

# John Charles Dent

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**John Charles Dent** (November 8, 1841 – September 27, 1888) was a Canadian journalist, author and historian.

He was born in Kendal, Westmorland, England. Shortly after his birth, his family emigrated to Canada West.

Dent received his primary education in Canadian schools, studied law in Brantford, Ontario, and became an attorney in 1865. He practised law for a few years, but found the profession did not suit him, and was drawn to pursue literary endeavours instead. He accordingly relinquished his practice as soon as he felt himself in a position to do so, and went to England.

He developed his journalistic skills working for *The Daily Telegraph*. He also contributed a series of articles to the periodical *Once a Week*.

At this period he had a wife and family depending on him for support, and it speaks well for his

abilities, that he was able to amply provide for them out of the profits solely derived from his literary labours. To do this he had to devote himself to work that could be quickly written, and readily sold. Accordingly, Dent produced no very long or ambitious work in England.

After remaining in England for several years, Dent and his family moved to America in 1867. He obtained a position in Boston, which he held for about two years. Then he went to Toronto, having accepted a position on the editorial staff of the *Toronto Evening Telegram*, which was then just starting. For several years Dent devoted himself to journalistic labours on various newspapers, but principally the *Toronto Weekly Globe*. To that journal he contributed a very notable series of biographical sketches on "Eminent Canadians."

In 1880, soon after the death of George Brown, founder of the *Globe*, Dent severed his connection with that paper and began his first ambitious undertaking, *The Canadian Portrait Gallery* (1880), which ran to four large volumes. It contained biographies of Canadian public figures, living and dead, carefully prepared, and written

from an un-partisan standpoint. This book attained a considerable circulation, and brought to its author a comparatively large sum of money.

Dent's second book was *The Last Forty Years: Canada since the Union of 1841*. This work has been highly praised in all quarters.

His third work was a *History of the Rebellion in Upper Canada* (1885–6). Through careful research, from sources of information previously not accessible, Dent was able to throw new light on the characters of the men who took part in the Upper Canada Rebellion. This work met with severe criticism when first published, as it contradicted commonly-held beliefs at the time.

In writing history, he was in accord with Thomas Babington Macaulay. He always believed that a true story should be told as agreeably as a fictitious one; "that the incidents of real life, whether political or domestic, admit of being so arranged as, without detriment to accuracy, to command all the interest of an artificial series of facts; that the chain of circumstances which constitute history may be as finely and gracefully woven as any tale of fancy."

Dent has been compared to Francis Parkman for his ability to write about Canadian history without being dull and dry.

In addition, he wrote a great many sketches, essays and stories. A collection of his stories was published posthumously in *The Gerrard Street mystery and other weird tales*. (1888)

Dent was elected to fellowship in the Royal Society of Canada in 1887.

In private life, Dent possessed qualities of mind and heart, having their visible outcome in a courteous, genial manner that endeared him very closely to his friends. With all his wealth of learning, which was very great, he was light-hearted, witty and companionable.

## Reference

This article contains material from the *Prefatory Sketch* found in *The Gerrard Street Mystery and Other Weird Tales*

## External links

- Works by John Charles Dent at Project Gutenberg
- Biography at the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*

Retrieved from

"[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Charles\\_Dent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Charles_Dent)"

Categories: 1841 births | 1888 deaths | Canadian historians | Fellows of the Royal Society of Canada | People from Cumbria | Ontario writers

---

- This page was last modified 01:54, 4 February 2007.
- All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.)  
Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a US-registered 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.