908.
37. Wilson, Herbert C. Obituary. *The Saturday News* (2 columns), December 17, 1909.
38. Wilson, Herbert C. Obituary. *The Saturday News*, December 17, 1909.

Edmonton and was one of the original members of the Edmonton Eskimos. At the start of World War I, Charles joined the 19th Alberta Dragoons and was sent overseas. He died in France in 1916. Dr. Wilson's eldest daughter Violet attended the Bishop Strachan School in Toronto and became a broadcaster and writer.⁽³⁹⁾ The Wilson's second daughter Marjorie married Colonel Arthur-Herbert Panet and left Edmonton. Panet became the senior officer in charge of the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Related profiles: MacKay, Lafferty, Braithwaite, Brett, George

Related Perspectives: Military Medicine and Medical Care in the North-West Rebellions of 1870/71 and 1885, The Medical Profession in the North-West Territories

Key Words: NWT Council and Assembly, Honorable Frank Oliver, NWMP and Indian physician contracts, AMA President 1907/8



*Presentation of Dr. H.C. Wilson's NWT Speakers Chair, 1885-1891 to the Provincial Museum
Edmonton Journal, January 22, 1945*

39. Wilson, Violet H. Interview with Naomi Radford, page 2. A three column article of Violet Wilson's recollections was printed in the Edmonton Journal, June 26, 1974 as, "She Returns to Find her City's Grown Up."

40. Gouin, Jacques, Brault, Lucien *Legacy of Honor. The Panets, Canada's Foremost Military Family*, pages 130-132, Methuen, 1985.