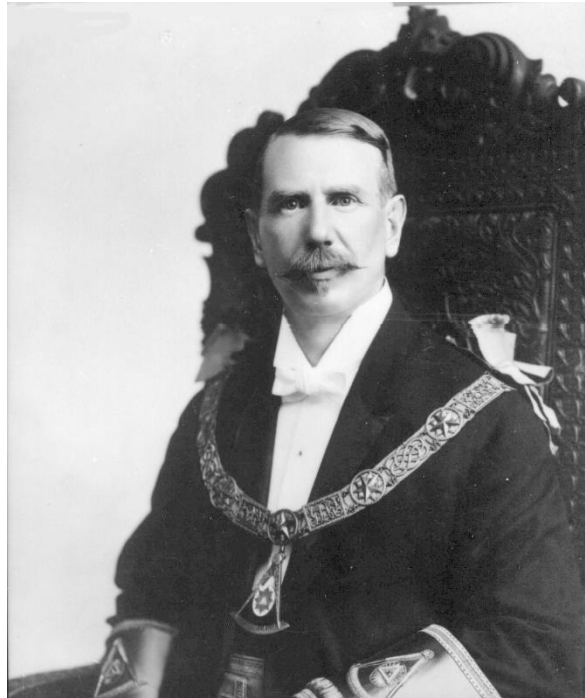


Hon. William David McPherson, KC

Grand Master (1913 – 1915) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario



*Photo from Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario
(1863 -- 1923)*

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

Mr. William David McPherson was born in Lambton County on August 22, 1863. He was educated at local elementary schools, the Strathroy Collegiate Institute, and the Toronto Law School. His major interests were in mining and electoral law and was the well-known author of *The Law of Mining in Canada* and *The Law of Parliamentary Elections in Canada*. He was elected a Life Bencher of the Law Society.

He was elected to the Ontario Legislature in June 1904 for the Conservative Party. By the time of World War I he was involved in the Soldier's Aid Commission for Ontario, and in December 1916 he was called on to replace the retiring Ontario Provincial Secretary, William John Hanna.

He was a member of the Church of England, an active Orangeman, and served as Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of North America.

He married Nettie Jane Batten (1863-1928) on 6 October 1886, in Simcoe. They had five sons and four daughters.

At the age of 65 William David McPherson underwent surgery, but it was insufficient to allow a recovery of his health and he died at Toronto, 2 May 1929. He is buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery. His monument indicates his faith and his family, not his role as our Grand Master.

Masonic Career

Mr. William David McPherson was initiated into Zetland Lodge, No. 326 G.R.C, Toronto and served as W.M. in 1896. At the time Zetland Lodge No. 326 counted 244 brethren.

He was elected as DDGM of Toronto West District No. 11 (1899-1900). He was elected as Deputy Grand Master (1911 - 1913) and as the 26th Grand Master (1913 - 1914 and 1914 - 1915) of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario.

No other information is currently available about his Masonic endeavours with other bodies.

As Grand Master

We can get a sense of our 26th Grand Master and his commitment and leadership to Craft Masonry through music. To take an anecdote from *Whence Come We?* "Zetland Lodge No. 326, Toronto, had long been noted for the musical accompaniment which its Masonic choir provided for the ritual. In 1915 the Chairman of the Committee on Masonry observed, "The proposed Musical Ritual which has been rehearsed in Toronto is a matter of great interest to the Craft." The new Grand Master appointed a Special Committee to investigate the feasibility of preparing a musical ritual for adoption across the whole jurisdiction. The Chairman (M.W. Bro. McPherson) and several of the more active members of the committee belonged to Zetland Lodge. In 1917, the Committee announced that its work was nearly complete, and that the book was ready for printing. It has been in use ever since." By this anecdote we may understand that M.W. Bro. McPherson was musical, as a singer.

It is also clear in the Proceedings that M.W. Bro. McPherson was quite patriotic, and supportive of military veterans. During his term as Grand Master he oversaw a Peace Festival after the Grand Lodge Communication, July 16, 1914. Grand Masters from Grand Lodges across Canada, from the United States, as well as from England, Scotland and Ireland were invited. The event was to commemorate the century of peace between British North America and the United States since the conclusion of the War of 1812. Unfortunately, it was very soon after the celebrations of that peace when war returned with the outbreak of the Great War (World War I).



As Grand Master, M.W. Bro. McPherson made many rulings on administrative issues, constitutional interpretations, and matters of the reputation of the Fraternity. These included rulings that a Past Master from another jurisdiction could be present during the Installation ceremony here, that a lodge may limit the number of members by passing a Bylaw, details of counting written ballots for officers when the ballot is blank, that a Masonic hall could not be rented to non-Masonic bodies as a joint tenant, and that summonses must be sent in a sealed envelope.

In the cases of members of the Craft who had been convicted of criminal offences or breach of trust, M.W. Bro. McPherson ruled that they should be immediately suspended and subject to a Masonic trial.

An application was made to form a regimental lodge within the Canadian Armed Forces. Although the Grand Lodge of Ireland had granted many 'traveling warrants' to military units, M.W. Bro. McPherson conferred with several Past Grand Masters and declined to grant the dispensation, citing insuperable difficulties.

Yamaska Lodge No. 130 had been chartered in 1860 under the Grand Lodge of Canada. Yamaska Lodge was forced by circumstances to affiliate with the new Grand Lodge of Quebec on September 23, 1874 when the Grand Lodge of Canada ceased working in the Province. The Lodge did not receive a new number until September 26, 1877, when the Grand Lodge of Quebec numbered it as Yamaska Lodge, No. 21, GRQ, Granby. Yamaska Lodge sent a telegram to M.W. Bro. McPherson asking to withdraw their affiliation with the Grand Lodge of Quebec and be again aligned with the Grand Lodge of Canada. M.W. Bro. McPherson noted that the Grand Lodge of Quebec had exclusive jurisdiction within its own jurisdictional area the Grand Lodge of Canada would recognize that exclusive authority. He concluded that he would not take the action requested by the lodge.

