

John Strachan Biography

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Biography

John Strachan (1778-1867) was the first Anglican bishop of Toronto and one of the most important members of the ruling oligarchy in Upper Canada. He was also an educator and the founder of the University of Toronto.

John Strachan was born on April 12, 1778, at Aberdeen, Scotland. He was educated at the University of Aberdeen and at St. Andrews. In 1799, unable to find an attractive living in Scotland, he emigrated to British North America and during the next 12 years taught school in Upper Canada.

In May 1803 Strachan accepted orders in the Church of England. In 1812 he was made rector of York (Toronto) and chaplain to the troops. By the end of the War of 1812 he had emerged as one of the prominent men of York. He was rewarded in 1815 with an appointment as an honorary member of the governor's executive council, and in 1817 he became a full member.

In 1820 Strachan became a member as well of the legislative council, and from 1818 to 1828 he acted as the chief adviser to the lieutenant governor, Sir Peregrine Maitland. In May 1823, in addition to his other duties, Strachan was appointed president of the Board of the General Superintendence of Education.

In 1825 Strachan was appointed archdeacon of York. By the mid-1830s, as his religious duties became more burdensome, he withdrew more and more from participation in political affairs. On Aug. 4, 1839, he was consecrated the first bishop of Toronto in Lambeth Palace Chapel. The balance of his long life was to be devoted to his diocese and to education.

In 1827 Strachan had obtained a royal charter for the founding of the University of King's College, York, but the first classes were not held until 1843. Through the 1840s Strachan had to oppose a number of governmental plans to secularize the university, and he finally lost this struggle in 1850. He immediately began to plan for a new university which would be under the control of the Church of England, and Trinity College admitted its first students in January 1852.

In 1854 Strachan lost another lengthy battle when the clergy reserves were secularized; with their secularization went the last hope of establishment for the Church of England in Canada. He died in Toronto on Nov. 1, 1867.