

E. R. C. Clarkson



The story of Ernest Roper Curzon Clarkson — known as “E. R. C.” — starts with the emigration of his father, Thomas Clarkson, from England to Canada in 1832. Thomas Clarkson was involved in various business ventures over the next three decades, before establishing a trustee and bankruptcy business in Toronto in 1864. The 1860s and 1870s saw significant development for the Canadian business community, most notably with the passage of three Dominion Insolvent Acts. This legislation established a limited number of “official assignees” authorized to administer and distribute insolvent estates; accountants were better able to prepare the numerous required financial reports than lawyers, who previously had a major share of this business.

Thomas became an official assignee in 1864.

In 1870, at the age of 17, E. R. C. joined the firm carrying on the trustee and bankruptcy business. E. R. C. was the eleventh of Thomas’ children, a son of his third wife, the first two having died at relatively young ages. Two years later, his father retired because of ill-health. Despite his youth, E. R. C. took over the running of the firm, but because he was still under the age of 21 and therefore ineligible to receive an appointment as an official assignee, he formed a partnership, Clarkson and Munro, with a senior employee, Thomas Munro, who was an official assignee.

E. R. C. had graduated from high school when he was just 15, and had been sent by his father to Montreal to gain mercantile experience, with a wholesale dry goods firm. E. R. C. therefore had some business experience before being thrust into the above leadership role at Clarkson and Munro. The firm continued until 1877; in that year he was appointed an official assignee and joined a Mr. Turner in the firm of Turner, Clarkson & Co. for the next four years, after which E. R. C. commenced to practise under his own name alone.

During this period, E. R. C. rapidly built up a profile in the business community and became particularly interested in the practice of accountancy as a profession. He was one of twelve sponsors who called a special meeting of accountants in Toronto in 1879 to discuss the organization of an accounting society. This society, The Institute of Accountants and Adjusters of Canada (predecessor to The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario), was formed: it was the world’s third accounting body, after the predecessor to The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland in 1854, and a matter of months after the predecessor to The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Quebec had been formed. E. R. C. was elected as one of the nine members of the first council of the Ontario body, on which he served from 1883 to 1891. In 1883, the charter of the Ontario Institute was obtained; E. R. C. soon presented himself for its examinations so that he could use the designation “Chartered Accountant.” He later became President of the Institute, in 1887–88.

E. R. C. conducted an accounting practice in his own name until 1891 when he formed the partnership of Clarkson & Cross, which also handled the trustee and bankruptcy work; Cross was another of the founders of the Ontario Institute. Affiliated partnerships were formed with practitioners in Winnipeg (Clarkson, Cross & Menzies) and Vancouver (Clarkson, Cross & Helliwell). A young accountant employed by Clarkson and Cross in 1898 was H. D. Lockhart Gordon, who subsequently went on to form Gordon & Dilworth., an accounting firm which will be referred to below.

Then in 1902, E. R. C. was one of 20 petitioners — including two others from the firm, Messrs. Cross and Helliwell — to form the Dominion Association of Chartered Accountants (predecessor to the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants), with admission to the Association being open to members of the various provincial institutes of Chartered Accountants.

E. R. C. had a fine reputation in the business community, with his advice being particularly sought by the banks. He became known for his ability to wind up businesses quickly and realize cash for the creditors. However, he did not think this policy was good for Canada or the banks or, in fact, for any of the major creditors. He persuaded one of the banks to let him manage one of the companies which was in difficulty instead of winding it up. He was able to pull the company out of its difficulties and this was very important to the small community in which it was located, as well as continuing to be a profitable client for the bank.

In 1912, E. R. C. was elected a director of the Canada Permanent Mortgage Corporation, and in 1922, he was elected a Vice President. In 1914, he was elected a director of the Manufacturers Life Insurance Company and held these and other important positions until his death at the age of 78. E. R. C. was also President of the Toronto Board of Trade, an organization which his father (Thomas Clarkson) helped found.

Like his father, E. R. C. had a large family, with seven sons and five daughters. Three of his sons joined him in the business, but only one, Geoffrey T., qualified as an accountant. Geoffrey T. was just 15 when he joined the firm in 1893; he subsequently took over the running of the firm, in 1913. In that year, he negotiated a merger agreement with Gordon & Dilworth; the merged firm became known in due course as Clarkson, Gordon & Co., and continued under that name until it became part of the "Big 4" firm EY in 1989.

Both a son and a grandson of Geoffrey T. were partners in the firm, meaning that five generations of Clarksons had leadership roles — a remarkable dynasty!

E. R. C. married Amy Lambe in 1877. He died in 1931.