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Alan J. Richardson
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

BUILDING THE CANADIAN CHARTERED ACCOUNTANCY PROFESSION: A BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE EDWARDS, FCA, CBE, LLD, 1861-1947

Abstract: George Edwards was a key figure in the creation of the modern institutional structure of accounting in Canada. He worked to implement a vision of accountancy as a profession rather than a business. This was reflected in his commitment to accounting education, to the restriction of entry to the CA profession to those who passed a test of competency, and to his desire to demonstrate the social and ethical value of accounting. He was president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario, president of the Dominion Association of CAs, and president of the Society of Cost Accountants of Canada. He created one of the major Canadian public accounting firms (Edwards, Morgan & Co.). His contributions were recognized through awards such as the Commander of the Order of the British Empire, an honorary degree from Queen's University, and life memberships in the Institutes of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. This biography examines his role in shaping the federal/provincial structure of the accounting profession, the development of university-based accounting education programs, the separation of the management and the financial accounting professions, the communications strategies of the profession, and his contributions to government and bank accounting.

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INTRODUCTION

Biographical research provides an opportunity to explore the role of individuals in the development of accounting and accounting institutions [e.g.; Parker, 1994; Previts and Robinson, 1996; Slocum and Roberts, 1996]. It is individuals who create ideas and organizations [Wren, 1998]. It is often individuals, and their involvement in a range of seemingly unrelated activities, that provide the threads that hold together the fabric of historical experience. This is not to deny the role of broader social interests or structures in shaping historical outcomes. As Hooks [1953, p. xiii] observed, "every philosophy which recognizes that men can and do make their own history also concerns itself with the conditions under which it is made." Biographical research thus examines the interaction between the individual and the social structures that constrain and enable their actions [cf. Giddens, 1984; Macintosh and Scapens, 1990].

This biography traces the contribution of one individual, George Edwards, who had a significant impact on the Canadian accounting profession. Throughout his career, Edwards displayed a remarkable clarity and consistency of vision for the Chartered Accountancy (CA) profession. At his retirement dinner in 1926, W.H. West [1926, p. 213], president of the American Institute of Accountants, gave tribute to Edwards, saying:

Mr. Edwards is known from one end of the Dominion to the other as a man who has constantly striven for an ideal; that ideal being a unified profession established on a high plane, not only technically and intellectually, but morally as well.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Edwards viewed accountancy as a profession rather than a business. This was reflected in his commitment to accounting education, to restricting entry to the CA profession to those who had passed a test of competency, and to his desire to demonstrate the social value of accounting. He wanted the CA institutes to be the sole representative of public accountants in Canada. He worked tirelessly to protect CAs against the encroachment of competing professional bodies. He also tried to institutionalize the public service dimension of accounting through his own example and through the creation of codes of ethics.

Edwards served the Canadian accounting profession for more than 30 years. During this time he was president of the Institute of CAs of Ontario (four terms), president of the Dominion Association of CAs (two terms), and founding president of the Canadian Society of Cost Accountants. He established a major national public accounting firm and used this firm to help build a national CA profession. His work earned him life memberships in the Institutes of CAs of Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. He was the first managing editor of the *Canadian Chartered Accountant* (now *CA Magazine*) and was instrumental in establishing accounting education as a university program of instruction in Canada. Queen's University awarded him an honorary degree in recognition of this service. During World War I, he served as accounting systems designer, comptroller, auditor, and liquidator for the Imperial Munitions Board in Canada and was named Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). After the war, he served as auditor of Canada's national accounts, the first external auditor to serve in this role. He retired in 1926 from professional politics but remained an active member of his firm until 1941. He died in 1947 at the age of 86.

METHOD

The examination of George Edwards' career in this biography provides a unique perspective on the history of the Canadian profession. He was a source of continuity among a series of key formative events in the profession. His vision and values represent one of the many perspectives on accountancy during its early years. The success of his vision was, in part, a reflection of his indefatigable efforts against formidable opposition over 35 years. More importantly, the vision reflected the tenor of the times. It provided a rallying point for like-minded accountants and resulted in the creation of institutions consistent with broader social interests. George Edwards' biography allows us to identify the interaction between his policy choices and the context within which they were enacted and, hence, to understand better the evolution of the Canadian profession.

Biographical research has not developed a well-defined methodology [Jones, 1998]. The process involves selecting a subject, gathering data, analyzing, and reporting [Lomask, 1986]. Each of these steps involves choices that should be made explicit, but there are few guidelines for undertaking each stage. As Goodman and Kruger [1988, p. 315] noted: "It is easy to describe

the steps that the historian follows, it is significantly harder to understand the process that he or she undertakes." Beyond this, biographic research varies according to the perspective that the author brings to the task. For example, biographers have developed psychological profiles of their subjects [e.g., Harris-Seares, 1997], focused on the cultural context of the subject [e.g., Reynolds, 1997], or provided a detailed linguistic analysis of the subject's writings [Erlich, 1996]. This section will provide an overview of the choices made in constructing this biography.

The choice of George Edwards as a subject reflects the importance of the period from 1890 to 1925 in the development of the Canadian profession and the prominence of his role(s) throughout this time. This 35-year period resulted in the formation of all of the accounting associations that now dominate the Canadian profession. It is also the period in which the audit market developed its current form. It is a period in which the structure of the profession was debated and institutionalized. For example, the relationship between provincial and federal accounting associations, the division of labor between management and financial accounting associations, and the institutional framework for accounting education programs were all decided during this period. In each of these cases, an examination of the archives will show the important role that Edwards played [cf. Richardson, 1994]. To use Lomask's [1986, p. 10] word, George Edwards has significant historical "residue."

The data available for this biography consist of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Edwards' writings, reports of the committees on which he served, recorded testimony before Senate hearings, and documents generated by him in various capacities (e.g., presidential addresses). Many of the key documents related to Edwards' contributions were published in the *Canadian Chartered Accountant*, a professional journal he founded for the CA profession. Data were also collected from marriage certificates, church records, business directories, and census records. Secondary sources include histories of the accounting associations and organizations with which he worked. In particular, the histories of the Imperial Munitions Board (including biographies of its chairman, Sir Joseph Flavelle) and the Institutes of CAs of Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta include materials relevant to Edwards. Given Edwards' prominence in the profession, his obituaries in both the daily press and professional publications also provided valuable data and leads for additional

source material [Editorial, 1947; Obituary, 1947]. Unfortunately, no archive of Edwards' personal papers has been located.¹

The analysis process used in this biography is narrative, chronological, and thematic [Erlach, 1996, p. 79]. No attempt has been made to quantify Edwards' contribution to the profession. Based on the documents, a series of key events was identified and discussed in chronological order. The analysis and interpretation of data assume that Edwards drew insights from his experiences and applied them to new circumstances as they emerged. It is also assumed that key aspects of Edwards' values and priorities are reflected in patterns of behavior over time [Atwood and Stolorow, 1984]. These emergent patterns are used retrospectively in this biography to help rationalize the choices that Edwards made during his life.

