Dr. William Canniff, MD, MRCS

CMA President, 1880
University of the City of New York, 1854
Surgery, public health

Dr. Canniff began his career by completing his training in England and serving as an acting assistant surgeon in the Royal Artillery. When he returned to Canada in 1857 he became an instructor in pathology and then a professor of surgery at Victoria College in Toronto. After serving briefly with the Union forces during the US Civil War he practised in Belleville, Ont., and participated in the CMA’s organizing meeting in October 1867. A year later he returned to Toronto, where he taught briefly at Victoria College and joined the staff of the Toronto General Hospital. Later, in 1883, he was appointed Toronto’s first permanent medical officer of health and, according to the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, “he spent the next seven years slowly educating his fellow citizens in the basic principles of sanitation and disease control.” By the time he resigned in 1890, “he had made preventive work an integral part of urban life.” He died in 1910.