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“Courtesy and Kindliness of Heart”

Curtis Strong Chittenden

Among the 10 founding fathers of the Ontario Dental Association was a grim, ascetic dentist from Hamilton named Dr. Curtis Strong Chittenden. He was an asset to the neophyte organization, since he was the only person among the founders who had experience with dental associations: during the 1850s he had been a member of the Michigan State Dental Association and served as its President in 1860. In view of his expertise, it is not surprising that at the first ODA meeting his colleagues elected him Vice-President.

So enthusiastic was Chittenden about the potential of the new association that he wasted no time proclaiming his new professional affiliation. On January 12, 1867 — just nine days after the meeting — he altered his advertisement in the *Hamilton Evening Times* from, “C. S. Chittenden, Dentist,” to “C. S. Chittenden, Dentist, and member of the Dental Association of Canada West.”¹ (When the dental association was formed on January 3, 1867, it was named the Dental Association of Canada West, because the province of Ontario was not created until Confederation, which took place on July 1 that year.)

Chittenden was born in Burlington, Vermont, in 1825. He studied dentistry with his older brother, Dr. Nelson Chittenden, before completing the degree of Doctor of Dental Surgery at the New York College of Dentistry in 1846. Three years later, he moved to Hamilton, where he practised for the rest of his career.

When the profession was incorporated in 1868, in addition to his activities as a member of the ODA, Chittenden was named in the *Act Respecting Dentistry* as one of the members of the Provisional Board of Directors and Examiners of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario. However, his appointment caused considerable consternation among younger dentists. Under the new act, dentists who had been in practice for less than five years were required to pass a “suitable examination” to receive a licence, and one prerequisite for the examination was “integrity and good moral character.”