The structure of the paper follows the logic of analysis outlined above; i.e., it is chronological and thematic. The paper begins with a brief sketch of Edwards' personal life. This is followed by an overview of his business, primarily carried on under the name Edwards, Morgan & Co. There follow five sections dealing with the major issues in which Edwards was involved: (1) federal/provincial professional relations; (2) accounting education; (3) the Imperial Munitions Board; (4) government and bank accounting; and, (5) the division of labor in the profession between financial and management accounting. The conclusion identifies the common elements in Edwards' contribution to the profession and areas wherein his goals were not achieved.

GEORGE EDWARDS: PERSONAL

Edwards was born in St. James Ward, Toronto on March 25, 1861, six years before the creation of Canada as a sovereign nation. He was the fourth of five children born to William and Mary Anne Edwards.² He died on February 12, 1947 in the aftermath of World War II (see his photograph in Exhibit 1). His formal education was limited. He attended the Toronto Collegiate Institute (now Jarvis Collegiate Institute) and had "private tutors." Toronto Collegiate Institute was the first "Grammar School" in Canada (founded in 1807) and was intended to provide an academic education for students continuing on to college. Bookkeeping was taught in these

¹Edwards' family was contacted during the preparation of this biography and was invited to comment on this paper. The interpretations expressed, however, have not been approved or otherwise by the Edwards family.

² based on the 1871 Census of Canada

schools using the Irish National School texts [Bell, 1918; McKeen and Richardson, 1998]. Edwards gained a basic understanding of bookkeeping and business practice through these courses.

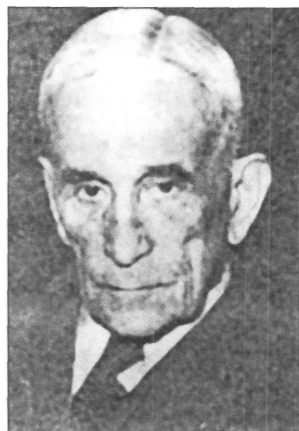
Edwards continued his accounting training as an apprentice with the accounting firms headed by E.R.C. Clarkson in Toronto, beginning at age 19 (Turner, Clarkson & Co. until 1881, E.R.C. Clarkson thereafter). Upon receiving his CA designation in 1889, he left Clarkson's firm and started his own practice. Edwards and Clarkson (both E.R.C. and his son G.T. Clarkson) would repeatedly find themselves at odds over the next 25 years regarding the structure of the profession, the need for examinations as a basis for entry to the profession, and the ethics to be applied to practice. At its heart, this disagreement was over whether accountancy was primarily a profession or a business.

At his retirement dinner, Edwards mentioned Clarkson as a friend and thanked Clarkson for giving him his start as an accountant. Although Clarkson could not be there (he was 74 years old and in poor health at the time), he wrote a letter of congratulations [Clarkson, 1926, p. 214] that included this rather cryptic paragraph:

There are few who have not more antipathies than are good for them – fellowship rubs these away; the game is here for members of this Institute to play manfully – it is a good and honest game – and they are the men to play it. These meetings indicate that, behind, there is a deep tribal sense that they should stand together and play the game fairly, and by consultation and argument pass on their knowledge to one another, encouraging by every means possible a full sense of the supreme obligation each one owes to his own conscience and his own pride.

This paragraph subtly suggests that the tension between them had not been forgotten, but that Clarkson recognized that their

EXHIBIT 1



George Edwards
c.1947

debates had contributed positively to the development of accountancy.

George Edwards' family was well positioned in Toronto society. His father, William, had emigrated from England in 1836. He was a manufacturer, deeply involved in the Toronto Mechanics' Institute, a forerunner of the public library system, and a member of the Toronto City Council [Morgan, 1898, p. 305]. By 1868, William Edwards had been appointed as secretary (deputy minister) of the Ontario Department of Public Works, a position he held until his retirement [Champion, 1899; Creighton, 1984, p. 130]. He is also listed in various Toronto city directories as the secretary and treasurer of the Board of Arts and Manufacturers (1865) and as accountant and librarian to the Board of Agriculture (1866).

William Edwards was prominent in the Methodist community of Toronto; both his eldest and youngest sons were Methodist ministers. The Edwards family initially attended the George St. Methodist church. This church was the wellspring of Methodism in Toronto, serving the city's merchant families. Champion [1899, p. 83] described the congregation as follows:

No professional men, either physician or lawyer was found among its worshippers. It had several who were engaged in business but none whose business was large enough to be remarkable. It had a monopoly of the merchant tailors and master shoemakers of the city.

As William Edwards progressed in his career, he moved his family to a more prestigious neighborhood and joined Trinity Methodist church. William held several positions within the church, acting as a trustee and as a member of its temperance committee. The congregation at Trinity Methodist included "some of Toronto's merchant princes and successful businessmen" [Champion, 1899, p. 219]. These contacts would be important in George Edwards' career as an accountant.

George Edwards also maintained close ties with the church. In 1911, he bought the former Bala Falls Hotel in Bala, Ontario about 100 miles north of Toronto. He built a cottage on the property which he named "Caerholme" [Petry, 1998, p. 40].³ George added a room to the cottage for the use of the Anglican bishop of

³The property is now known as Edwards' Point.

Toronto. In 1920, he donated a portion of the land around his cottage to the Anglican Church and a small, cedar shake chapel (St. Alban's) was built on the site. This church allowed the Anglican congregation to move from a nearby church shared by Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians. His connection to the Methodist and Anglican churches provided guidance for his attempts to restructure the profession (see the discussion of the Dominion Association of CAs below) and gave him contacts with prominent business and political elites (see the discussion of Edwards' firm below).

Edwards married Sarah Caroline Woods in 1884 at age 23. Together they had five sons (Arthur, Hugh, Oswald, Alfred, and John) and one daughter (Gertrude). Edwards has been described as "small and dapper" [Creighton, 1984, p. 130] and "ambitious, outspoken and just plain pig-headed" [*Perspectives*, 1985, p. 2]. He ran his accounting firm as a family business and, although successful, he was reputed to have had difficulty maintaining senior staff whose surname was not Edwards [Creighton, 1984, p. 134].

