



SIR ADAM BECK
1857-1925

Born in Baden Ontario, Beck moved his cigar-box manufacturing company to London in 1885. In 1902 he was elected mayor of London for a three year term. He represented London in the provincial legislative assembly (1902-1919 and 1923-1925). A member of the provincial cabinet (1905-1914 and 1923-1925) he presided over the enactment of the law establishing the Ontario Hydro Electric Power Commission in 1906. As chairman of that body from 1906-1925, he was largely responsible for its successful establishment and growth which led to a policy of low-cost electrical distribution to not only the urban areas but also to the back roads of rural Ontario. He was knighted in 1914.

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Adam Beck was born on the 20th of June, 1857, in the town of Baden, Ontario which was founded by his father Jacob B. Beck. At the age of 14, Adam began working in his father's iron foundry. After the foundry folded, Adam and his brother William went to Galt and opened a lumber veneering and cigar box manufacturing firm. Adam moved the business to London, Ontario in 1884 and eventually branches opened in Montreal, Toronto and Hamilton.

In 1898, Adam ventured into politics and unsuccessfully ran as the conservative candidate for the Ontario legislature. Four years later in 1902 he was elected as mayor of London and as London's member in the provincial parliament. He was mayor for 3 years and except for 1919-1923 was London's MLA until his death. In 1905, he was appointed a minister without portfolio and in 1906 he introduced the bill creating the Hydro Electric Power Commission.

He resigned from Cabinet in 1914 when Sir James P. Whitney attempted to put the \$200 million plus Hydro Commission under control of the cabinet. Beck did, however, did manage to maintain the commission's public ownership.

Beck became a colonel in the Canadian militia in 1912 and served in WW1 as director of remounts, supervising the purchase of horses for the army.

Adam Beck married Lillian Ottoway in September 1898. In 1904 their daughter Marion, was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Marion eventually recovered but the Becks still decided to establish the Queen Alexandra Sanatorium in Byron to ensure the finest available facilities for the treatment of tuberculosis patients.

Lillian Beck oversaw "Rose Day" in which thousands of roses were sold to raise funds for the sanatorium. In 1909, Beck founded and was elected president of the newly established London Health Association which would become University & Victoria Hospitals. In 1914 Lillian became president of the London Red Cross Society.

Both Adam & Lillian Beck were enthusiastic equestrians and participated in numerous shows in Canada, the United States and England. Adam Beck was elected director of the National Horse Show Association of America, as well as the International Horse Show in London in 1911. He was master of the fox hounds at London Hunt Club from 1897-1922 and promoted the London Jockey Club and the London Hunt Club.

In 1909 Adam and Lillian Beck were presented at court and Adam Beck became Sir Adam Beck.

Adam Beck remained chairman of the Hydro-Electric Power Commission until his death on August 15, 1925, four years after Lady Lillian's death.

Adam Beck became renowned for his efforts and determination to bring hydro-electric power from Niagara Falls, to not only the lucrative city markets but equally as well to up and down the rural back roads of Ontario. He was opposed to the high rates charged by various private electric companies. Adam Beck was often called “the poor man’s friend “for his efforts to provide cheap electricity and to help the sick and destitute.

To honour the initiatives and accomplishments of Adam Beck and their subsequent contributions to the Canadian agricultural community, we induct Sir Adam Beck into the Middlesex County Agricultural Hall of Fame.