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Introduction
The Speakership of the Canadian House of Commons traces its origins back many centuries in British parliamentary history, but has evolved over the past 140 years as a distinctly Canadian institution. As the presiding officer of our House of Commons, the Speaker is the key to ensuring that this institution, central to Canada’s federal system of government, operates smoothly. The Speaker also performs many other roles and functions, and holds an essential position in our parliamentary system of government.

Origins of the Speakership
The roots of the Speakership can be traced back in England at least to the 14th century. In 1376 Sir Peter de la Mare was selected by the House of Commons to be its spokesman, and in 1377 his successor, Sir Thomas Hungerford, became the first of more than 150 members of the British House of Commons who have been called Speaker. Early Speakers — charged with representing the Commons to the King — were not in an easy position: between 1399 and 1535 seven Speakers were beheaded, one was killed during the Wars of the Roses, and one was murdered. The role of the Speaker crystallized in 1642, when King Charles I entered the House to demand that he be told the whereabouts of five parliamentarians whom he desired to be surrendered to him. Speaker William Lenthall refused to provide the information, in historic words that have been used from time to time in the Canadian House to define the relationship between the House and the Crown:

May it please Your Majesty, I have neither eyes to see, nor tongue to speak in this place, but as the House is pleased to direct me, whose servant I am here; and I humbly beg Your Majesty’s pardon that I cannot give any other answer than this to what Your Majesty is pleased to demand of me.
Speakers were a part of early Canadian colonial legislatures. The first Speaker in what would become Canada was Robert Sanderson, a Boston merchant, chosen to chair the first representative House of Assembly of Nova Scotia in 1758. Over the years before Confederation, the Speakers of British North American legislative assemblies strengthened the independence, impartiality and non-partisan nature of their positions, in parallel with developments in the Speaker’s office in the United Kingdom.

The British North America Act, 1867 – now the Constitution Act, 1867 – created the Dominion of Canada “with a Constitution similar in Principle to that of the United Kingdom.” The Constitution Act, 1867 provides that the House elects its own Speaker, who presides over all its meetings, and that it must elect a new Speaker if the office becomes vacant permanently or temporarily (a provision that changed in 1885 when a Deputy Speakership was created). The Speaker may vote only in case of a tie. Much of the office of Speaker, however, is not set down in any constitutional or statutory documents, but rests on history, practice and convention.

A Uniquely Canadian Speakership

Below are several distinguishing features of the Canadian Speakership:

- Until the mid-1980s, the Prime Minister nominated the prospective Speaker (usually after consulting the Leader of the Opposition), and the House approved the nomination. In 1985 the House introduced the secret ballot for electing the Speaker, a measure assuring the independence of the position.

- Normally the nominee is a member of the governing political party; on rare occasions a Speaker from a previous administration has been nominated by the different incoming government. Since Confederation, 20 Liberals and 14 Conservatives have held the office.

- Over time, Canadian Speakers have increasingly withdrawn from partisan activity. Although the Speaker must be a member of Parliament who has nearly always run for election as a member of a political party, he or she is expected to be scrupulously non-partisan. Speakers do not attend caucus meetings or take part in debates in the House of Commons, although such participation is not prohibited.

- Due to the bilingual nature of Canada, a convention developed (which has not always been observed) of alternating English-speaking and French-speaking Speakers. Despite simultaneous interpretation in the House in recent years, bilingualism remains an asset, if not a requirement, for the Speaker.

- Speakers of the Canadian House of Commons have averaged a relatively short tenure in the Chair, compared to those of the United Kingdom House of Commons.

- In 1965 a change in the Standing Orders strengthened the authority of the Speaker by eliminating appeals to the House from the Speaker’s decisions. But the real source of his or her authority is the confidence of members of the House of Commons. The Speaker is, as William Lenthall said, the servant of the House. He or she can set the tone of the proceedings by maintaining decorum and order, but the Speaker cannot impose his or her will on the House.
Duties of the Speaker

The most visible element of the Speaker’s work in the Canadian House of Commons is his or her procedural duties while presiding over debates from the Speaker’s Chair. It is here that the importance of the position becomes clear: ensuring that the nation’s business is conducted efficiently, and balancing the rights and interests of both the majority and the minority. The Speaker is responsible for interpreting and enforcing all rules and practices, and for acting as the guardian of the rights and privileges of individual members of Parliament and of the House itself.

As a representative of the House of Commons, the Speaker has a number of traditional ceremonial and diplomatic duties. He or she is the spokesperson for the House in its dealings with the Senate, the Crown and other bodies outside Parliament. When entering or leaving the House, the Speaker is always preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms carrying the Mace, the symbol of the Speaker’s authority. A day on which the House is sitting always begins with the Speaker’s Parade, in which the Speaker walks in procession through the Hall of Honour and into the Chamber. Members rise while the Speaker proceeds to the Chair and the Sergeant-at-Arms places the Mace on the Table. Once satisfied that the constitutionally required minimum of at least 20 members of Parliament is present, the Speaker reads
the Prayers (part of the daily proceedings of the House since 1877) and formally opens the sitting. The Speaker leads the procession when the House is summoned to the Senate to attend the Queen or Governor General, both at the beginning of a new session of Parliament and when there is a ceremony to grant Royal Assent to bills.

The Speaker also has extensive administrative and financial duties, being responsible for the overall direction and management of the House of Commons. Matters of administrative and financial policy affecting the House are overseen by the Board of Internal Economy, which is chaired by the Speaker. The management of the staff of the House of Commons falls under the Speaker, although the Clerk of the House and its senior officials generally manage them on a day-to-day basis. The Speaker oversees the premises of Parliament, as well as matters of security and policing within the parliamentary precincts. In addition, along with the Speaker of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Commons oversees the direction and control of the Library of Parliament.

In a diplomatic capacity, the Speaker receives foreign visitors on Parliament Hill, including ambassadors, heads of state, and parliamentary delegations from other nations. He or she regularly leads delegations to Parliaments in other countries.

Serving Canadians

The brief biographical notes that follow offer perspectives on the careers of all Speakers of the Canadian House of Commons elected from 1867 to date. They illustrate the variety of backgrounds — in terms of occupation, income and education, among other things — from which Speakers have come. Many Speakers assumed office after acquiring substantial political experience at the federal, provincial (for early Speakers, in legislative assemblies and executive councils) and/or municipal levels. For some, the Speakership was the height of his or her political career; for others, distinguished careers followed the departure from the Chair. Until the second half of the 20th century, the Speakership was often a stepping stone to Cabinet. Several Speakers went on to be eminent judges, and two recent Speakers were appointed Governors General of Canada. A few Speakers, however, ended up in relative poverty or obscurity. Some have served long terms, while others have chaired the House for less than a year. Each brought individual strengths to the position, such as deep knowledge of parliamentary procedure, impeccable judgement, an ability to defuse tense situations, or a congenial manner that fostered co-operation.

Only 34 of 4,089 members of Parliament have been nominated and elected as Speakers of the Canadian House of Commons. Their personal qualities and experience led each of them to fulfil the office differently. Each one presided at a unique time and dealt with a different composition of the House and specific issues and challenges. Whatever the reason for his or her election to the office, each of the men and women serving as Speaker has had an important part in the orderly passage of the laws that affect all Canadians and the operation of our House of Commons. The following biographical sketches pay tribute to the distinguished Canadians who have served in this important office and made a contribution to Canada’s Parliament and the country.
About This Publication
The Speakers of the House of Commons contains information from a variety of sources, both historical and contemporary. This publication does not attempt to provide exhaustive biographical information about each Speaker, but rather seeks to shed light on the tenure of each individual who has served as Speaker of the House of Commons in Canada.

For simplicity, the political affiliations associated with each Speaker are identified using broad terms. As such, “Liberal” indicates a member of the Liberal, Laurier Liberal, or Liberal Progressive parties; “Conservative” indicates a member of the Conservative, Liberal Conservative, Unionist, National Liberal and Conservative, National Conservative, National Government, or Progressive Conservative parties.

The occupation(s) identified for each Speaker only include the field of his or her primary work. Titles following the Speakers’ names reflect their lifetime achievements. Thus, an individual who became a member of the Privy Council or Governor General after his or her tenure as Speaker is referred to as “the Honourable” or “the Right Honourable,” even though these titles were not held during his or her Speakership.

For the purpose of this publication, a Speaker is considered to remain in office until a new Speaker is elected; therefore, during a dissolution, a Speaker continues to hold his/her position until the new Parliament elects a new Speaker. There are, however, certain gaps in time due to unforeseen circumstances such as illness or death.
BORN
Berwick-on-Tweed, England, 1819

DIED
Ottawa, Ontario, 1883

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Business

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1867
• First Elected to Speakership: 1867

PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• John A. Macdonald
• Alexander Mackenzie

ARTIST | George Theodore Berthon, 1872
James Cockburn
Q.C. (1867-1874)

The first Speaker of the 1st Session of the 1st Parliament of Canada, James Cockburn had an extensive political history before standing for the House of Commons in 1867. His 1861 campaign in West Northumberland for a seat in the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada was directed against the government of John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier; he ran as an Independent and defeated the Postmaster General. Cockburn’s re-election in 1863 as a Liberal-Conservative was by acclamation, and the following year he won a by-election. In 1864, somewhat surprisingly, he joined the short-lived administration of Macdonald and Sir Étienne Taché as Solicitor General for Canada West. A delegate to the Quebec Conference in 1864, Cockburn was thus a Father of Confederation.

Although future Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie privately considered Cockburn to be “an inferior man,” he took his seat in the new House of Commons by acclamation, and was nominated by Macdonald (now Sir John) as the Dominion’s first Speaker. Cartier seconded the motion, but Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) Joseph Dufresne was not satisfied because, he said, Cockburn could not speak French. Cartier responded that Cockburn could at least understand French, and his election was unanimous.