Interestingly, on his marriage certificate Edwards listed his occupation as "woolen manufacturer." At his retirement dinner in 1926, it was mentioned that he had obtained "a general mercantile experience" between 1880 and 1890 (his years with Clarkson). Clarkson had a significant bankruptcy practice and on occasion would take over the management of a failed firm rather than liquidating the assets [Little, 1964, p. 18]. Clarkson also had several business interests of his own. Edwards spent nine years with Clarkson prior to receiving his CA designation at a time when a five-year apprenticeship was the norm. It is possible that Edwards was involved in one of Clarkson's businesses during this time. Edwards also recounted at his retirement dinner that Clarkson had paid him \$2.50 per day rather than the going rate of \$2 per day which, he recalled, was greatly appreciated given his family responsibilities.

Although Edwards was not listed in any of the *Who's Who in Canada* for this period, his profile is consistent with the "accounting elite" [Richardson, 1989]. The accounting elite in Canada during this period was primarily Ontario-born, Anglican, Conservative, male, and relatively less educated than the business elite of the day. Unlike the typical member of the accounting elite, Edwards was not active in municipal politics or as a company director.⁴ The lack of these commitments may have allowed him

⁴based on the *Canadian Directory of Directors* for the period

the time to concentrate on professional issues. The fact that Edwards was not listed in these directories, while other members of his firm and family were, suggests that he consciously refused to be included. This apparent humility, a preference to work out of the limelight, is characteristic of his career.

THE ACCOUNTING FIRM: EDWARDS, MORGAN & CO.

George Edwards articulated with E.R.C. Clarkson beginning in 1880 at the age of 19. He stayed with Clarkson until he received his CA designation in 1889. At that time he formed a partnership with Alexander Hart-Smith and began to practice in Toronto. Hart-Smith died in 1903 and Hart-Smith's stepson, William Pomeroy Morgan, entered into partnership with Edwards. The new firm was known as Edwards, Morgan & Co. (see Exhibit 2).

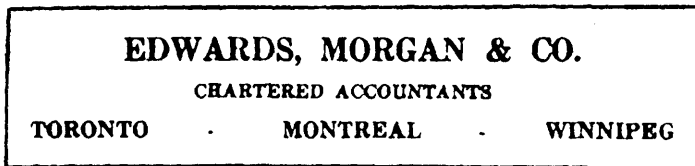
All of Edwards' five sons eventually joined the firm: Arthur Harper Edwards (CA, 1902), Hugh Percival Edwards (CA, 1913), Oswald Noel Edwards (CA, 1917), Alfred Geoffrey Edwards (CA, 1917), and John Macham Edwards (CA, 1920). Several of his sons would follow in their father's footsteps in serving the profession. Arthur became a founding member of the Institute of CAs of Manitoba and served as a president of the Institute of CAs of British Columbia. Hugh (Percy) served for many years on the Institute of CAs of Ontario (ICAO) council and as president. Oswald is also notable, but for contrary reasons. Although he became an accountant, he was apparently not happy with the role. He was able to express this antipathy on one occasion when he was asked to set an examination on cost accounting for the ICAO. The examination was so difficult that no one achieved a passing grade, and Oswald was never asked to take on such duties again [Creighton, 1984]. The Edwards, Morgan & Co. firm continued past Edwards' death until it finally disappeared through a merger with Deloitte and Touche in 1957.

Edwards' daughter (Gertrude), it should be noted, is neither among the alumni of the firm nor is her name or Edwards' wife's name ever mentioned in any professional documents. At Edwards' retirement dinner, Mrs. Edwards was presented with a brooch to commemorate the event. This is probably not surprising given Edwards' views on women in the profession. As president of the ICAO in 1896, Edwards debated the wisdom of admitting women to membership. He offered the opinion that "women could not hold their own in executive ability, especially in accounting" and that "the prestige of the profession would suffer

by admission of ladies to membership" [Creighton, 1984, p. 47]. Edwards' views held the day, and the Institute voted against allowing women entry to the profession [McKeen and Richardson, 1998]. Edwards' attitude was common for his generation and is consistent with his educational experience at the Toronto Collegiate Institute where women were relegated to one classroom in the basement [Jarvis Collegiate Institute, 1999].

EXHIBIT 2

An Advertisement for Edwards, Morgan & Co.



A discrete advertisement from *The Monetary Times*, 1930

The Edwards, Morgan firm expanded across Canada, benefiting from the "greatest economic boom in [Canada's] history" between 1900 and 1913 [Bothwell et al., 1987, p. 55]. Edwards opened offices in the financial centers of Toronto and Montreal and subsequently followed the railway-and-settlement boom across the prairies with offices in Timmins, Winnipeg (operating as Edwards, Ronald & Co.), Calgary, and Vancouver. Creighton [1984] suggested that Edwards, Morgan & Co. was the first multi-office firm in Canada and second only to the Clarkson Gordon firm in prestige among Canadian accounting firms. The latter claim may be somewhat exaggerated. Richardson [1999] identified Edwards, Morgan as the eighth largest audit firm in Canada in terms of the number of audits conducted during the period 1902-1941. During this period, the firm averaged a market share of about 2.75% of all clients. Edwards, Morgan's client list did not include any of the larger firms in Canada. For example, Edwards did not audit any of the banks, railway companies, or public utilities that dominate the list of Canada's largest companies.

The firm's clients included the Borden Company (dairy), Canada Bread Company Limited (bakery), Canada Permanent Mortgage Company (mortgages), Coast Copper Company (copper mining), the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada Limited (copper, zinc, and lead mining), Dunlop Tire and Rubber Goods Company (tire manufacturing), Holinger

Consolidated Gold Mines (mining), National Trust Company (trust/banking), Photo Engravers & Electrotypers Limited (photographic equipment/services), Russell Industries Limited (automobiles), Joseph E. Seagram (distiller), Hiram Walker-Gooderham & Worts Limited (distiller), George Weston Limited (baker), and Wright-Hargreaves Mines (mining).⁵ The firm also audited the accounts of the Dominion of Canada for three years (see the section on government accounting below). Edwards' participation in the Methodist church community of Toronto provided links to many of his clients. Some of the leading figures in the Canadian (and, in particular, the Toronto) business community were Methodists including Ames, Cox, Eaton, Gooderham, Gundy, Flavelle, Massey, Weston, and Wood [Champion, 1899, p. 285; Sanderson, 1910, p. 394; Bliss, 1987, pp. 346-349]. These were the "merchant princes and successful businessmen" of the parish of Trinity Methodist church [Champion, 1899, p. 219]. Edwards included many of this group among his clients, particularly Weston, Cox, Gooderham, and Flavelle. Cox and Gooderham deserve particular mention due to the extended group of companies they controlled.