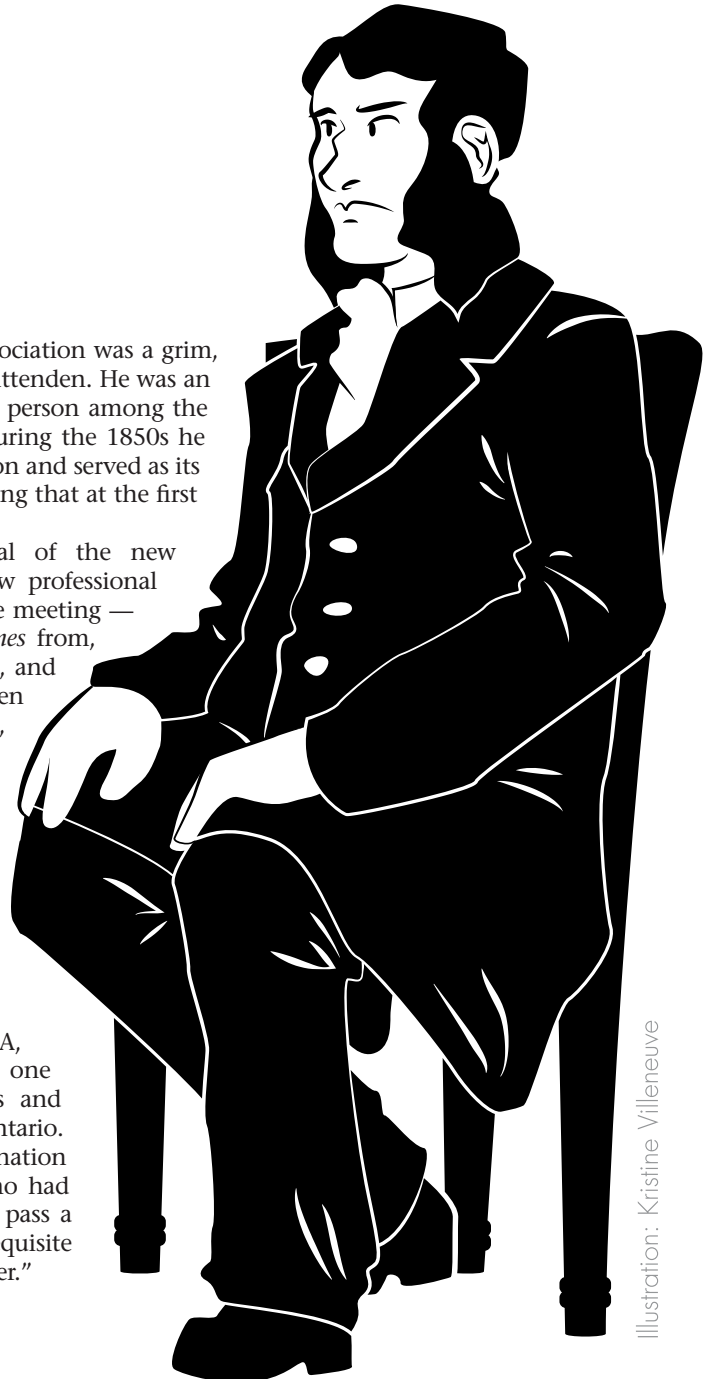


Illustration: Kristine Villeneuve

While the qualities necessary to meet this requirement were unspecified in the act, Chittenden gave his own interpretation of “integrity and good moral character,” in a speech at an ODA meeting in January 1868.

“In the first place,” he told the assembled dentists, “he should be a man possessed of a strong and healthy frame and good constitution; for although many delicate men have attained to the highest pinnacles of the different professions, men of health and strength succeed best as a rule. He should possess a fair amount of intellectual capacity, as well as untiring industry and perseverance.

“He should be the most cleanly of clean men. His person, his clothes, his hands, his mouth and, in fact, everything about him should be kept in the neatest and cleanest possible condition. He should also be the most patient of men, or the thousand and one whimsies of those who are to come under his hands will sometimes cause him to lose his temper, the least exhibition of which may cost him, if not the loss of a patron, what he prizes as highly, his good opinion.

“He should be a strictly honest man. Indeed, it may almost be said that it applies with more force to the practice of dentistry than to all others, for, unless a man’s principles are so firmly fixed that nothing can induce him to swerve in the slightest degree from the strictest integrity, he will be too strongly tempted to always act with perfect honesty in the constantly recurring opportunities for dishonourable practices which every dentist meets.”²

It is easy to understand why Chittenden’s views might cause nervousness among some practitioners who would be required to write a “suitable examination” and be examined for “integrity and good moral character” — particularly when Chittenden would be one of the examiners. In reality, however, Chittenden recognized that rigid adherence to his qualifications would disqualify from licensure every dental practitioner in the province of Ontario, and most of the dental practitioners passed the license examination without undue difficulty.

Despite this digression, Chittenden was respected by his colleagues who, in 1870, elected him President of the Ontario Dental Association. That same year, he found time to organize the Hamilton District Dental Society, the forerunner of today’s Hamilton Academy of Dentistry. Except for two years of voluntary absence, Chittenden was elected continuously to the Board of the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario for the rest of his life and served as president of the board for his last 13 years in office. Among other valuable services, for several years he was co-editor, with Dr. George Beers, of the *Canada Journal of Dental Sciences*, Canada’s first dental journal.



Curtis Strong Chittenden
ODA Founding Member
President, 1870

At the time of Chittenden’s death in May 1889, a colleague wrote: “The announcement of the death of C. S. Chittenden, D.D.S., M.D.S. ... was received by the dentists of Ontario, and by not a few residents elsewhere, with profound regret, and an unusual sense of personal bereavement.

“It is safe to say that no man in our profession had among its members so many personal friends. For more than twenty years — ever since the first movement for associated effort in the advancement of dentistry in 1867 — he has been prominently before them, and in his public, as in his more private relations to his professional brethren, his ability, courtesy, kindness of heart and general good-fellowship, endeared him to all. ... Dentistry in Ontario has room for a large number of men of the character and attainments of our friend, the late Dr. C. S. Chittenden.”³



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Dr. James Shosenberg is a former Editor of Ontario Dentist and author of The Rise of the Ontario Dental Association — 125 Years of Organized Dentistry (1992). In honour of our 150th Anniversary in 2017, Dr. Shosenberg is authoring The Rise of the ODA – 150 Years of Organized Dentistry, which will be available for ODA members in 2017.