Cockburn retained his seat in the 1872 general election, and was re-elected Speaker when the 2nd Parliament convened in 1873. This in itself was a deviation from the custom of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada since 1841, in which English- and French-speaking Speakers were elected alternately. He lost his seat in the 1874 election but regained it in 1878. In his final years, because of illness and a precarious financial situation, Cockburn relied on successive patronage appointments until his death in 1883.
BORN
Clonakilty, Ireland, 1822

DIED
Toronto, Ontario, 1896

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Journalism

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1867
• First Elected to Speakership: 1874

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Alexander Mackenzie

ARTIST | John Colin Forbes, 1878
Timothy Warren Anglin
(1874-1879)

Timothy Anglin is the only Speaker both to have lost his seat in the House of Commons because of corrupt practices and then to be re-elected in the same Parliament. Before he was elected as an MP in the first post-Confederation Parliament, he had firmly opposed Confederation. By the end of his political life he had come to be respected for his strength of will, diligence and talents as a journalist and propagandist.

Anglin’s career in New Brunswick before 1867 included election to the colony’s House of Assembly and a year as a member of the Executive Council. He had founded his own newspaper, the Freeman, in 1849, and it would remain his public mouthpiece for more than three decades. His main cause was the progress of Irish Roman Catholics, first in New Brunswick and then throughout the new Dominion of Canada.

Anglin ran for the federal House as an Independent in 1867, but by the time of the general election in 1872 he had affiliated himself with the Leader of the Opposition, Alexander Mackenzie, and his Liberal party. When Sir John A. Macdonald’s Conservative government fell in November 1873, Mackenzie did not include Anglin in his Cabinet. Instead he nominated him as Speaker four months later when Parliament was reconvened.

Anglin had an unsettling practice of introducing himself into debate in the House. Opposition members were also concerned that the Speaker continued to own and actively edit the strongly partisan Freeman. That concern was reinforced by a member of Mackenzie’s own Cabinet, who reported that the newspaper had received untendered government printing contracts contrary to the Independence of Parliament Act. The Committee on Privileges and Elections eventually reported that the Speaker had indeed violated the statute. Anglin resigned his seat in 1874, and won it back in 1877. He was also re-elected as Speaker in February 1878, but with the support of only two-thirds of the members (116 to 53): for the first time in the House, the vote to elect the Speaker was recorded on division, a voice vote intended to show that a motion is not decided unanimously. Macdonald’s Conservatives won the September general election, and Anglin was once more on the backbenches. He was defeated in 1882, and failed in his attempt to make a political comeback.
BORN
St-Pierre, Lower Canada, 1829

DIED
Lévis, Quebec, 1890

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Medicine, Military

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1867
• First Elected to Speakership: 1879

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• John A. Macdonald

ARTIST | John Colin Forbes, circa 1880

© House of Commons Collection, Ottawa
When Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald nominated Dr. Joseph-Godric Blanchet* as Speaker in 1879, the Conservative MP from Quebec had already served as Speaker of the Quebec Legislative Assembly for eight years. He was the first and only Canadian to be Speaker of both the House of Commons and a provincial legislature. Blanchet had substantial parliamentary experience as a Quebec Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from 1867 to 1875, and sat simultaneously as a federal MP in the House of Commons from 1867 to 1873 (double mandates were allowed until 1873). He was elected again as an MP in the general elections of 1875, 1878 and 1882. He had a reputation for political honesty and for being approachable.

Not unexpectedly, the Prime Minister spoke highly of Blanchet’s qualifications. Sir Leonard Tilley, Minister of Finance, seconded his nomination, and Alexander Mackenzie, Leader of the Opposition and former Prime Minister, expressed full confidence in Blanchet.

In addition to maintaining his medical practice, Blanchet was actively involved in the Canadian militia for some two decades. Like many Canadians, including Macdonald, he was concerned about the American Civil War spilling over the Canadian border. He was a supporter of the (defeated) 1862 Militia Bill introduced in the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada, and in 1863 he raised the 17th (Lévis) Battalion of Infantry. Lieutenant-colonel of the battalion until 1884, he commanded on the front lines during the 1866 and 1870 Fenian raids.

Blanchet’s four-year term as Speaker of the House of Commons, it has been reported, was “probably the least eventful of any 19th-century Speaker”: “no major scandals, no parliamentary crises and no English–French conflicts.” Perhaps the most controversial issue over which he presided — debate that prompted at least one all-night session in the House — concerned the federal disallowance of Ontario’s Rivers and Streams Act of 1881. Macdonald did not renominate him as Speaker following the 1882 general election, and Blanchet resigned his seat the next year to accept a government post in Quebec.

* The names Godric, Godéric and Goderic are used interchangeably in different sources.
BORN
Kingston, Canada West, 1841

DIED
Toronto, Ontario, 1899

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Business, Military

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1870
• First Elected to Speakership: 1883

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• John A. Macdonald

ARTIST | Frances E. Richards Rowley, 1887
On April 27, 1870, one month after the death of his father (a Conservative MP), George Kirkpatrick successfully ran for his Kingston-area seat to succeed him. At the age of 29 he began 22 consecutive years in the House, aided perhaps by the fact that his Frontenac riding was adjacent to that of Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, and by his late father’s close friendship with Macdonald. Despite these connections, he never secured a cabinet post.

In 1883 Macdonald decided to nominate Kirkpatrick as Speaker; with a playful reference to the Speaker’s ceremonial tricorne hat, Macdonald wrote Kirkpatrick that “I purpose, if you have no objection, to knock you into a cocked hat at the opening of Parliament next week.” In the House, Macdonald noted that Kirkpatrick’s time there “gained for him the esteem, I might almost say the affection, of his brother members.” Sir Hector Langevin, the Minister of Public Works, seconded the nomination, but commented that Kirkpatrick’s French was limited.

Leader of the Opposition Edward Blake, however, raised a more general point. He began by quoting Macdonald’s words on the re-election of Speaker James Cockburn in 1873: Macdonald said then that he “was trying to introduce the system that had obtained in England and had worked well: That after a Speaker had served well, he should not be changed capriciously at the beginning of each Parliament.” Now Macdonald had reversed himself. Why was former Speaker Joseph-Godric Blanchet not nominated again? Blake concluded by hoping that Kirkpatrick “will endeavour to maintain the dignity of this House by some more active steps, on certain occasions, than former Speakers have taken, by the repression, at the earliest moment, of incidents, which, when prolonged only become more lamentable.”

Although Kirkpatrick is reported as saying that he was not overjoyed at being elected Speaker, he has also been described as “probably the best, or, at least, the most impartial of 19th-century Speakers.” He may have irritated some Conservative MPs by ruling against the government on occasion; he certainly irritated the Prime Minister, who saw him as not strong enough in the House, and as too close a friend of Edward Blake. Macdonald did not re-nominate him for Speaker in 1887, and denied him a cabinet post the following year. He stayed on the backbenches until Conservative Prime Minister John Abbott recommended in 1892 that the Governor General appoint him Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario.
BORN
Ste-Rose, Canada East, 1848

DIED
St-Polycarpe, Quebec, 1916

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Military

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1873
• Cabinet Appointments: Minister of Public Works, 1892–1894; Minister of Public Works, 1894–1896; Minister of Agriculture (acting), 1895; Secretary of State of Canada (acting), 1895–1896; Minister of Railways and Canals (acting), 1896
• First Elected to Speakership: 1887

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• John A. Macdonald

ARTIST | René Émile Quentin, 1889
Joseph-Aldric Ouimet* had two main interests as a young man, both of which would influence his later career: military service and legal work. He graduated from infantry school in Quebec when he was only 17; by the end of 1870, at the age of 22, he had taken his law degree in Ontario, he was commissioned a first lieutenant in the Chasseurs canadiens, and he had fought against the second Fenian raid. With Conservative politics next in mind, in 1873 he began 23 years of service as an MP, firmly behind Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald’s Liberal–Conservative policies on, for example, a protective tariff and the Canadian Pacific Railway.

In 1885 — as a lieutenant colonel — he recruited a Montréal regiment to accompany him to the North-West Rebellion. On his return he broke with Macdonald by voting to censure the government for ordering the execution of Louis Riel. It was said that Macdonald was attempting a reconciliation when he nominated Ouimet for the Speaker’s position in 1887. As Leader of the Opposition Edward Blake stated before Ouimet’s election, the new Speaker owed his promotion to the fact that he had condemned and voted against the execution of Louis Riel as well as the government’s conduct concerning the Metis peoples.

Ouimet’s four years in the Chair went relatively smoothly; a contemporary observer commented that his “unfailing good temper, his manifest desire to hold the scales of justice even, ... won for him the approval of both sides of the House.” Following the 1891 general election, and the government’s wish to alternate between French- and English-speaking Speakers, Ouimet returned to the backbenches and Macdonald nominated Peter White as Speaker. The following year Prime Minister Sir John Abbott brought Ouimet into the Cabinet as Minister of Public Works. After four years Ouimet left politics for a judicial appointment to the Court of Queen’s Bench in Quebec, where he served until ill health forced him to resign in 1906.

* The names Aldric and Aldéric are used interchangeably in different sources.
BORN
Pembroke, Upper Canada, 1838

DIED
Pembroke, Ontario, 1906

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Business

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1874
• First Elected to Speakership: 1891

PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• John A. Macdonald
• John Abbott
• John Thompson
• Mackenzie Bowell
Peter White holds the unique distinction of presiding over the House during the ministries of four prime ministers: Sir John A. Macdonald, Sir John Abbott, Sir John Thompson and Sir Mackenzie Bowell. A wealthy Ontario lumberman, he was successful in seven and defeated in five federal elections between 1872 and 1904.