Cox controlled a web of financial institutions centered on the Bank of Commerce and including Dominion Securities, a stock brokerage run by Ames (his son-in-law), National Trust (with Joseph Flavelle as president), Canada Life Insurance Company, and several other smaller insurance companies [Naylor, 1975a, b]. Cox was also the lead member of a syndicate that bought the Canadian assets of the Dunlop Tire and Rubber Company of America to create the Dunlop Tire and Rubber Company of Canada. Edwards was connected to this group through his audit of National Trust and Dunlop Rubber. Joseph Flavelle, president of Cox's National Trust, was instrumental in providing Edwards' entree into government accounting (see below).

The Gooderham family developed its business based on grain milling. This venture soon diversified into distilling to take advantage of excess grain production. Ultimately, the family controlled a group of companies including the Hiram Walker-Gooderham

⁵This list of clients was compiled from Houston's *The Annual Financial Review* (various editions 1902-1941), supplemented by Henderson [1984, pp. 29, 44]. The editor of this volume invited companies to submit financial statements to him which he condensed and published. This list is, therefore, unlikely to be complete, but it provides a sample of the types of firms Edwards, Morgan audited.

Worts Distillery, the Canada Permanent Mortgage Company, Manufacturers Life Assurance, Manufacturers Accident Insurance, and the Bank of Toronto [Bliss, 1987]. Edwards was connected to this group through his audits of the Hiram Walker-Gooderham Worts Distillery and the Canada Permanent Mortgage Company.

The Edwards, Morgan firm played an important role in establishing the CA profession across Canada. For example, the first meeting of the Institute of CAs of Alberta was held in the offices of Edwards, Morgan in Calgary in 1911 [*Perspectives*, 1985, p. 1]. Arthur Edwards, George's eldest son, was one of six charter members of the Alberta Institute. In Manitoba, the Institute of CAs of Manitoba (ICAM) had been created in 1886, but the Institute was dormant and held no meetings between 1888 and 1902 [Hoole, 1963]. The ICAM was reawakened by Edwards in 1902 through members of his firm (then Edwards & Hart-Smith) which had been recently established in Winnipeg [Neville, 1986, p. 9]. Edwards needed the support of the ICAM in his battle, described below, with the Dominion Association of CAs (DACA). W.S. Ronald, a member of Edwards' firm in Winnipeg, became president of the ICAM in 1903. Edwards became an out-of-province member that year and represented Manitoba at the DACA in 1922 [Hoole, 1963, p. 7].

Edwards' firm provided him with a network of contacts across Canada and the financial resources that allowed him to devote considerable time to the profession. The remainder of the biography deals with specific issues or events that were important in Edwards' professional life. Each of these events provided an opportunity for Edwards to enact his vision of the profession. In particular, these events show how Edwards worked to create a unified profession based on high standards of technical and moral practice. His vision, however, was not unopposed, so that these events also show Edwards to be an adept political strategist.

FEDERAL / PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

Canada is a federation with a central government and 13 member states (ten provinces and three territories as of 1999). The division of powers between these levels of government was laid out in the British North America Act of 1867 (now the Canada Constitution Act). The Act is ambiguous on certain matters and, as a result, there are continuing debates over matters of jurisdiction between the provinces and the federal government. For example, both levels of government have powers to incorporate companies.

This constitutional structure sets the scene for one of George Edwards' major battles and victories.

The first institutes of CAs were established through provincial legislation and accepted into membership all those who had passed the prescribed examinations regardless of their current occupation. Contrary to this model, John Mackay sought to create an association of CAs more narrowly restricted to those in public practice but with membership based on experience rather than examination. Mackay was a practicing auditor in Ontario at this time. One of his clients was National Trust where he served with George Edwards as co-auditor. Mackay sought federal incorporation of this association in 1901 but was unsuccessful. The following year with help from the Association of Accountants of Montreal and two prominent Ontario accountants, Clarkson (Edwards' former employer) and Cross, both of whom had resigned from the ICAO over a professional misconduct case [Richardson, 1990], the DACA was created.

Edwards saw the DACA as a rival to the provincial institutes, and he attempted to close down the federal body. He opposed the federal incorporation of the DACA successfully in 1901 on the strength of his political lobbying. The 1902 application for incorporation of the DACA had more institutional support, most notably from the Association of Accountants of Montreal, and he was unable to prevent incorporation on that occasion. As a result he had to change tactics and in 1903, he arrived at the DACA annual meeting with 76 applications for membership and proxy votes from Ontario and Manitoba. He attempted to use these proxies to outvote the existing 17 members. The chair of the meeting did not allow this move. In 1908, he sought legislation in Ontario that would limit the use of the CA designation in Ontario to members of the ICAO. Although the province passed the legislation, the DACA petitioned the federal government which disallowed the Ontario legislation as *ultra vires* (beyond Ontario's jurisdiction). In effect, the Ontario legislation had declared that the federal legislation authorizing a national CA designation was invalid in Ontario. This position was not allowed to stand.

Finally, under the mediation of Harry Price, president of the Society of Incorporated Accountants and Auditors of England, at the 1908 conference of the American Association of Public Accountants in Atlantic City, the groups met and peace was negotiated. The DACA became a federal body for the provincial institutes with no powers over designations, education, or standards.

George Edwards had won and in the process had created the structure now followed by all accounting associations in Canada.

The DACA was given the mandate to (1) secure the incorporation of provincial societies in provinces of the dominion where none existed; (2) assist provincial societies in securing uniform legislation for the better protection and regulation of local professional interests; (3) secure the adoption by provincial societies of uniform standards of examination and membership; (4) arrange for reciprocal privileges between provincial societies for the benefit of their members; (5) consider the question of ethics; (6) secure harmony of action on all matters affecting the common interest and generally to act in an advisory capacity to provincial societies [Edwards, 1915, p. 340].

Two aspects of this mandate are particularly noteworthy. First, Edwards succeeded in institutionalizing (in item 3) his vision of limiting entry to the profession by examination, contrary to the preferences of the original founders of the DACA. This was a key victory for those who saw accountancy as a profession rather than simply as a business. It established the principle that the skills of the accountant were to be gained through education rather than just through practical experience. Second, the mandate given to the DACA reflected Edwards' view that accounting associations in Canada should be comprehensive and noncompetitive (items 1 and 4). There would be a CA association in each province so that all public accountants would be represented, but members of one provincial association would be guaranteed membership in all others, thereby eliminating competition between provincial associations.

