Wesley Bourne: leader extraordinaire of Canadian anesthesiology

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Very high on the list of the most celebrated leaders in anesthesiology in Canada, if not the world, is Wesley Bourne (Figure). He was born on a sugar plantation in Barbados in 1886 and, following a solid education there at The Lodge School (est. 1745), he applied to study medicine at McGill, graduating in 1911. He had an incredible array of qualities, not the least of which was his capacity for hard work. Steeped in the classics, he was a gifted teacher who enthralled generations of students and peers worldwide with his erudite, enthusiastic presentations on a variety of anesthesia topics. From the outset, he realised the importance of understanding the basic science aspects of anesthesia. Within ten years of graduating from McGill, Wesley Bourne was at the vanguard of this emerging specialty in North America.

Bourne was the first recipient of the prestigious Henry Hill Hickman award from the Royal Society of Medicine in England in 1935. He founded the Canadian Society of Anaesthetists in 1920, which in 1943 became the Canadian Anesthetists' Society. Bourne was appointed President of the American Society of Anesthesiologists in 1942, the only non-American ever to hold that office. He also served two terms as President of the International Anesthesia Research Society.

In 1945, McGill established the first independent Department of Anesthesia in Canada, and Dr. Bourne was invited to be the first Chair. His three-year diploma course at McGill was the beginning of formal specialist training in anesthesia in Canada and became a template for

Figure Portrait of Wesley Bourne by A. Sherriff Scott, presented to Professor Bourne by Quebec Anaesthetists in 1950. This portrait is now on display in the McGill Department of Anesthesia in Montreal

anesthesia training in many parts of the world. How fortunate we were to have had such an inspiring leader at the helm as the art of anesthesia was advanced to a science in Canada during the mid-20th century.

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