After the 1891 general election (and only five weeks before he died in office), Macdonald nominated White as Speaker rather than inviting him into his Cabinet. “I do not know on either side of the House,” he said, “any honourable member who would prove, from his demeanour, conduct and ability, more acceptable, without reference to political questions, than my friend.” Leader of the Opposition Wilfrid Laurier sourly noted that he was not “altogether disappointed at the choice,” but he questioned why the Deputy Speaker, John Wood, was not chosen instead.

White was Speaker during a difficult time in the House of Commons for Conservative prime ministers: Senator Sir John Abbott — the first Prime Minister to be a senator — reluctantly succeeded Macdonald, but cancer forced him to retire in 1892; Sir John Thompson took over until he suddenly died of a heart attack in 1894; Senator Sir Mackenzie Bowell followed (the second senator to become Prime Minister) and was ousted by his colleagues in 1896.

Debate was particularly heated and divisive during the Manitoba Schools Question in 1896. Manitoba’s Liberal government had abolished public funding of Roman Catholic schools. The Conservative federal government had the authority to pass remedial legislation, but Laurier — supported by anti-French and anti-Roman Catholic forces — blocked it. The election of 1896 was largely fought on the issue. Although White opposed the Conservative position, he wisely kept his own counsel while in the Chair. He was defeated in the 1896 general election, and resigned the Speakership during Sir Charles Tupper’s 69-day term as Prime Minister. Laurier appointed him to the Privy Council in 1897.

WHITE AND HIS BROTHER ANDREW WERE LUMBER BARONS IN PEMBROKE, ONTARIO, A TOWN FOUNDED BY THEIR FATHER IN 1828.
BORN
Hatley, Canada East, 1841

DIED
Toronto, Ontario, 1899

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Journalism, Business

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1872
• First Elected to Speakership: 1896

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Wilfrid Laurier
James Edgar, a lawyer and railway entrepreneur, was nothing if not persistent in his political ambitions. Elected to the House in 1872, he was defeated in his re-election bid and was subsequently defeated in five consecutive attempts to regain a seat before winning one in an 1884 by-election. During that period he became Liberal Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie’s unofficial Ontario organizer; he had previously served as the party’s chief whip in the House of Commons, and on his re-election served again as a whip and railway critic for Liberal Leader of the Opposition Edward Blake. Mackenzie had used Edgar to negotiate a new railway clause for British Columbia’s entry into Confederation, and under Blake he revitalized Liberal fundraising.

Despite these activities, Edgar’s influence was in decline when Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier put together his 1896 Cabinet. Wanting more forward-looking individuals in his Cabinet, Laurier instead nominated him for the Speakership. The Opposition’s concerns focused less on Edgar’s strong partisanship than on the fact that, as Leader of the Opposition and former Prime Minister Sir Charles Tupper regretted, “it has been found necessary to depart from the time-honoured precedent of having the Speaker alternately French and English,” as the previous Speaker had been an anglophone as well.

To honour Edgar, Laurier appointed him to the Privy Council, and he was knighted in 1898. By this time Edgar was noticeably suffering from nephritis, a kidney disease, known then as Bright’s disease. After Edgar’s sudden death — the first and only time a House Speaker died in office — Laurier praised him for his fairness and “general acceptance to both sides of the House.” Speaking for the Opposition, Conservative George Foster noted slightly ambiguously that “his decisions have been as fair and equitable as he in his position could make them.”

Hon. Sir James David Edgar
(1896–1899)

Known for his literary achievements, Edgar wrote the popular poem “This Canada of Ours” to commemorate Confederation.
BORN
Denny, Scotland, 1834

DIED
Dundas, Ontario, 1915

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Agriculture

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1872
• First Elected to Speakership: 1899

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Wilfrid Laurier
News reached the House of Commons slightly before 7:00 p.m. on July 31, 1899, that Sir James Edgar, Speaker of the House since August 1896, had died unexpectedly. Deputy Speaker Louis-Philippe Brodeur took the Chair. The situation was unprecedented in Canada’s post-Confederation history, reported Sir John Bourinot, author of Parliamentary Procedure and Practice and former Clerk of the House of Commons, but a precedent in the U.K. suggested the appropriate procedure for a new Speaker’s election.

Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier nominated Thomas Bain, a faithful Liberal MP of 27 years, to replace Edgar as Speaker. Leader of the Opposition and former Prime Minister Sir Charles Tupper commended him as “independent, able and impartial.” Bain became the first farmer to be elected Speaker of the House of Commons. It was understood that his would be a partial term, lasting only until the day before the House met after the next general election.

Bain acknowledged the difficulty of being unilingual in a bilingual House, but his colleagues appear to have treated him leniently. His mild manner and hesitation to make firm rulings meant, nonetheless, that order in the House suffered. One of the most tumultuous days in the House took place when the Conservative MP Frederick Monk accused the government of accepting fraudulently prepared emergency rations for troops in the field. Bain appeared to exercise minimal control over the debate. It was also reported that on one occasion, members of the Opposition set out to confuse the 65-year-old Speaker with points of order. They succeeded, tying up debate for an hour, until the Speaker rose, spread his arms, and like a Methodist preacher declared “Will the brethren please come to order.” Members roared with laughter.

Bain’s declining eyesight led him to announce without warning that he would not stand in the 1900 election, and his term as Speaker ended as expected. He received no honours from Laurier’s returning government.

BAIN WROTE AN ARTICLE ON “THE SPEAKER AND THE HOUSE OF COMMONS” IN 1901.
BORN
Beloeil, Canada East, 1862

DIED
City of Québec, Quebec, 1924

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Journalism

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1891
• Cabinet Appointments: Minister of Inland Revenue, 1904–1906; Minister of Marine and Fisheries, 1906–1911; Minister of the Naval Service, 1910–1911
• Appointed: Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 1896–1900
• First Elected to Speakership: 1901

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Wilfrid Laurier
Hon. Louis-Philippe Brodeur
P.C., K.C. (1901-1904)

A committed Liberal since he was a young man — he also served as Speaker of a mock parliament in the mid-1880s — Louis-Philippe Brodeur was an aggressive supporter of Sir Wilfrid Laurier outside and inside the House of Commons. First elected in 1891, he offered to resign his seat so that a defeated cabinet minister could run in his riding. His performance in the House led to Prime Minister Laurier’s appointing him Deputy Speaker five years later.

With the death of Speaker Sir James Edgar and the decision of Edgar’s successor Thomas Bain not to run in the 1900 election, Brodeur was the natural choice for Speaker in 1901. His nomination by Laurier was greeted by cheers in the House, and Leader of the Opposition and former Prime Minister Sir Charles Tupper expressed his party’s confidence in Brodeur.

The new Speaker presided over many lively debates in the House during the next three years, including problems concerning treaties and trade relations with the United States, the vexing question of Alaska’s boundary with Canada, and public statements by the Earl of Dundonald, General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia, improperly challenging civilian control of Canada’s armed forces.

The most difficult issue of all, however, proved to be the government’s transportation policy concerning a proposed second transcontinental railway (which would dominate the 1904 general election). In general, MPs were satisfied with Brodeur’s impartiality.

In January 1904 the Prime Minister decided that he needed Brodeur in his Cabinet; the Speaker resigned and was sworn in as Minister of Inland Revenue. He soon came to be regarded as Laurier’s Quebec lieutenant, until recurring illness ended his political career in 1911. Laurier appointed him to the Supreme Court of Canada, where he served until illness forced him to retire in 1923. Prime Minister Mackenzie King then recommended to the Governor General that Brodeur be appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec. He died in office two months later.
BORN
Toronto, Canada West, 1860

DIED
Blue Sea Lake, Quebec, 1932

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Journalism

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1896
• First Elected to Speakership: 1904
• Appointed to Senate: 1907

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Wilfrid Laurier

ARTIST | Charles Ignace Adelard Gill, circa 1905
Napoléon Belcourt, a fluently bilingual lawyer and journalist, was Speaker for only 10 months in 1904–1905 — not the briefest period on record (both Marcel Lambert and Lloyd Francis would serve shorter terms), but the most short-lived since Confederation. Louis-Philippe Brodeur, elected Speaker in February 1901, had resigned his post to become Minister of Inland Revenue in Sir Wilfrid Laurier’s Cabinet, and a new Speaker was required for the remainder of the 9th Parliament.

The former Speaker’s dignity and impartiality had been eminently satisfactory, Laurier said on nominating Belcourt, and he anticipated that the new Speaker would display the same qualities. Conservative Leader of the Opposition Robert Borden concurred. At the end of Belcourt’s term, every staff member of the House of Commons (“without a single exception”) appeared at his farewell reception, and the Clerk’s toast to him prompted “cheers and vocal honours.” Similarly, the toast by the Mayor of Ottawa at a non-partisan banquet in Belcourt’s honour was received with “tremendous cheers and musical honours.”

Although Belcourt retained his seat in the 1904 election, Prime Minister Laurier did not nominate him again for Speaker (he appointed Belcourt a Senator in 1907).

Given the constant tension between English-speaking and French-speaking Speakers that pervaded the political atmosphere, Laurier realized that he needed a primarily English-speaking Speaker after the French-speaking Brodeur from Quebec and the Franco-Ontarian Belcourt. Since Confederation the practice of alternating between English- and French-speaking Speakers had been generally observed, but not always.

Prime Minister Mackenzie King summed up the practice in 1922: “It has been more or less a tradition in this House that in successive parliaments the speakers should be chosen alternately from representatives of English and French origin.” On the same day, Conservative Leader of the Opposition Arthur Meighen referred to another Canadian custom: “the practice to promote him who has occupied the post of Deputy Speaker, if he is so fortunate as to be returned, to the position of Speaker in the succeeding Parliament.” Both traditions had been and would be raised frequently in House discussions of electing a Speaker.
The SPEAKERS of the House of Commons

BORN
Newmarket, Canada West, 1859

DIED
Toronto, Ontario, 1922

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1900
• First Elected to Speakership: 1905

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Wilfrid Laurier
Hon. Robert Franklin Sutherland
P.C. (1905-1909)

Robert Sutherland was a small-town Ontario lawyer, a Presbyterian and an indefatigable cricket-player. He learned French on his own well before he indicated any federal political interests. Consequently, during his campaign as a Liberal in the 1900 general election, he was able to appeal to both urban Protestants and rural French-speaking Roman Catholics in his riding.