Edwards was a vice-president of the DACA in 1910 and became its president in 1911 and again in 1913. He announced the aim of the DACA through the slogan "one name, one standard, one aim" [Edwards, 1912, p. 86]. This slogan, Edwards volunteered, was a paraphrase of the slogan of "one of our influential church organizations," referring to the attempt of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational churches to merge. Semple [1992, p. 416] described the underlying belief of the unification movement to be that "all Christians throughout the world belonged to the same family, shared the same values and worked for a common end." It is reasonable to speculate that Edwards' ties to the Methodist church, through his brothers and father as well as conversations with the archbishop at his cottage, would have provided him with insider knowledge of the unification process. Incidentally, the

process was successful, and the United Church of Canada was created in 1925. Edwards endorsed the aims of the church unification movement as a goal for the accounting profession.

Edwards' experience with the DACA made him aware of the potential for rival designations/associations in Canada. His interaction with Harry Price is also likely to have made him aware of the situation in the U.K. where six professional associations competed for public recognition of their members. At the DACA annual meeting of 1912, he warned:

The permanency of the name by which competency in a public accountant will be designated cannot be doubted. More largely as a result of coincidence of thought, however, than of any careful planning or design on our part the name of Chartered Accountant is the name which has come to occupy a commanding place in Canada. It is not good enough to be content to accept this good fortune complacently and assume that this condition must perforce be permanent. The history of an older commercial center than ours warns us that there may be dangerous rivalries in the near future to the supremacy of the Chartered Accountant in Canada if we fail to profit by observation [reported in President's Address, 1921, p. 142].

Edwards would continue throughout his career to monitor and manage the emergence of competing accounting associations. This role is most notable in the creation of the Society of Cost Accountants of Canada, but he was also involved in negotiations to limit the charter of the Certified General Accountants of Canada to prevent them from competing directly with CAs (see below).

He continued on the DACA Council as a representative of the ICAO until his retirement in 1926. During this time he served on the "General Purposes" Committee (essentially an executive committee), the Uniformity of Standards Committee, and the Magazine Committee. The latter committee is particularly important. Edwards became the first managing editor of the *Canadian Chartered Accountant (CCA)* in 1911. This role gave him a vehicle to communicate the social value of accountancy to a broader audience.

Edwards worked consistently to develop the CCA as a com-

munications mechanism within the profession and, more importantly, with outside parties. In the first volume of the *CCA*, a report from the "journal committee," chaired by Edwards, reported:

Enough has been said to justify the prediction that our circulation in the near future amongst business men and educators will far outweigh the support the publication will receive from our own members and those who compose our student societies, thereby substantially enhancing the value of the journal as a select advertising medium.

He constantly pushed to increase the frequency of publication of the journal [e.g., Report of the Magazine Committee, *CCA*, Vol. 14, 1924, p. 166]. When the Society of Cost Accountants of Canada was created in 1920, he used the opportunity to expand the *CCA* to a bimonthly publication (from quarterly) with the promise to include more cost accounting material in its pages. It became a monthly publication in 1932.

Edwards thought that the journal should be a commercial enterprise that would accept advertisements and possibly be turned over to a commercial publisher. This would allow the CAS to extend their influence and visibility by reaching a larger audience. The *DACA* did hire an editor to remove the burden from members but banned advertisements from the journal for a period in the 1930s. Ultimately, however, Edwards' vision of the journal as an important medium of communication beyond the CA profession did come about.

ACCOUNTING EDUCATION

George Edwards was first elected to the Council of the ICAO in 1890 and served as its president in 1895, 1896, 1897, and 1903. He served on the Council and on key committees continuously until his retirement in 1926. A central concern throughout his time on the Council was the education provided to CA candidates and the quality of examinations used to control entrance to the profession. Between 1903 and 1926, he was chairman of the ICAO Board of Instruction. This Board had responsibility for negotiating with proprietary schools (e.g., Shaw's Correspondence Schools) to arrange programs of instruction for CA students. Edwards was unsatisfied with the quality of the instruction being provided by

these organizations [Edwards, 1921b] even though these schools were often run by CAs. After World War I, he entered into negotiations with Queen's University to provide courses.

The connection between CAs and universities was already in process when Edwards began his negotiations with Queen's University in 1919. The dean of McGill University in Montreal had contacted the Association of Accountants of Montreal in 1912 suggesting that some type of educational program could be arranged although nothing was ever implemented [Collard, 1980, p. 108]. The Institute of CAs of Saskatchewan entered into an agreement with the University of Saskatchewan to offer an accountancy degree in 1913 [*Canadian Chartered Accountant*, 1913, p. 50], and its first graduate was reported in 1914. The Institute of CAs of Alberta concluded an agreement with the University of Alberta to share responsibility for education and examinations in 1914. World War I interrupted this momentum.

Queen's University had been involved in distance education for the Canadian Bankers Association since 1914 [Gibson, 1983, p. 37]. The addition of accounting courses was a small leap for the University, but associating the University with accounting courses would add considerable legitimacy to CA training. From the University's perspective, Smails [1951, p. 7] suggested that Skelton, the head of the Department of Political Studies, was using correspondence courses to create the backbone of a commerce program [see also Daub and Buchan, 1999].

Edwards [1921a] set out eight policies that formed the basis for the ICAO's negotiation with Queen's University: (1) the program should be delivered by correspondence so that it was accessible to all CA candidates; (2) the course of study would be based on commercial textbooks rather than material prepared by the ICAO; (3) the texts would be Canadian or British in recognition of the differences between their legal and economic systems and those of the U.S. in spite of the greater availability of American textbooks; (4) the program would be offered within defined periods to allow for common examinations for all students; (5) the course of instruction would be "postgraduate" and build on a base level of literacy and numeracy; (6) the program would be limited to candidates for the CA designation; (7) the program of study would be required of all candidates for the designation; (8) there would be no optional subjects.

These policies reflect two continuing themes in Edwards' work. First, by centralizing accounting education in one program,

Edwards could more easily ensure that all CAs achieved a minimum level of competence. This was essential in order to guarantee that the CA designation would be worthy of public trust. It would also facilitate reciprocity of membership among the different provincial institutes of CAs. Second, by restricting the program to CA candidates and by retaining control over the curriculum, Edwards tried to limit access to the appropriate knowledge to those who would become members of the ICAO rather than some competing accounting association. The design of the program thus contributed to a standardization of CA licensure and the exclusion of others from public accountancy.