There was a movement to increase the initiation fee. M.W. Bro. McPherson used this interest to reinforce that the individual character of an applicant must be the criterion for admission to membership in a lodge.

An indication of the condition of some lodge meeting rooms and halls may be derived from the comments of M.W. Bro. McPherson that "lodges should be compelled in their own interests to see that all necessary precautions are taken to provide ample means of egress from lodge rooms and ante rooms, in case of fire." He noted in his 1914 Address that a fire in Ottawa destroyed the premises shared by seven lodges. A further three lodge buildings in other communities were consumed by fire. Fortunately, no brethren are reported as being injured.

M.W. Bro. McPherson was moved by two marine disasters. In the autumn of 1913, a hurricane resulted in the destruction of over 20 large steamships on Lake Huron with

many deaths, including some Masons. A donation to a “Lakes Disaster Fund” was immediately approved by Grand lodge. On May 29th, 1914, the RMS “Empress of Ireland” sank off the coast of Rimouski due to a collision with another vessel. Over 1000 persons died, making this the worst peacetime maritime disaster in Canadian history. M.W. Bro. McPherson paid tribute to a Mason who died as well as to all who died and those who mourn.

It is notable that M.W. Bro. McPherson encouraged the use of a Lodge of Instruction. He arranged his travels so that he attended and presided at many such events during his term of office. He held Provincial Lodges of Instruction that attracted many District Deputy Grand Masters to observe the exemplification of all three degrees.

Many pages of the 1915 Address of the Grand Master were devoted to the war then raging in Europe. He was eloquent in condemning the need for war, while encouraging active support for the war effort in Canada. One action he launched was the compilation of an “Honour Roll” containing the names of members of the Craft who have enlisted for service. It was his hope that when it was completed it “will form a magnificent record of noble and patriotic men from our jurisdiction”. The “Honour Roll” was published in the 1919 *Annual Proceedings*.

Anecdote of an artefact pertaining to M.W. Bro. McPherson

The minutes of a regular meeting of Victoria Lodge No. 56 on June 6, 1933, state: “an interesting and historic presentation was made to Victoria Lodge by W.M. Lowery in the form of a Masonic Seal which had been in the possession of the family of the donor’s wife for over 115 years. The Seal is now on display in the Lodge room and bears the following inscription: “Masonic Seal of the 71st Regiment, Gordon Highlanders presented to Victoria Lodge No. 56 by W.M. Lowery June 6, 1933. This Lodge disbanded after the Battle of Waterloo by order of the Government. The Seal has been in the possession of the Treas. George McPherson’s Family since that time. This attached ribbon is the same as used on Waterloo Medals presented by King George III in 1815.”

Research shows that some of the claims of the plaque are correct. It is the seal of the 71st Regiment. It was presented to Victoria Lodge No. 56 on June 6, 1933. The attached ribbon is the same as used on Waterloo Medals presented by King George III in 1815.

There are claims that are incorrect. The 71st Regiment of the British Army was not known as the Gordon Highlanders. There is a separate and fascinating history of the 71st Regiment. The seal was presented not by W.M. Lowery, but by V.W. Bro. William Lowrie; he was the Worshipful Master of Huron Lodge No. 392 of nearby Camlachie in 1926 and appointed the Grand Standard Bearer for 1948 – 1949.

Lodge No. 895 was not disbanded by order of the government. The Warrant for Lodge No. 895 was returned to the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1835. The explanatory letter from the Secretary of the lodge states that the Commanding Officer of the 71st Regiment ordered the lodge to disband.

The plaque and the minutes of Victoria Lodge No. 56 note that the Lodge Seal has been in possession of the McPherson family since that time. Research through the Archives of the Grand Lodge of Ireland and genealogical research has revealed the lineage of the relevant branch of the McPherson family.

Documents held by the archives of the Grand Lodge of Ireland show Bro. George McPherson as a member of Lodge No. 895, and the 71st Regiment. Accessible military records of the British Army show George McPherson was born in Clyne, Sutherland, Scotland. Young Mr. George McPherson signed his attestation for enlistment in the British Army on the 29th of May 1809, and he served in the 71st Regiment of Foot. He was discharged from the British Army in 1837 at the age of 45.

The Royal Mint of the United Kingdom has digitized the records the Waterloo Medal Roll and made the records available. Sergeant George McPherson of the 71st Regiment of Foot is numbered 662 on that record.

Land grant records held at the National Archives of Canada show that George McPherson of the 71st Regiment received a land grant in Plympton Township of Lambton County in 1837.

Genealogy records show that a son of George McPherson was William McPherson, born in Chatham, England, on the 29th of October 1821. A history of the 71st Regiment shows it was garrisoned in Chatham, England, at that time.

The Masonic career of William McPherson is unknown, but his civic career was exemplary in that he served as Warden of Lambton County in 1858. He died June 6th, 1865, at the age of 44. He was buried in Sutherland Cemetery near Mooretown, in Lambton County, but later re-interred in Toronto's Mount Pleasant Cemetery by his son M.W. Bro. William David McPherson.

M.W. Bro. William David McPherson had 9 children, five of whom were boys. One of the sons is George Batten McPherson (1890 – 1969) who is the man identified on the plaque accompanying the Lodge Seal. The Lodge Seal had been in the family of George B. McPherson for four generations before being delivered in 1933 to Victoria Lodge No. 56 which is the oldest Masonic lodge in the place where the McPherson family called home in Canada.



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