Re-elected in the 1904 general election, Sutherland was nominated as Speaker by Liberal Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier in January 1905. Laurier stressed his judicial and fair mind; George Foster, representing the Conservative Official Opposition (and who had previously served in the Cabinets of five prime ministers), did not know Sutherland, but seconded the motion on the recommendation of his colleagues. On his election, Sutherland became the first English-speaking Speaker to give part of his acceptance speech in French.

Some years later, Sir William Mulock of the Ontario Supreme Court praised him as Speaker for discharging “the duties of that difficult office with such fair, judicial impartiality as to win for him the confidence and respect of the whole House.” In 1908 Sutherland did not accept Laurier’s offer to nominate him again as Speaker. The following year the Prime Minister appointed him to the Privy Council, and then as a judge to the High Court Division of the Ontario Supreme Court.

Sutherland chaired a controversial and influential royal commission on hydroelectric regulation in Ontario.
BORN
Ste-Scholastique, Canada East, 1860

DIED
Westboro, Ontario, 1937

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Journalism

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1900
• Appointed: Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 1905–1908
• First Elected to Speakership: 1909

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Wilfrid Laurier
Hon. Charles Marcil
P.C. (1909-1911)

A journalist for 20 years before his first election victory as a federal MP in 1900, Charles Marcil would go on to sit in the House for 36 unbroken years. Well-regarded rather than a rising star, he was appointed Deputy Speaker by Liberal Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1905. He was impeccably bilingual, and had a dignity of manner and speaking that appealed to many.

His nomination as Speaker in 1909 was welcomed by the government side of the House, but Conservative Leader of the Opposition Robert Borden was less impressed. Without being overly specific, Borden alluded to press reports of Marcil’s “methods of campaigning” in the context of the vicious “system of offering bribes to constituencies” in Canada. Borden concluded by noting that anyone filling the position of Speaker could not “be a suppliant from day to day in respect of his constituency.”

Veiled references or not, Marcil was one of the most successful suppliants in the House, and known for his unwavering attention to his constituents in his eastern Quebec riding of Bonaventure. His 1904 campaign speech, for example, included a long list itemizing the money he had brought to the riding for 32 projects since the last election, totalling more than $13 million by today’s standards.

Marcil presided over the last days of Laurier’s administration until its defeat in the 1911 general election. He resigned as Speaker, and Laurier appointed him a Privy Councillor. Mackenzie King later said that Marcil’s “last word was one of grateful acknowledgement to a minister of the Crown for something the minister had been able to do which was of assistance to the constituency.” A month before his death, while suffering from heart trouble, Marcil told the Prime Minister that he was concerned about leaving the riding. King told him not to worry: “We’ll look after Bonaventure.”
BORN
King Township, Canada West, 1843

DIED
Markdale, Ontario, 1917

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Medicine, Business, Agriculture

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1878
• First Elected to Speakership: 1911
• Appointed to Senate: 1915

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Robert Borden
Dr. Thomas Sproule was 68 when Prime Minister Robert Borden nominated him as Speaker in 1911. A physician and 33-year veteran of the House, he was well known for his lifelong commitment to the Protestant Orange Order (a benefit to the Conservative party, Borden thought at the time).

In seconding his nomination somewhat less than enthusiastically, Leader of the Opposition Sir Wilfrid Laurier said he found Sproule’s only weakness “is that he is a Tory, a Tory of the Tories, the very quintessence of Toryism.” Immediately after, Borden rebuked Laurier for his “ill temper.” Borden was aware that Sproule spoke no French, and later recalled that “he was very conscientious and upon his selection as Speaker he felt himself constrained to study this language, of which he was absolutely ignorant, in order that he might be able to read the prayers in French.” On his first attempt, William White, the Minister of Finance, mentioned to his seatmate Frederick Monk, Minister of Public Works, that Sproule had done fairly well. Monk responded “I have no doubt that Almighty God would understand it.” However, Sproule tended to pronounce “ciel” (heaven) as “seau” (bucket).

Sproule’s impartiality in the Chair would be sorely tried in 1913 by the tumultuous Naval Bill debates (about whether Canada should maintain a navy or instead contribute to the Royal Navy). During an opposition filibuster, the Chair of Committees of the Whole (the Deputy Speaker), Pierre-Édouard Blondin, lost control of the proceedings on two occasions; Sproule assumed the Chair both times. He too was unable to calm the debate, and had to “name” Liberal Michael Clark (Red Deer) — the step before expulsion from the House, and the first time since Confederation that a Speaker had been forced to name an MP. Laurier refused Borden’s offer of unimpeded time for debate, and Borden introduced a new standing order allowing closure — a procedure to curtail debate and bring on a vote.

Sproule resigned as Speaker because of his deteriorating health in December 1915, and was appointed Senator; he died two years later.
BORN
Tingwick, Quebec, 1881

DIED
City of Québec, Quebec, 1961

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1911
• Cabinet Appointments: Minister of Inland Revenue, 1917; Secretary of State of Canada (acting), 1917; Minister of Mines (acting), 1917; Minister of Inland Revenue, 1917–1918
• Appointed: Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 1915–1916
• First Elected to Speakership: 1916

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Robert Borden
A lbert Sévigny ran successfully in the 1911 federal election, one of 26 MPs from Quebec who supported Robert Borden, the new Conservative Prime Minister. Less than three and a half years later his dedication to the Prime Minister and his policies earned him the Deputy Speakership in February 1915 — an office that his son Pierre would also assume 43 years later.

In December 1915 Thomas Sproule resigned the Speakership because of ill health. Sévigny was nominated to fill the position by Sir George Foster, acting Prime Minister, who praised him for his pleasant personality, culture, and “affability and capacity.” The Leader of the Opposition, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, good-humouredly seconded the motion, observing that Sévigny started out in the House of Commons as “an ardent Nationalist,” denounced Laurier’s policies, and eventually “became a repentant sinner.” When the House met in the Victoria Memorial Museum Building after the tragic Centre Block fire in February 1916, Sévigny presided without the Speaker’s traditional robes: they had been destroyed in the fire. Members understood that the event had touched him particularly personally, because two of his wife’s guests in his parliamentary quarters had lost their lives.

Despite Sévigny’s having been a strong partisan and advocate of Canada’s participation in the First World War, he was generally considered to be an even-handed Speaker. By the end of 1916, however, the Prime Minister — by now Sir Robert — needed him in the Cabinet as a government spokesman in Quebec during the conscription crisis. The day after Sévigny resigned the Chair on January 7, 1917, Borden appointed him Minister of Inland Revenue, the first of three cabinet posts he would fill during 1917 before he lost his seat in the December 1917 general election.

Borden’s successor as Conservative Prime Minister, Arthur Meighen, appointed Sévigny to the Quebec Superior Court in 1921, and he served with distinction as a judge for the next 40 years.
BORN
Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1877

DIED
Ottawa, Ontario, 1942

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1908
• Cabinet Appointments: Minister of Fisheries, 1930–1932; Minister of Finance and Receiver General, 1932–1935
• Appointed: Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 1916–1917
• First Elected to Speakership: 1917
• Appointed to Senate: 1935

PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Robert Borden
• Arthur Meighen

ARTIST | Sir Edmund Wyly Grier, 1921
Hon. Edgar Nelson Rhodes
P.C. (1917–1922)

In 1916 Edgar Rhodes was on a recruiting campaign to enlist Canadian soldiers for the First World War when Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden appointed him Deputy Speaker of the House. The 39-year-old Nova Scotia lawyer was preparing to go overseas to join the war effort, but Borden’s call was irresistible. Rhodes had already served eight years as an MP, and his appointment was greeted warmly by members of the House.

On February 3, 1916, as Rhodes was in the Chair presiding over the House for the first time, fire broke out in the Centre Block. Just as Rhodes led the members out of the House, a huge flame broke through a wall of the Chamber. Seven people died in the fire, including Bowman Law, MP, who was working in his office. The Library of Parliament was saved by the quick-witted action of Library clerk Michael MacCormac, who closed the Library’s iron doors in time. The rest of the Centre Block, however, was completely destroyed, and Parliament moved to the nearby Victoria Memorial Museum Building. For four years the House of Commons met in its auditorium.

In his 11 months as Deputy Speaker before the 1917 general election, Rhodes impressed members by his fairness and genial temperament, and by substantially reducing House expenditures. He was an obvious choice for the Speaker’s post, nominated by the Prime Minister and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition, Sir Wilfrid Laurier. A keen fisherman, Rhodes is reported to have said that he would rather have been Canada’s greatest angler than Canada’s First Commoner (as the Speaker was known historically).

Rhodes decided not to run in the 1921 general election, and was sworn into the Privy Council. He accepted the presidency of the British American Nickel Corporation, whose previous president was the industry leader Sir James Dunn. He then returned to Nova Scotia, where he revived the Conservative party and became Premier. In 1930 he accepted a post in Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett’s federal Cabinet, served first as Minister of Fisheries and then as Minister of Finance, and in 1935 was appointed by Bennett to the Senate.

Rhodes’ wide-ranging business interests included rolling stock (railway coaches and freight cars), mining, lumber, and shoe and piano companies.
BORN
Montréal, Quebec, 1866

DIED
Montréal, Quebec, 1937

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1896
• Cabinet Appointments: Solicitor General of Canada, 1904–1906; Minister of Labour, 1906–1909; Postmaster General, 1906–1911; Minister of Marine and Fisheries, 1911; Minister of the Naval Service, 1911
• First Elected to Speakership: 1922
• Appointed to Senate: 1930

PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• William Lyon Mackenzie King
• Arthur Meighen

ARTIST | Jacqueline Comerre Paton, circa 1924
When he was elected Speaker at the age of 55, Rodolphe Lemieux had already distinguished himself in a remarkable variety of careers. By 1922 he had been a lawyer, a law professor, and a federal cabinet minister heading five different departments. In total he was elected 10 times as a Liberal MP (actually 12, because twice he ran for and won two seats simultaneously, allowable under the legislation at the time). As a student at the University of Ottawa he had often gone to the House to listen to the debates rather than studying, and he soon turned his substantial oratorical gifts to campaigning for the Liberal party.