Edwards' policy also had an unintended positive side effect. The CA program was to use Canadian or British accounting textbooks (policy #3 above), but few existed at that time. Once the demand for the Queen's program among CA candidates was established, the faculty teaching in the program began preparing their own course materials. The ready-made market of the CA program reduced the risk to publishers of producing a Canadian book in a field dominated by texts from the larger U.S. market. As a result, the Queen's University faculty would produce some of the first university-level financial accounting, cost accounting, and auditing textbooks published in Canada [e.g; Ashley, 1931; Smalls, 1930, 1933; Smalls and Walker, 1926; Walker, 1933].

The Queen's correspondence program was eventually adopted by all of the provincial societies. The program continued until 1967 by which time the CAs had implemented a university degree requirement (the implementation of the degree requirement varied from 1964 to 1968 depending on the province). Candidates for the CA designation were expected to take the required subjects as part of their degree program under the new regulations. Edwards would have approved of this evolution in accounting education.

THE IMPERIAL MUNITIONS BOARD

During World War I, three of George's sons served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Europe. George also served the war effort as comptroller and auditor for the Imperial Munitions Board (IMB) in Canada. This dual role is a violation of modern independence rules and was recognized as unusual at the time:

In addition to Mr. Edwards being the only officer in charge of its accounts, he was also Auditor for the Ministry of Munitions, a curious but very inter-

esting anomaly. This fact however shows what confidence the British Treasury placed in him [Carnegie, 1925, p. 225].

It is interesting to consider whether or not this situation was a breach of the accounting ethics of the day. Immediately prior to the war, Edwards, as president of the DACA, had prepared a paper on accounting ethics and had distributed this paper to the provincial associations (no copy of it has been located). Other articles on accounting ethics around this period emphasize relationships among practitioners rather than issues of broader public interest [e.g., Bunnell, 1910]. After the war, Edwards continued his efforts to formalize the ethical duties of CAs. He was a member of the DACA committee that produced the association's first code of ethics in 1925. This code continued to emphasize etiquette in collegial relations but did include one clause concerning conflict-of-interest. This clause required the accountant to "inform a client or employer" of circumstances that could impair the accountant's judgment or objectivity [Crowell, 1925]. Edwards' work with the IMB would have met this minimal requirement.

The IMB was a replacement for the Shell Committee (a political committee of the Canadian government) and was intended to remove the procurement of munitions for the war effort from political considerations [Rider, 1974, p. 67]. The IMB was an agency of the British government although it operated primarily in Canada. Its head was Joseph Flavelle, a Canadian entrepreneur with interests in meatpacking and finance. The chairman was empowered to act unilaterally and could use the rest of the Board for advice but not for decision making. Flavelle was thus empowered to run the IMB as a business rather than as a government agency.

George Edwards joined the Board at the personal request of Sir Joseph Flavelle. Flavelle was president of National Trust, which was audited by Edwards, Morgan. Edwards devoted full time to the IMB between 1914 and 1918. The staff of the accounting department during this period numbered 1,200, and the IMB oversaw "1,200 Million dollars" worth of contracts [Edwards, 1925]. The British Treasury, through intermediaries in New York City, initially provided the funding for this operation. Edwards also established the accounting procedures in New York. From 1915 onwards, the operations were financed by loans from the Canadian government, Canadian banks, and the Canadian Pacific Railway. At the end of the war, George was given the additional

role of liquidator of the IMB's assets [Carnegie, 1925, p. 225].

Edwards' particular achievements with the IMB were the implementation of an inventory tracking system for materials flowing between different contractors and the introduction of continual auditing [Bliss, 1978, p. 307]. The auditing system put the IMB on a 24-hour cycle from noon to noon. Each night the records of the IMB were audited, allowing audited financial records to be available the next morning for review. These two systems were credited with reducing asset loss and improving efficiency in the entire supply system. Prior to Edwards' intervention, shells produced for government contracts had been subject to significant cost overruns [Bliss, 1978, p. 368].

As a result of this service, Edward was awarded the CBE: Commander of the Order of the British Empire. King George V created the Order of the British Empire in 1917 specifically to reward civilians and servicemen in support positions (as opposed to field positions). No records are available to trace the process by which Edwards was nominated, but it is likely to have been through Sir Joseph Flavelle and his connections with the British government.

Edwards' work with the IMB required him to work closely with the Canadian Ministry of Finance. The Canadian government and Canadian banks (with some government coaxing) provided a large portion of the funds with which the IMB would operate. This connection resulted in Edwards being called upon to undertake a number of projects for the Ministry of Finance after the war. The more notable projects were investigating the failure of Merchants Bank (1922) and the Home Bank (1923), providing advice to the Department of Finance on the audit provisions of the Bank Act (1923, 1924), and providing evidence before the Senate Committee on Banking (1923). These experiences allowed Edwards to have a significant impact on government and bank auditing in Canada.⁶

GOVERNMENT AND BANK ACCOUNTING

Edwards was an early proponent of improved government accounting. He began lobbying the Ontario government on legislation concerning municipal accounts in 1895. He succeeded in having the Ontario Municipal Act (OMA) amended in 1897 to

⁶See Beckhart [1929] and Edwards' testimony reported in the *Proceedings of the Standing Committee on Banking and Business*, 1923, pp. 746-771.

require that municipal auditors be Fellows of the Institute of CAs (FCA) or some other organization of expert accountants. The FCA was awarded by examination at that time, while the CA was given by a vote of members. This was the first legislation to specify a particular accounting association to fill a statutory role [Creighton, 1984, p. 131]. Creighton also suggested that Edwards' success as a lobbyist may have had much to do with his father's long-standing civil service role.

The existence of two sets of criteria in the OMA regarding appropriate auditors is neither an accident nor a failure of Edwards' lobbying ability. Edwards recognized that limiting this role to CAs would have required the CAs to accept into membership all auditors currently auditing municipalities. Edwards wanted to maintain the exclusivity of the designation. He reasoned that the public would appreciate the integrity of the CA designation and that, over time, clients would avoid unaffiliated public accountants [see Edwards, 1915, pp. 342-343]. Edwards again successfully lobbied against naming CAs as the only qualified auditors in the Trust Companies Act (1919) and the Bank Act (1923).

Edwards was able to put his concerns about the state of government accounting into action when he was appointed the auditor of the national accounts in 1921, 1922, and 1925 (see Exhibit 3).⁷ The national accounts are the responsibility of the Auditor General, a position created in 1878 to ensure that government expenditures were in accordance with legislative approvals. The role gradually expanded to include a concern with the overall financial management of government [Sinclair, 1979].

