

Sir Adam Beck

Among the luminaries who attended Galt Collegiate Institute, or Tassie's School, is Sir Adam Beck, one of our great manufacturers, statesmen, politicians and philanthropists.

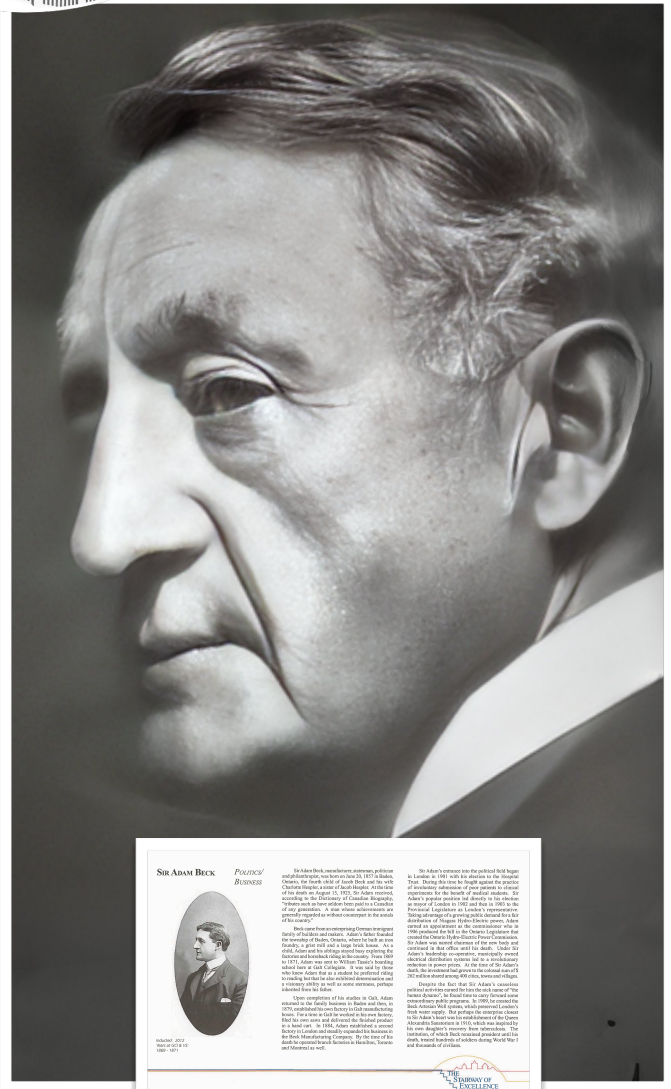
Born June 20, 1857 in Baden, Ontario, he was the fourth child of Jacob Beck and Charlotte Hespeler, a sister of Jacob Hespeler.

Beck is remembered at GCI's Stairway to Excellence where his exploits recall one of the giants in the then-emerging field of electric power generation in Ontario.

At the Hydro building (corner of Wellington and Dickson Streets) in downtown Cambridge, a plaque honours Beck's instrumental influence in establishing the Galt Public Utilities Commission Building. He encouraged officials to construct the building and to include in it a hydro shop, to promote the use of power. The tablet notes how the building helped secure the future of electrical power in the community, and recalls the "grateful and affectionate remembrance of Sir Adam Beck without whose knightly courage and inspiring zeal this building and all for which it stands could not have been."

Another plaque, erected in London by the Government of Canada, notes how "Beck became a manufacturer in London which he represented in the Legislative Assembly (1902-19 and 1923-25). A member of the provincial cabinet (1905-14 and 1923-25) he presided in 1906 over the enactment of the law establishing the Ontario Hydro-Electric Power Commission. From the creation of the Commission until his death at London he served as its chief administrative officer."

As a child, Adam and his siblings explored the Baden area by horseback. He later did the same thing in and around Galt when he attended William Tassie's boarding school from 1869 to 1871. During those years he was said to prefer riding to his studies, though he also showed determination and a visionary ability—not to mention sternness of character. At the time of his death on August 15, 1925, Sir Adam Beck received, according to the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, tributes such as have seldom been paid to a Canadian of any generation.



In 1879 he began a box manufacturing factory in Galt, where he filed his own saws and delivered the finished product in a hand cart. Establishing a second factory, in London, he steadily expanded his Beck Manufacturing Company, eventually operating branch factories in Hamilton, Toronto and Montreal.

He was elected mayor of London in 1902, and then elected to the provincial legislature in 1903. In 1906 he was appointed commissioner of Niagara Hydro-Electric power, then became first chairman of the Ontario Hydro-Electric Power Commission. At the time of his death the Commission was worth \$262 million, shared among 400 cities, towns and villages, and Beck was regarded as the father of Ontario Hydro.