Lemieux had Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier’s complete confidence. He entered the House in 1896, when Laurier was forming his first government, and was his loyal lieutenant until Laurier’s defeat by Conservative Robert Borden in 1911. Relations with Prime Minister Mackenzie King were not nearly as warm (in 1921 King had defeated Borden’s successor as Prime Minister, Arthur Meighen). Perhaps jealous of Ernest Lapointe’s position as King’s Quebec lieutenant, Lemieux declined a cabinet post but accepted King’s nomination for Speaker.

Lemieux’s first election as Speaker in 1922 did not go smoothly. Leader of the Opposition Arthur Meighen acknowledged that Lemieux was a superlative candidate, with a quarter-century of continuous service in the House. But he strongly objected to King’s announcement two months earlier that Lemieux would be selected as Speaker, as if the Prime Minister were making an appointment rather than a nomination. He also raised the fact that it had been Canadian practice to nominate the Deputy Speaker to succeed the former Speaker (though this had not been consistently applied).

Lemieux was re-elected as Speaker in both the 15th and 16th Parliaments. In the December 1926 election for Speaker, the Conservative acting Leader of the Opposition, Hugh Guthrie, formally protested the nomination of Lemieux because it violated the practice since Confederation of alternating between French- and English-speaking Speakers. After extended debate Lemieux was re-elected nonetheless, the first Speaker to preside over three consecutive Parliaments.

Although he had been fiercely Liberal for decades, as Speaker he tried to remove himself entirely from partisan politics. His approach would come in very useful when he was in the Chair in 1926 during the heated King-Byng constitutional crisis. On Lemieux’s retirement in 1930 King appointed him to the Senate.
The SPEAKERS of the House of Commons

BORN
Woodstock, New Brunswick, 1873

DIED
Vancouver, British Columbia, 1965

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Military

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1921
• First Elected to Speakership: 1930

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• R.B. Bennett

ARTIST | Kenneth Keith Forbes, 1934
Prime Minister R.B. Bennett was impressed by George Black’s performance as Commissioner of Yukon (1912–1915) and by his service in the First World War. Black recruited a Yukon infantry company for the 2nd Motor Machine Gun Brigade overseas, and was wounded during the Battle of Amiens in August–September 1918; however, after recovering in a London hospital, he returned to his unit. When Bennett nominated him as Speaker in 1930, Black had won his Yukon riding as a Conservative in four consecutive general elections. The Leader of the Opposition, former Prime Minister Mackenzie King, seconded the nomination, praising his judgement, discretion, quick decision-making and sense of humour, even if he had been a strong partisan as an MP. Robert Gardiner of the United Farmers of Alberta party concurred in the nomination.

Of United Empire Loyalist ancestry, Black was an original 1898 Yukon “sourdough” (named after the sourdough bread starter that prospectors brought with them during the Klondike River gold rush, near Dawson City, Yukon). He was a hardy and tenacious man, campaigning in his vast riding by canoe, snowshoe and dog team; he was severely injured after the 1921 election when a car rolled on top of him, and dogs pulled him on his sleigh to the mail road and then the railroad, to safety. He was a keen hunter, going for grizzly and black bears, mountain sheep, mountain goats, moose and caribou. While he was Speaker, he was reported to have kept a .22 calibre pistol in his Speaker’s quarters, and to have used it to shoot at rabbits from his window when they were chewing up shrubs on Parliament Hill.

In 1935 Black suffered a serious nervous breakdown, perhaps an after-effect of his Amiens wounds. He resigned the Speakership and travelled to England for psychiatric treatment. Meanwhile his wife, Martha Black, successfully ran in his place in the general election that year, and was the second woman to be elected to the House after Agnes Macphail in 1921. Black’s recovery went well, and he returned to Canada to win his Yukon seat again in 1940 and 1945. Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent recommended him for the Privy Council in 1951. After his wife died in 1955, Black remarried at the age of 84.
BORN
Thornhill, Ontario, 1879

DIED
1951

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1930
• First Elected to Speakership: 1935

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• R.B. Bennett

ARTIST | Kenneth Keith Forbes, circa 1935
© House of Commons Collection, Ottawa
Hon. James Langstaff Bowman  

Only a few hours before the House reconvened on January 17, 1935, Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett notified James Bowman that he was about to be nominated as Speaker. Two days earlier the previous Speaker, George Black, had resigned for health reasons. A modest lawyer with a commanding voice, Bowman had had no idea that he would be chosen in his first term as an MP. He had previously run against William Ward (a Manitoba farmer and insurance agent) in the Dauphin riding in two general elections, losing each time. Successful at last, Bowman became the first Manitoban to be elected Speaker.

When Bennett announced the nomination in the House — seconded by former Prime Minister Mackenzie King — members on all sides applauded loudly. As was customary at the time, the Speaker’s election was unanimous. Bowman’s inexperience was occasionally evident, as when he failed to appear when a Depression relief bill was about to be reported to the House (pages eventually found him). Nevertheless, members seemed to like his manner and the even-handedness of his rulings.

Although his term would be cut short after less than 13 months by the 1935 general election, during his tenure he presided over several momentous debates. Social legislation was the subject of heated discussion in the House as the Great Depression intensified. To help alleviate large-scale unemployment and hardship, Bennett’s government had already created unemployment relief camps and brought in economic legislation. It was at this time that the Bank of Canada and the Canadian Wheat Board were established. Yet under the British North America Act, 1867, responsibility for social legislation remained with the provinces, not the federal government. This prompted difficult debate on issues such as minimum wages, hours of work, unemployment insurance and labour standards.

In the general elections of 1935 and 1940 Bowman was once again defeated by William Ward, and he returned to his law practice in Manitoba. His service as Speaker was not recognized until 1950, when he was appointed a Privy Councillor.
The SPEAKERS of the House of Commons

46

BORN
Montréal, Quebec, 1886

DIED
Westmount, Quebec, 1950

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1917
• Cabinet Appointment: Secretary of State of Canada, 1940–1941
• First Elected to Speakership: 1936

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• William Lyon Mackenzie King

ARTIST | Kenneth Keith Forbes, circa 1940

© House of Commons Collection, Ottawa
Pierre-François Casgrain’s nomination as Speaker in February 1936 was blighted even before he was eventually elected by the House of Commons to the Speakership. Prime Minister Mackenzie King had made public his choice of Casgrain some six weeks earlier, and before the House met Casgrain took it upon himself to fire 127 parliamentary staff arbitrarily. He apparently regarded the forthcoming election in the House as a mere formality.

In a highly unusual debate that took place without a Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, former Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, pointed out that Casgrain’s action was both contrary to statute law and an invasion of the privileges of members. He told the House that on those grounds he was opposed to the election of Casgrain. Bennett was supported by James Woodsworth, leader of the new Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). A rare occurrence for the election of a Speaker: the nomination was carried on division, a voice vote intended to show that a motion is not decided unanimously, but the names of those voting for and against the motion are not recorded. King’s defence of Casgrain was muted, and he later countermanded the dismissals.

Described as mild, quiet-spoken and bland, Casgrain was a successful lawyer who had been elected to the House five times. He was the Liberal party whip for 11 years, and served as Chief Government Whip for three years before his election as Speaker. Observers at the time were also aware of his good fortune in marriage: his wife was Thérèse Casgrain, a pioneer in women’s rights, the first woman to head a Canadian political party (the Quebec wing of the CCF, the Parti social démocratique du Québec), and late in life an Independent Canadian senator.

Casgrain resigned as Speaker in 1940 to be appointed Secretary of State in King’s wartime government.
BORN
Renton, Scotland, 1877

DIED
Ottawa, Ontario, 1950

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1926
• Cabinet Appointment: Minister of Mines and Resources, 1945–1948
• First Elected to Speakership: 1940

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• William Lyon Mackenzie King

ARTIST | Kenneth Keith Forbes, 1945
James Glen was 62 when Prime Minister Mackenzie King nominated him as Speaker following the wartime general election of March 1940. King saw in him, he said, a man interested in parliamentary proceedings who was fair during debates, with legal training and committee experience. The nomination of Glen, a Liberal Progressive MP from Manitoba, was seconded by Richard Hanson in his first statement in the House as interim Conservative leader and Leader of the Opposition.

For Canadians, the Second World War was already eight months old when Glen assumed the Chair. The Conservative party had run in the election on establishing an all-party national unity government (rather like the U.K.’s coalition government that Winston Churchill would set up in May), but King rejected the proposal. In general, Glen’s job was made somewhat easier by the seriousness of the issues before the House. It seemed to many MPs that the real power in the country was the small Cabinet War Committee, using the authority of the War Measures Act, the Official Secrets Act 1939, and the Defence of Canada Regulations.

The war brought not only radical restrictions on individual liberties (including the internment of Japanese-Canadians), but also the use of rare procedures. Hansard was censored to make sure it did not contain information useful to the enemy, visitors to the parliamentary precincts were more closely controlled than before, and the House of Commons met in secret sittings when necessary. The proceedings of these secret sessions were reported only most vaguely; for example, after the fact the Speaker would announce only that a sitting was “devoted to the question of coastal defence in Canada.”

Glen, it turned out, was a keen golfer. On one occasion his parliamentary golfing colleagues prepared an eight-page pamphlet celebrating a hole-in-one he made at the Rivermead Golf Club in nearby Aylmer, Quebec.