Between 1918 and 1924, the office of the Auditor General was virtually dormant. During 1918, John Fraser, the incumbent Auditor General, was on sick leave, eventually dying in office in 1919. E.D. Sutherland was then appointed as acting Auditor General, but he too developed health problems and was on leave from 1922 until his resignation in 1923. The post remained empty for a year until Georges Gonthier was appointed in 1924 [Ward, 1962, p. 162]. As a result of this series of events, the Auditor General's office had operated without strong leadership for six years.

Edwards was thus brought into an environment where "both the opposition and the government [and particularly the

⁷The appointment in 1921 was "without remuneration" [Saunders, Sessional Paper No. 2, 11 George V, A. 1921, p. vii]. The terms of appointment are not recorded for the other years.

Department of Finance] lost faith in the auditing process" [Ward, 1962, p. 163]. Although outside firms had been hired on several occasions during the 1920s for special projects, this was the first time that an external auditor had been used for the national accounts. The use of outside consultants hired by the government was protested by the Auditor General [Sinclair, 1979]. He claimed that under the act creating the position, the Auditor General was independent of the sitting government and reported directly to the Parliament. The government then had no place in arranging for outside experts to interfere with the operations of the Auditor General.

In spite of the internal opposition to Edwards' role in the preparation of the national accounts, he was able to have an impact on their presentation. One of Edwards' key contributions was to reformat the national accounts to conform to current practice in business and banking in particular [Saunders, 1921, p. vii]. The original terms of reference of the audit were limited to verification of the conformity of the public accounts with the government's books. Edwards, Morgan & Co. was also engaged in 1922 to review the government's assets and the procedures in place in different departments for safeguarding revenues.

EXHIBIT 3

Audit Certificates for the Dominion of Canada

We have examined the Balance Sheet of the Dominion of Canada (shown herewith) as of March 31st, 1920, also the Expenditure and Revenue Account for the fiscal year ended on the said date, and have verified the same by reference to the Dominion Ledgers. We certify that the above-mentioned statements accurately set forth the matters therein referred to, and are as shown by the said books.

EDWARDS, MORGAN & CO.,
Chartered Accountants.

Ottawa, December 1st, 1920.

We have examined the Balance Sheet of the Dominion of Canada as at March 31, 1924, and we certify that the Balance Sheet conforms to the Balance Sheets of previous years in not including in the Net Debt of the Dominion, issues of the Canadian National Railway Company and Companies included in its System, which carry the Guarantee of the Dominion of Canada. Such Guaranteed Issues are shown year by year as Indirect Liabilities.

G.F.O. EDWARDS,
Of the firm of Edwards, Morgan & Co.
W. GARTH THOMSON,
Of the firm of Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.

Ottawa, Canada, 27th January, 1925.

In 1925, Edwards again audited the national accounts but this time with a co-auditor (no audit statements appear for 1923 or 1924). The change from a single auditor to co-auditors is consistent with Edwards' lobbying on the revisions to the Bank Act of 1923. Given that Edwards used financial reporting in the banking industry as a model for reformatting the national accounts, it is likely that he also imported the new audit requirements from the Bank Act into this assignment. The co-auditor in 1925 was Peat Marwick Mitchell, a firm with an established reputation in bank audits [Cowperthwaite, 1986].

Beckhart [1929, p. 439] gave Edwards credit for the changes in the audit provisions of the 1923 Bank Act. Specifically, the act required that auditors must be experienced members of an association of accountants, that the audit be conducted by two people of different firms, and that the auditors should not simultaneously provide other services to the bank while acting as its auditor. Edwards' views were in opposition to those of the Canadian Bankers' Association which favored the status quo. G. Clarkson, son of Edwards' former employer and teacher, also gave testimony at the hearings. He and Edwards were at odds over the need for bank auditors to refrain from providing any other services to their banking clients [Beckhart, 1929, p. 439]. Clarkson claimed that there was so little profit in the audit that his firm would have to withdraw from bank audits if they were denied the opportunity to provide other services. He estimated at the time that 4% of his business was comprised of bank audits, while 25% of his business was other work on behalf of the banks.⁸ Clarkson lived up to this promise and withdrew from bank audits after the act was enacted [Little, 1964, p. 26].

In testimony regarding the Bank Act, Edwards was asked if he had ever served as a bank auditor. He answered, "no." His expertise in banking stemmed from his work preparing a report for the Minister of Finance on the failure of the Merchant Bank. This engagement, in turn, grew out of his work as auditor of the government accounts. He also argued that his expertise in this matter was "the result of long study of relationships subsisting between members of my profession and their clients, and the standards of competency and conduct in a professional sense, which entitles them, as a class, to public confidence" [Canada, 1923, p. 764]. He

⁸Canada, *Proceedings of the Standing Committee on Banking and Business* [1923, p. 765].

argued that independence of the auditor from bank management was a necessary condition for shareholders to have confidence in bank financial statements. He also thought that mandatory auditor rotation would allow management to change auditors periodically without undermining depositor confidence in the bank. Auditor rotation would also ensure that overfamiliarity between the auditor and management would not impair auditor independence. Although these provisions were opposed by the Canadian Bankers' Association and other prominent auditors, Edwards' credibility with the Ministry of Finance and government proved decisive in allowing his vision of the auditor's role to be enacted.

Edwards also investigated the Home Bank failure in 1923. He gave evidence on his finding to the Royal Commission that investigated the failure in 1924 [McKeown, 1924, pp. 491-522, 539-551]. Clarkson also provided evidence to the Royal Commission as liquidator of the failed bank. One of Edwards' key findings in this case was that the Home Bank was the only bank at that time not audited by a CA. He used this circumstance to impress upon government and bank officials the value of CAs in society [Richardson and Lew, 1992]. Interestingly, George Gonthier, who was appointed Auditor General in 1924, was the first CA to hold the position [Ward, 1962].

THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN ACCOUNTING

In his presidential address to the DACA, Edwards [1912] spoke of the Boer War and England's "mistake" in allowing Dutch colonies to develop in South Africa. He drew members' attention to "the truth that allies are better than neutrals, for some day neutrals may become a menace." Further he predicted, by analogy, "that those of our Canadian Societies which have been tolerant or neglectful of the growth of independent professional elements in their very midst will presently reap the harvest in the form of organized antagonism to our hopes and plans for a united accountancy profession in Canada." His vision of a unified accounting profession, however, was challenged by the diversity of the work locations and tasks that accountants undertake.

