

Harry Shirreff Professor of Chemical Research.

The creation of the Harry Shirreff Professor of Chemical Research Chair has a history that involves a few different personalities of the late 1800's/early 1900's, with the principal character being **Richard Bedford Bennett**, Prime Minister of Canada (1930 – 1935), Viscount of Mickleham, (1938 – 1947).

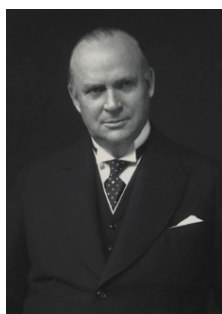
Bennett was born in 1870 in Hopewell Hill, New Brunswick. He made a living as a teacher in New Brunswick while in his late teens, but was able to fulfill his ambition of studying law by enrolling in Law School at Dalhousie University in 1890. During summer breaks from his teaching and law studies, Bennett worked as a clerk in the law office of Lemuel Tweedie in Chatham, N.B. There, in 1890, he met and became friendly with **Jennie Shirreff**. She was a nurse who in 1893 moved to Halifax to work in the Halifax General Hospital. While in Halifax, she met and soon married in 1894 the Canadian businessman, **Ezra Butler Eddy**. Eddy was the founder and majority owner of a large and successful enterprise, the E. B. Eddy Company, principally located in Hull, Quebec,



whose primary business was in wood derived products, especially paper and wooden matches. (Matches from the Eddy Match Company are still available in Canada.) Upon his death in 1906, the bulk of his estate was given to charity, but his wife Jennie Shirreff Eddy did receive a large number of company shares.

Over the next few years, Jennie Eddy, with the help of Bennett, amassed sufficient company shares to assume majority control of the E. B. Eddy Company. She was very grateful for Bennett's advice and assistance, and when she died in 1921 left about one-third of her share of the company to Bennett, with the rest going to her brother, **Joseph Thompson ("Harry") Shirreff** who was at that time the company vice-president.

Harry Shirreff remained an executive with the E. B. Eddy Company until his sudden death in 1926. In his will, he bequeathed "...one thousand and eight fully paid shares of the capital stock of the E. B. Eddy Company Limited being all the shares in the E. B. Eddy Company owned by me to the Honourable Richard Bedford Bennett." This bequest left Bennett as the majority owner and made him a very wealthy man.



After graduating from Dalhousie Law School, Bennett practiced law in Calgary but remained very active in Dalhousie University affairs. He played an important role in helping Jennie Shirreff Eddy donate a large sum of money to build a women's residence (now known as Shirreff Hall). He also donated money to purchase a large building on Oxford Street to be used as the President's residence. Bennett was also a governor of Dalhousie for several years starting in 1925.

From 1930 to 1935, R. B. Bennett served as Prime Minister of Canada. In 1938 he retired to England and was elevated by Winston Churchill to the House of Lords as **Viscount Bennett**, of Mickleham in the County of Surrey and of Calgary and Hopewell in the Dominion of Canada.

While living in England, Bennett gifted in a letter dated 29 March 1943 to Dalhousie University a sum of \$750,000 to set up four Chairs. One of these Chairs was to recognize the very important role that Harry Shirreff played in Bennett's life, and was to be given to "*...a Professor in Science Department of the University, preferably of a subject connected with the manufacture of pulp or paper. The Professor shall be designated The Harry Shirreff Professor of...*"

Dal President Carleton Stanley in a response dated 21 January 1944 explained to Viscount Bennett that Dal did not have a pulp and paper research presence, and there was no "*room in Eastern Canada for more than one pulp and paper research center*", one of which already existed at McGill University. Stanley went on to say:

"But we do need a chair in chemical research, and it happens that we have a born investigator on our staff – so badly paid that I wonder that we have been able to hold him. He is an Islander, C. C. Coffin, a loyal Dalhousian, who secured his PhD from McGill and studied in Europe on a scholarship. In Canada, he is regarded as one of our "top two or three" chemists. Professor Ellis, of the University of London, who spend a year touring the physics departments and departments of physical chemistry for the Carnegie Corporation just before the war, rated his work in physical chemistry as equal to anything in Canada. The committee, therefore, recommend that it be called the Harry Shirreff Professor of Chemical Research."

Viscount Bennett agreed with this idea, and in 1944, Carl Coffin became the first Harry Shirreff Professor of Chemical Research. He was followed by Walter Chute 1954-1978, Osvald Knop 1981 – 2000, Neil Burford 2001 – 2011, Axel Becke 2012 – 2015, Mary Anne White, 2015 – 2016 and the current Harry Shirreff Chair holder since 2018, Michael Freund.