Just before the 1945 general election — in which Glen was successful as a Liberal — he resigned as Speaker so that King could appoint him to his Cabinet.
BORN
St-Hyacinthe, Quebec, 1898

DIED
Montréal, Quebec, 1963

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Dentistry, Industry, Military

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1942
• First Elected to Speakership: 1945

PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• William Lyon Mackenzie King
• Louis St-Laurent

ARTIST | Kenneth Keith Forbes, 1946
In nominating Gaspard Fauteux as Speaker in 1945, Prime Minister Mackenzie King referred to his parliamentary experience, patience and impartiality. Moreover, he was the grandson of Honoré Mercier, former Premier of Quebec, and nephew of Sir Lomer Gouin, former Premier of Quebec and former federal Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Fauteux was well known for defeating Montréal’s Mayor Camillien Houde in the 1931 Quebec provincial election. Houde was interned for sedition during the Second World War, and Fauteux defeated him again in the 1945 federal general election. Fauteux was somewhat reticent about accepting the Speaker’s post, telling King that “I am a dentist, not a lawyer.”

The Prime Minister, however, had chosen not to consult the Progressive Conservative Leader of the Opposition, John Bracken, and acerbic debate preceded Fauteux’s nomination and unanimous election. It was not an auspicious start. During his four years in the Chair, a number of his rulings upset opposition members. He chided Bracken for reading his maiden speech; he pointedly ruled out non-urgent questions before the Orders of the Day (an issue that would bedevil future Speakers); opposition members protested his preventing certain questions from being asked; he cut off questions about his rulings; and he apparently decided arbitrarily whether or not he would recognize an MP — several times he left the Chair while MPs were seeking to speak.

At the same time, he was open to streamlining and updating many practices and procedures of the House.Acknowledging widespread criticism by MPs, in 1947 he tabled his own Report on Procedure making proposals on many controversial matters. Following the revelations concerning postwar Soviet espionage by Igor Gouzenko, a cipher clerk for the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, Fauteux was Speaker when the House received interim reports from the Royal Commission established in 1946 to investigate espionage. When the House received the court judgement finding Fred Rose — a second-term Communist MP — guilty of conspiracy and violating the Official Secrets Act 1939, it expelled Rose on January 30, 1947.

Successful in the 1949 general election, Fauteux resigned the Speakership; the following year he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec.
BORN
Toronto, Ontario, 1891

DIED
Brantford, Ontario, 1976

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Military

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1935
• Appointed: Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 1945–1949
• First Elected to Speakership: 1949
• Appointed to Senate: 1953

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Louis St-Laurent

ARTIST | Lilias Torrance Newton, 1951
Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King appointed William Ross Macdonald as Deputy Speaker of the House in September 1945, the first of a series of public offices held by Macdonald over 30 years. He was 82 when he retired as Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario in 1974, the conclusion of a life of public service that had nearly come to a premature end in 1916 when he suffered grievous wounds as a Canadian infantry officer at the Battle of the Somme. He was successively an MP, Deputy Speaker and Speaker of the House, three times a cabinet minister, senator, twice Leader of the Government in the Senate, Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and finally Lieutenant-Governor.

Noting to the House that Macdonald had already served with distinction as Deputy Speaker for four years, in 1949 Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent nominated him for the Speakership. Progressive Conservative Leader of the Opposition George Drew seconded the nomination, adding that Macdonald had earned the respect of the House by his unfailing courtesy and modesty. On his unanimous election the new Speaker began learning French, although it was reported that his difficulties with the language were a good-humoured joke in the House.

At a meeting of Commonwealth Speakers in London in 1950, protocol officials advised Macdonald not to wear his Speaker’s tricorn hat in the presence of King George VI. Citing precedent, he proved that the officials were wrong, and wore his hat.

The Speaker chose not to run in the 1953 general election, and Louis St-Laurent appointed him to the Senate. In a tribute to Macdonald, the Prime Minister said “No Speaker has been greater – and few have been his peer.”
The SPEAKERS of the House of Commons

BORN
Montréal, Quebec, 1912

DIED
Montréal, Quebec, 1970

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1945
• Appointed: Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 1952–1953
• First Elected to Speakership: 1953

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Louis St-Laurent

ARTIST | Kenneth Keith Forbes, 1960

© House of Commons Collection, Ottawa
Louis-René Beaudoin was elected Speaker in 1953 with high expectations. Three times successful as a Liberal in the general elections of 1945, 1949 and 1953, and with a year’s seasoning as Deputy Speaker, he was nominated by Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent and seconded by Progressive Conservative leader George Drew. Beaudoin soon became recognized for his fairness, procedural knowledge (he started but did not finish writing a book on parliamentary procedure), wit and urbanity: perhaps even as one of the best Speakers in Canadian history.

Then within 24 hours his career as Speaker was ruined, on June 5–6, 1956. An American-owned company needed additional funds to complete a natural gas pipeline from Burstall, Saskatchewan, to Montréal. During what became known as the Pipeline Debate, the government decided to impose closure on debate of a bill to provide the loan. On June 5 the Speaker allowed opposition procedural debate to continue past the deadline. On the next day he reversed himself, nullifying the previous afternoon’s debate, and the government passed the loan legislation.

The result was chaos on the floor of the House. The outraged opposition parties claimed that the Speaker had succumbed to government pressure, and some members stormed the Chair. Government members sang songs to counter catcalls. The normally calm leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), M.J. Coldwell, mounted the Speaker’s dais shaking his fist. In ensuing days the Leader of the Opposition moved a motion of censure against the Speaker for the first time in Canadian parliamentary history, and angry late-night debate continued for a month.

Beaudoin resigned at the end of the session, and although he retained his seat in the 1957 general election, he did not run again. Later he unsuccessfully attempted a political comeback. But he spent most of his remaining years drifting around the United States and Canada. At one point he was a bartender at Freddie’s Tavern in Tempe, Arizona. This once-distinguished parliamentarian and member of the Privy Council for Canada died nearly penniless in Montréal.
BORN
Lacombe, Alberta, 1900

DIED
Toronto, Ontario, 1991

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1953
• First Elected to Speakership: 1957
• Term as Governor General: 1967–1974

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• John Diefenbaker
A year after Roland Michener was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in 1945, Premier George Drew appointed him to the Cabinet — a decision that would have an unintended and long-lasting effect on Michener’s political future. In 1948 Drew successfully ran for the leadership of the federal Progressive Conservative party, defeating John Diefenbaker on the first ballot. When Diefenbaker became leader and then Prime Minister in 1957, he was still irritated that Michener — by now a Progressive Conservative MP — had not supported him nearly a decade earlier. Diefenbaker did not invite Michener to join his Cabinet, and only after Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) MP Stanley Knowles turned down his offer to be nominated for Speaker did the Prime Minister nominate Michener instead.

During his more than four years as Speaker in the 23rd and 24th Parliaments, Michener garnered a reputation for even-handedness and sensible flexibility in interpreting the procedural rules of the House. A measure of his success may be the occasional complaints by government members — and by the Prime Minister himself — that he was too fair to the opposition parties. An important achievement for which he was responsible was the smooth introduction of simultaneous interpretation in the House on January 15, 1959.

Michener was defeated in the general election of 1962, the first time since Confederation in 1867 that a Speaker had lost his riding in an election in which his party formed the government. He was offered neither a seat in the Senate nor any other patronage appointments, often seen as appropriate recognition of the Speaker’s service to the House and country. In the tributes that followed, Diefenbaker noted that if Michener had not been defeated, he would have been nominated as permanent Speaker. In his memoirs, however, Diefenbaker characterized Michener as lacking political courage for leaving politics instead of running again.

When Lester Pearson won a minority Liberal government in the general election of 1963, he offered to nominate his old friend — they had known each other since both played hockey at Oxford in the 1920s — for the permanent Speakership of the House. Michener declined, but the following year he accepted Pearson’s appointments as High Commissioner to India and later as simultaneous High Commissioner to Nepal.

In 1967, on the centenary of Confederation, Pearson nominated Michener for appointment as the Queen’s representative in Canada — the first former MP to become Governor General.
BORN
Edmonton, Alberta, 1919

DIED
Barrhead, Alberta, 2000

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Military

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1957
• Cabinet Appointment: Minister of Veterans Affairs, 1963
• First Elected to Speakership: 1962

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• John Diefenbaker

ARTIST | Kenneth Keith Forbes, 1963
In his first words to the House on being confirmed as Speaker in September 1962, Marcel Lambert conveyed his hope that “we shall have productive days ahead of us within the rules of the house, which I would commend to all honourable Members.” Given the potential for disruptions during the minority Parliament, he intended not to lose control of the House.

Members of the opposition parties — and even Progressive Conservative government members — soon found that being required by the Speaker to conform to their own procedural rules was too onerous. They particularly objected to being held to relevant questions and allowable supplementary questions during Question Period, as the standing orders set out. Some members seemed to favour challenging the Speaker’s rulings by formal vote.

Not easily intimidated — he had been a tank officer in the Second World War, and spent nearly three years in a German prisoner-of-war camp — Lambert was firm in his rulings on argumentative and trivial questions. Early in 1963, dissension in Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s Cabinet over whether or not to arm Canada’s anti-aircraft missiles with nuclear warheads became a political issue in the House. Lambert ruled against holding an emergency debate on the Bomarc missile question, and his ruling was reversed by the House.

Shortly afterwards, the Prime Minister appointed him Minister of Veterans Affairs, bringing to an end the shortest term of service (September 27, 1962 – February 11, 1963: less than five months) of any Canadian Speaker. He went on to complete 10 terms as an MP, and in 1984 Prime Minister Mulroney appointed him to the Canadian Transport Commission. In a tribute to Lambert on his death in 2000, former Prime Minister Joe Clark praised him for having “earned a reputation as a tough arbiter in a rowdy Commons in those heady times.”
BORN
Napanee, Ontario, 1903

DIED
Montréal, Quebec, 1999

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Business

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1949
• First Elected to Speakership: 1963
• Appointed to Senate: 1966

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Lester B. Pearson
Appointed to chair the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in 1958, Alan Macnaughton became the first opposition member to preside over that influential committee’s proceedings. His sense of fair play so impressed Lester Pearson that he nominated Macnaughton as Speaker in 1963, in Pearson’s first term as Prime Minister of a minority Liberal government.