Edwards' resolve to eliminate organized opposition was soon put to the test with the application of the Certified General Accountants Association of Canada (CGA) for a federal charter in 1913. The CGA originated in 1908 as a technical self-study group of Canadian Pacific Railway accountants. Gradually this group grew, and members began to seek a way to publicly acknowledge

their accomplishments. Initially they sought a charter that would allow them to grant a designation similar to the CAs but without the requirement of an apprenticeship in public practice. Edwards intervened but withdrew the opposition of the CAs in return for informal assurances that the CGA would limit itself to the interests of "employed accountants" (i.e., both financial and managerial accountants but not those in public practice) and would not grant a designation. Edwards had thus negotiated for the CGA to be neutral with respect to his ambitions in public accounting. By 1920, however, the membership of the CGA had grown to include public accountants, while a provincial charter had been obtained in Quebec that permitted the group to hold examinations and grant a designation. Edwards regarded this as an abrogation of the original agreement [Edwards, 1921b]. The neutrals had become a menace in Edwards' eyes.

The division of labor between public and salaried accountants (essentially a division between the preparation and the audit of financial statements) was not the only source of challenge to Edwards' vision of a unified profession. There was also a growing bod of accountants concerned with costing and managerial uses of accounting information. In the U.K. (1919) and the U.S. (1919), associations of cost accountants were formed independently of the established accounting associations with ambiguous jurisdictional boundaries. In Canada, the CGA was the obvious association to represent cost accountants since its membership already included many accountants practicing as cost or management accountants.

Edwards' experience with the IMB had made him aware of the variability of costs across manufacturers and the poor state of cost control in many instances. Edwards was concerned both with the need to improve the effectiveness of cost accounting practice and to prevent the creation of another accounting association to compete with the CAs [cf. Edwards, 1921b]. The examination and apprenticeship requirements that the CAs had carefully crafted to control entry to public accounting could not be changed to allow the entry of cost accountants into CA institutes. But, at the same time, Edwards could not allow the CGA to benefit from this emerging branch of accountancy by gaining more members and a stronger mandate. *The solution to these concerns was the creation of an association on terms acceptable to the CAs.*

In 1920, the president of the DACA called on the provincial CA institutes to create a new association for the benefit of cost accountants. The eight incorporators of the Society of Cost
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Accountants of Canada were the eight provincial presidents of the institutes of CAs chaired by Dilworth, a partner with the firm Clarkson, Gordon, Dilworth and Nash.⁹ At the inaugural Board of Trustees meeting, George Edwards emerged as the first chair of the Society [*Canadian Chartered Accountant*, 1920, pp. 31-34, 116-119]. It is likely given his sudden appearance in this capacity that it had been George Edwards, working behind the scenes at the ICAO and the DACA, who had orchestrated the creation of the Society.

This organization would be federally incorporated but, as Edwards had shown through his battles with the DACA, would not have the power to hold examinations or establish a designation. The organization would be a mechanism to allow cost accountants to share information and improve their craft, but it would not become a rival to the CA designation. Soon after Edwards stepped down from the presidency in 1924, however, the Society started to debate offering "certificates of competency." The Society began holding examinations in 1927 [Allan, 1982, p. 21] and, after incorporating provincially, created the Registered Industrial Accountant designation in 1941 (this designation became Certified Management Accountant in 1976).

Edwards' work with the Society of Cost Accountants of Canada was the last major project he would undertake before retiring from involvement in professional affairs in 1926 at the age of 65. The last five years of his professional life were marked by honors for his achievements. These included an honorary doctorate from Queen's University (1922) and life memberships in the Institute of CAs of Manitoba (1926) and the Institute of CAs of Alberta (1927). In 1926, a dinner was held at the University of Toronto to mark his retirement. Over 200 prominent members of the accounting and business communities of Canada and the U.S. attended. To commemorate the event, a painting of Edwards was commissioned and now hangs in the library of the Institute of CAs of Ontario.

CONCLUSION

Of my ability to adequately serve and promote the interests and welfare of the Chartered Accountants in Canada I have had serious misgivings; of my

⁹Although there are now ten provinces, a CA association was not created in Prince Edward Island until 1921, and Newfoundland did not become a Canadian province until 1949.

deep concern for those interests and my devotion to your cause I have never had a moment's doubt. I hope that your verdict may be that some progress has been made [Edwards, 1912, p. 81].

George Edwards served the Canadian accounting profession for 36 years from his first election to the ICAO Council in 1890 until his retirement from professional politics in 1926. He was a strategist and a tactician. He had a vision of accountancy as a profession rather than simply as a business, mandating a single standard of practice reflected in educational programs, systems of examination, and codes of ethics. He worked to establish the CA profession as the sole representative of public accountants in Canada with a responsibility for maintaining the standards of practice and the usefulness of its members to society. He was vigorous in protecting this vision from others and in creating the infrastructure necessary to support it. His name is prominent at the initiation of key changes in the profession but, after the structure had been put in place, he operated in the background. For example, after his stints as president of various associations in which he was involved, he frequently served on key committees, working to ensure the implementation of initiatives he had put in place.

His legacy includes the federal/provincial structure of the accounting profession in Canada, university-based accounting education, a professional journal, the division of labor between management and financial accounting associations, and a vision of the place of CAs in Canadian society. Although there is no question of Edwards' influence on the profession, several aspects of his vision were unsuccessful. He was unable to prevent the creation of alternative accounting associations in Canada. At the time of his death, the CPA (Certified Public Accountant), APA (Accredited Public Accountant), RIA (Registered Industrial Accountant) and CGA (Certified General Accountant) were established designations in Canada. He also lived to see the entry of women into the profession, albeit after his retirement from professional politics. In 1929, the Privy Council ruled that the word "person" in Canadian law referred equally to men and women. This ruling opened all opportunities created by statute to both sexes. The professions that enjoy statutory protection of their designations and practice rights were henceforth unable to prevent women from entering the profession. Edwards saw both of these events as undermining the status of the profession.

In 1926, at age 65, George Edwards retired and ceased all activity within the profession. It is hard to imagine how someone so intimately involved in the development of the profession could end his connection so abruptly. It suggests that Edwards saw his work in the profession simply as part of his job, not a calling or a crusade, but simply something that had to be done and done well. At age 65 it could be that George simply wanted to enjoy his success and spend more time with his powerboats (a passion of his). Or perhaps it is as George Edwards said at his retirement dinner in 1926: "Our profession is now upon an assured foundation and it is long since it needed any help of mine to ensure its steady progress."

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