Unassuming, courteous and tactful, Macnaughton generally displayed impartial firmness in handling a fractious House. Some Liberals objected to the latitude he allowed former Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition John Diefenbaker in questioning the government. Macnaughton responded by noting that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are both officers of the House of Commons, and are entitled to their own judgement in asking and responding to questions.

Macnaughton showed himself to be particularly adept in 1964 when the government decided to replace Canada’s official national flag (the Canadian Red Ensign) with a new design. What became known as the Canadian Flag Debate went on for many months and was particularly acrimonious. Macnaughton eventually split the main motion into two: one substituting the new design for the national flag, and the other establishing the Royal Union Flag (the Union Jack) as a symbol of Canada’s allegiance to the Crown and membership in the Commonwealth. In this attempt to moderate the acerbic debate, for the first time the Speaker used his own authority to split a motion.

He was also active in promoting greater parliamentary efficiency through recommendations of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization, such as allocating time for debates, shortening Question Period and creating research funding for MPs. In 1965, time-consuming appeals of the Speaker’s rulings were abolished. Diefenbaker proposed to Pearson that Macnaughton become the first permanent Speaker of the House, but Pearson’s government found the proposal too problematic.

Macnaughton did not run in the 1965 general election, and he was appointed to the Senate seven months after the next Parliament began.
BORN
Ottawa, Ontario, 1920

DIED
Brussels, Belgium, 1998

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS
Liberal, Independent

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1962
• Appointed: Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 1963–1965
• First Elected to Speakership: 1966

PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Lester B. Pearson
• Pierre Elliott Trudeau
Praising Lucien Lamoureux’s service as Deputy Speaker during Prime Minister Lester Pearson’s first minority term (1963–1965), Leader of the Opposition John Diefenbaker described his tact, wisdom, sense of humour and impartiality. Each was a quality that Lamoureux would need even more in his new post as Speaker during the next Liberal minority government of 1966–1968, and each was one that he would go on to demonstrate consistently during his 3,177 days as Speaker. His tenure in the 27th, 28th and 29th Parliaments was unmatched until 2009, when it was exceeded by Peter Milliken.

Members of the House recognized Lamoureux’s convictions about impartiality from his first nomination as Deputy Speaker, when he withdrew from the Liberal caucus. He was so scrupulous, it was said, that when he and his wife invited MPs and their spouses for dinner, they invited exactly the same number of members from the government and Opposition. Impeccably bilingual, he ruled the House firmly but in a gentle and witty manner.

Lamoureux chose to run as an Independent in the 1968 general election; both the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives agreed not to nominate candidates in his riding. Diefenbaker and his successor as Conservative Leader of the Opposition, Robert Stanfield, had long called for a permanent Speaker, but Pearson’s successor as Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, disliked the concept. Lamoureux again ran as an Independent in the 1972 general election, but not unopposed. Although the question of a permanent Speaker was raised sporadically thereafter, the government never took the necessary steps to implement the arrangement.

The Speaker was known for working exceptionally long hours; not infrequently he spent the whole week in his Centre Block office, having his meals brought in and sleeping on a couch. Following his decision not to run in the 1974 general election, the Prime Minister described him as “a great Speaker, in the view of many the greatest since Confederation.” After the election Lamoureux was appointed Ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg (1974–1980) and then Ambassador to Portugal (1980–1985).
BORN
Kingston, Ontario, 1933

DIED
Ottawa, Ontario, 2005

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1968
• First Elected to Speakership: 1974

PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Pierre Elliott Trudeau
• Joe Clark

ARTIST | Robert Stewart Hyndman, 1979
During his second term as a Liberal MP, James Jerome had impressed many members of the House with his fair-minded chairing of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs (1973–1974). When Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau nominated him to be Speaker in 1974, however, contrary to the usual practice the Prime Minister failed to consult the Leader of the Opposition (Robert Stanfield) or representatives of the other political parties. Deeply disappointed, Stanfield explained to the House why he declined to second the motion for Jerome’s election, although he pledged the full co-operation of the Progressive Conservative party. The unspoken implication was that the Prime Minister was treating the Speakership as just another government appointment.

Despite this lack of bipartisan approval, Jerome soon earned the general respect of the House, especially among opposition members. In his first major ruling he halted the government’s use of parliamentary secretaries to ask questions during Question Period. The government’s attempts to have him reconsider his ruling were taken by opposition members to show a lack of respect for the Speaker.

Jerome felt that the much-discussed issue of live radio and television coverage in the House was an important aspect of open democracy. Following a resolution of the House in January 1977, he chaired a Special Committee on TV and Radio Broadcasting of Proceedings of the House; nine months later, on October 17, 1977, gavel-to-gavel coverage began – the first of any legislature in the world.

Shortly after the Liberal government was defeated in the general election of 1979, the new Progressive Conservative Prime Minister, Joe Clark, nominated Jerome to be Speaker. Jerome had contested the election as a Liberal, and thus he became the first opposition MP ever to be elected Speaker.

After Clark’s minority government fell in 1980, Jerome announced that he would not run in the next election; Clark then appointed him Associate Chief Justice of the Federal Court.
BORN
Howell, Saskatchewan, 1922

DIED
Montréal, Quebec, 1993

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Journalism

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1972
• Cabinet Appointments: Minister of State for Science and Technology, 1972–1974; Minister of the Environment, 1974–1975; Minister of Communications, 1975–1979
• First Elected to Speakership: 1980
• Term as Governor General: 1984–1990

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Pierre Elliott Trudeau

ARTIST | Brenda Bury, 1984
Jeanne Sauvé assumed the Speaker’s Chair in 1980 — the first woman in the post — with a reputation for strong partisanship, following more than six years as a Liberal cabinet minister. Her nominator, Prime Minister Trudeau, called her “a fighter,” while former Prime Minister Clark felt moved to second her nomination by noting the most fundamental requirement for a Speaker: “rigorous and scrupulous impartiality.” “The Speaker is the servant of the whole House, not just the governing party, and is duty bound to abandon all traces of normal party affiliation.”

Rumours began that the Prime Minister had nominated Sauvé as a consolation prize for excluding her from his 1980 Cabinet. She had in fact already turned down the Speakership once. Her early days in the Chair were marred somewhat by her not knowing the faces, names and ridings of MPs, not recognizing certain MPs during Question Period, and making a few questionable rulings.

Sauvé presided over a newly televised House, which may have affected the behaviour of some members. For example, at one point all 32 New Democratic Party MPs walked out of the House to protest the Speaker’s allowing more questions from Liberals than from members of other parties, and there were numerous points of order and a week-long filibuster on the government’s proposed constitutional legislation. The House came to a standstill in March 1982 when the Progressive Conservatives refused to show up for a vote on the government’s proposed energy legislation, leading to an infamous bell-ringing episode that lasted for 15 days.

In a sweeping overhaul of the House’s finances and administration, Sauvé eliminated inefficient practices, reduced House employment by 305 positions, streamlined human resources, and cut excessively bureaucratic processes.

At the conclusion of Ed Schreyer’s five-year tenure as Governor General, the Prime Minister nominated Sauvé to succeed him. On January 28, 1984, the Queen appointed Jeanne Sauvé as Canada’s Governor General — the first woman ever to hold that position. Following her recovery from an illness, Sauvé was sworn in on May 14, 1984.
**BORN**
Ottawa, Ontario, 1920

**DIED**
Ottawa, Ontario, 2007

**PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND**
Economics, Military

**POLITICAL AFFILIATION**
Liberal

**POLITICAL RECORD**
- First Elected to House of Commons: 1963
- Appointed: Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 1980–1984
- First Elected to Speakership: 1984

**PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP**
- Pierre Elliott Trudeau
- John Turner

**ARTIST** | Anita Elizabeth Kertzer, 1987
As a student at the University of Toronto in the early 1940s, Lloyd Francis had been Speaker of the annual Queen’s University model parliament. He regarded this as his introduction to the legislative process, as he went on to serve as an Ottawa city alderman, federal MP and Speaker of the House of Commons.

Much of Francis’s parliamentary reputation, unusually, originates from his almost four years as Deputy Speaker rather than his 10 months as Speaker. Nominated to the Deputy Speakership by Prime Minister Trudeau in 1980, he was in the last cycle of his electoral alternation between success (1963, 1968, 1974 and 1980) and defeat (1965, 1972, 1979 and 1984).

A notable incident occurred at 1:00 a.m. on October 24, 1980, when he was in the Chair replacing the Speaker, Jeanne Sauvé. At the government’s instigation Francis was responsible for implementing closure — a motion to curtail proceedings — during the debate about Canada’s constitution. As he started to put the motion, five opposition members walked up to the Speaker’s Chair and loudly demanded their right to be heard. Francis coolly continued, while close by on his left a Progressive Conservative member nearly came to fisticuffs while trying to protect former Prime Minister Clark from an angry member of the government.

Towards the end of 1983 Francis was effectively Speaker, as Sauvé suffered increasingly from ill health. Appointed Governor General, she resigned the Speakership in January 1984. Prime Minister Trudeau — impressed by Francis’s work as Deputy Speaker — nominated him as Speaker.

Previously as a Liberal MP, Francis had been something of a gadfly in opposing his own government’s policies that he felt were not in the best interests of his constituents, a large proportion of whom were federal public servants. While Speaker he turned more to improving the administration of the House and its employees, continuing work that he had begun with Sauvé. A man of strong principles, he tended to guide the House with a firmer hand than some other Speakers. His better-known rulings concerned the authority of the Chair, dilatory motions and the decorum of the House. After Francis’s defeat in the 1984 general election, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney appointed him Ambassador to Portugal.
BORN
Toronto, Ontario, 1947

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Business

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1979
• First Elected to Speakership: 1984

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Brian Mulroney

ARTIST | Shirley Van Dusen, 1993
Nominated by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1984, John Bosley, at 37, was the second-youngest Speaker in Canadian history. He was chosen, some observers suggested, because he was both fluently bilingual and had gathered appropriate experience during his previous five years as a Progressive Conservative MP.

Among Bosley’s important rulings from the Chair were several concerning changes to the Standing Orders dating from 1982, and to new 1986 procedures adopted by the House, based on recommendations of the Special Committee on Reform of the House (the McGrath Committee).

Some personal and overly critical comments had been directed at him fairly early in his tenure by both opposition and government members. Although Bosley was a patient man, members increasingly allowed the decorum of the House to suffer. As a result he was hard-pressed to check irrelevant comments and repetitive debate. In 1985 Bosley had to eject a Liberal MP from the House for yelling at him and refusing to recognize his authority.

With new House standing orders in place in 1986, the Speaker had clear authority to require shorter and more relevant questions during Question Period, a procedure that actually benefited MPs because more could participate. On the first day the new procedures went into effect, the Speaker made a statement to members explaining the current and new provisions, with a comment on the effect of television in the Chamber. That same day he had to expel a New Democratic Party MP for refusing to withdraw an accusation of lying directed at a government minister.

Quite unexpectedly, Bosley resigned the Speakership in September 1986, after less than two years in the Chair. There was media speculation that he had been forced out. In his letter of resignation to the three party leaders, however, Bosley made it clear that he was leaving because the House was suffering from “a crisis of our own making”: “indiscipline” and the “resulting erosion of public respect for Parliament.”

Before his resignation took effect, he presided over the MPs’ first election of a new Speaker by secret ballot. Nine months after Bosley’s resignation, Prime Minister Mulroney nominated him as a member of the Privy Council for Canada. He remained in the House as a government MP — unsuccessfully running for re-election by MPs as Speaker in 1988 — until he was defeated in the general election of 1993.
BORN
Yokohama, Japan, 1931

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law, Military

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1972
• First Elected to Speakership: 1986

PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Brian Mulroney
• Kim Campbell

ARTIST | Gregory Furmanczyk, 1994
Hon. John Allen Fraser

John Fraser was the first Speaker to be elected directly by members of the House of Commons. He was a former infantry officer, lawyer, Progressive Conservative MP successful in six general elections and three times a cabinet minister under two prime ministers. In 1985, Fraser had been forced to resign as Minister of Fisheries and Oceans over the Tunagate scandal in which he had ignored warnings that a million cans of tuna were unsafe for consumption.

The 1986 Speakership election, with voting by secret ballot, followed an amendment to the Standing Orders of the House in June 1985. The election had 39 MP candidates, and went to 11 ballots over some 11 hours. Among 12 candidates at the second election in 1988, Fraser was elected on the first ballot: a reflection of the confidence and popularity he had earned during his first term.

Among Fraser’s many noteworthy rulings was one chastising the Progressive Conservative government for prematurely publishing advertisements about the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 1989: the GST legislation had not yet passed Parliament. He rejected the government’s attempt at imposing closure to debate on the 1988 Canada–United States Free Trade Agreement (while allowing greatly extended sitting hours). And he affirmed the validity of the oath of allegiance to the Queen taken by Independent (later Bloc Québécois) MP Gilles Duceppe in 1990.

Fraser’s sense of history, his environmentalism — he had been Minister of the Environment — and his knowledge of the importance of Parliament and Canadian institutions all supported his activities to expand the educational mission of Parliament. He created the House of Commons’ Public Information Office, instituted the Greening the Hill environmental program, set up a task force on Parliament’s accessibility and employment opportunities for disabled people, established a program of parliamentary co-operation with emerging democracies in Eastern and Central Europe, and in 1993 published his book The House of Commons at Work.

Following his decision to retire from the Speaker’s Chair and not run in the 1993 general election, Fraser remained active in environmental and military matters. Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien appointed him Canada’s Ambassador for the Environment (1994–1998), and he chaired the Minister’s Monitoring Committee on Change in the Department of National Defence (1997–2003) as well as the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (1998–2005).
BORN
Mattawa, Ontario, 1935

DIED
Toronto, Ontario, 2009

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Education

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to the House of Commons: 1974
• First Elected to Speakership: 1994

PRIME MINISTER DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Jean Chrétien
Elected as a Liberal in five general elections before he decided to run for Speaker, in 1994 Gilbert Parent succeeded John Fraser as the second Speaker to be voted into the office directly by members of the House. The election went to six ballots — the fifth was a tie — over seven hours.

The House resulting from the 1993 election promised to be lively and controversial. Parent faced 199 first-time MPs and five political parties, of which two — Reform and Bloc Québécois — were newly recognized in the House. During this period, national feelings ran high over whether the Province of Quebec could separate from Canada, or be politically independent from Canada while maintaining an economic association with Canada. Initially, the Bloc Québécois, a sovereignist party, formed the Official Opposition, as it had the second highest number of seats. Parent was later required to decide whether the Reform Party or the Bloc Québécois would be the Official Opposition when, due to a resignation and a sudden death, their seat numbers drew even. He was called upon to rule on a wide variety of other issues as well, including the admissibility of amendments (hundreds, on one occasion) and recorded divisions that were used as delaying tactics. In March 1998 the Speaker was faced with ruling on the propriety of small flags on the Chamber desks of some government and opposition MPs, who were offended by a Bloc Québécois MP’s comment concerning the October 1992 national referendum on the Charlottetown Accord.

The Speaker — a former school teacher — stressed public information as a priority during his two terms. Together with Gildas Molgat, Speaker of the Senate of Canada, he was the driving force behind the establishment of the annual Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy, an intensive professional development opportunity that brings 85 outstanding teachers from across Canada together in Ottawa for an insider’s view on how Parliament works. Under his Speakership, in 2000, the House of Commons published what would become the first edition of the authoritative guide to House precedents and rules of procedure: *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, edited by the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk.
BORN
Kingston, Ontario, 1946

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Law

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Liberal

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 1988
• Appointed: Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole, 1996–1997; Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 1997–2000
• First Elected to Speakership: 2001

PRIME MINISTERS DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Jean Chrétien
• Paul Martin
• Stephen Harper

PHOTOGRAPHER | Couvrette/Ottawa, 2003
Peter Milliken was the longest-serving Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons in history, holding office for 3,776 days, or 10 years and four months. First elected Speaker in 2001, he was acclaimed in 2004 and re-elected in 2006 and 2008 (the first election to feature speeches by the candidates). As a Liberal, Milliken was also one of only two Speakers from an opposition party elected to the post; James Jerome (1974–1980) was the other.

Milliken had a longstanding interest in politics and parliamentary procedure. He was only 15 years old when he went to a Liberal nomination meeting, for Edgar Benson, and campaigned for Benson in his successful run for Parliament in 1962. About that time he began subscribing to Hansard, unusual reading matter for a teenager.

Milliken was first elected to the House of Commons in 1988 and was re-elected at every general election until 2011, when he decided to retire from politics. He served on various procedure committees of the House, and as Deputy Speaker from 1997 to 2000. His well-developed interest in Parliament — and his sense of humour — stood him in good stead in dealing with three prime ministers and their parties, and three fractious minority Parliaments.

Milliken’s parliamentary expertise assisted him in making the difficult decisions that he was called upon to make. On May 19, 2005, for instance, he had to break a tie vote on a confidence motion — a first time for a Speaker. Until the end of Milliken’s tenure, Speakers had been required to vote to break a tie only 10 times since Confederation in 1867; Milliken cast five of those votes. On April 27, 2010, Milliken issued a major ruling confirming the absolute right of the House to compel the production of documents, and finding that the government’s failure to comply with an order of the House constituted prima facie a question of privilege; the parties were able to work out a solution to this matter.

Milliken had the unique distinction of being the first Speaker to preside over four Parliaments, including three minority Parliaments, one Liberal and two Conservative. As one of the most skilful procedural experts to be Speaker, Milliken was well placed to meet the challenges posed by these circumstances.
BORN
Ottawa, Ontario, 1979

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
Insurance

POLITICAL AFFILIATION
Conservative

POLITICAL RECORD
• First Elected to House of Commons: 2004
• Appointed: Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole, 2006–2008; Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House of Commons, 2008–2011
• First Elected to Speakership: 2011

PRIME MINISTERs DURING SPEAKERSHIP
• Stephen Harper
Two weeks after his 32nd birthday, Andrew Scheer was elected Speaker of the House of Commons, the youngest person ever to hold the office. In spite of his age, Scheer brings considerable experience to the position, having served as one of the three Deputy Speakers since 2006 and as Chair of the Committees of the Whole since 2008.

While at University, Scheer worked on Parliament Hill, in the office of the Leader of the Opposition. Moving to Saskatchewan, he completed his education at the University of Regina. He was first elected to the House of Commons in 2004, at the age of 25, and was re-elected in the 2006, 2008 and 2011 general elections.

Scheer was one of eight candidates for the Speakership on June 2, 2011, and won on the sixth ballot. In his address to parliamentarians prior to the election for Speaker, Scheer highlighted the need to improve the decorum of the House of Commons, referring to the “toxic” climate of the House in the past few years. With the first majority government in over six years, many observers hope that the tone in the Chamber will improve, and that there will be less disruptive and discourteous behaviour. Scheer’s affability and experience were seen as important, and he promised to employ a mixture of diplomacy and assertiveness to set the tone for the House.

Andrew Scheer is married to Jill and they have four children — Thomas, Grace, Madeline and Henry.
Suggested Further Reading


