

William Hugh Wardrope, K.C.

Grand Master 1917 – 1919 of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario



Photo provided by Grand Lodge

(1860 – 1947)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

William Hugh Wardrope was born in Ottawa on August 12, 1860, the son of Rev. Thomas Wardrope, D.D., one-time Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (1891). William Hugh Wardrope was educated in Ottawa and Guelph and admitted to the Ontario Bar in 1884. He read law with the firm of Guthrie, Watt & Cutten, in Guelph. Though offered a County Court Judgeship in 1898, he declined. A few years later, in 1902, William Hugh Wardrope was made a King's Counsel. He practised law in Hamilton for over 40 years was the senior partner of the firm of Wardrope & Wardrope, Barristers. In addition to his practice in Hamilton, he was active at Queen's Park in the role of Secretary to the Private Bills Committee for several years, and as an Assistant Law Clerk.

Mr. William H. Wardrope was active in political and business activities in Hamilton. In 1908 he was unsuccessful in a bid to be elected to the Provincial Legislature. And in December 1935 he ran for the office of Mayor of Hamilton but lost. He found time for

business interests including being President of Stirling Trusts Corporation (Toronto) from 1922 until 1947 when he resigned due to ill health. He was President of the Commonwealth Life and Accident Insurance Company in 1929. On November 8, 1938, he was appointed as Assistant Chief Commissioner of the Board of Transport Commissioners and held the office until 1947.

In community affairs he is remembered as President of the Hamilton Branch of the Canadian Red Cross Society, director of the Aged Women's Home, Governor of the Hamilton general Hospital, Secretary-Treasurer of the Building Committee of the Y.W.C.A. and a Past President of the Dickens Society. He is honoured with the street name of Wardrobe Avenue in Stoney Creek.

At age 26 he married Elizabeth Stewart Macdonald (1861 – 1937) on May 26, 1887. They had four children. John Duff Macdonald Wardrobe (1887 – 1953), Frances Mary Malloch Wardrobe (born 1889), Heriot Hamilton Wardrobe (1891 – 1949), and William Wardrobe (1896 – 1973).

He was a member of Melrose United Church in Hamilton.

M.W. Bro. William Hugh Wardrobe died on June 27, 1947, after a long illness. At the time of his death, he was considered the Dean of the Past Grand Masters of our Jurisdiction, having been a Past Grand Master for 28 years and longer than the other living Past Grand Masters at the time. He is interred in Hamilton Cemetery. There is a family monument at the grave.

Masonic Career

Mr. William H. Wardrobe was initiated into Acacia Lodge, No. 61 GRC, Hamilton, July 12, 1895, and served as Worshipful Master in 1906. He was appointed as Grand Junior Deacon (1909-1910) and then elected as District Deputy Grand Master of the Hamilton District (1912-1913). He was elected as Deputy Grand Master for the 1915-1916 and 1916-1917 terms and as Grand Master for the 1917-1918 and 1918-1919 terms.

He was a member of Hiram Royal Arch Chapter, No. 2 GRC, Hamilton and served as First Principal. He was elected as Grand Principal Sojourner of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada (1921).

He was a member of Godfrey de Bouillon Preceptory, Knights Templar, in Hamilton.

In Scottish Rite, M.W. Bro. Wardrobe was a member of the Hamilton Chapter of Rose Croix and served as MWS (1910). He was coroneted as an Honorary 33° (January 23, 1918) and as an Active 33° (1925). He was elected and served as Sovereign Grand



Commander for two terms. The first was from October 3, 1934 to October 2, 1940. Then he stepped in to complete a term from April 18, 1942 to October 7, 1942.

He was a member of the Royal Order of Scotland.

For many years he the representative of the Grand Lodge of Scotland near the Grand Lodge of Canada.

At the Grand Lodge Communication of 1940, M.W. Joseph E. Perry, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts presented to M.W. Bro. W. H. Wardrope the Henry Price Medal of Massachusetts.

Wardrope Lodge No. 555, now of Hamilton District C, was Instituted in 1919. The name was selected to honour M.W. Bro. William H. Wardrope, then the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario. A portrait of M.W. Bro. Wardrope is displayed at the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Hamilton.

As Grand Master

Our 28th Grand Master's term was from July 1917 to July 1919. Later it was recorded that: "during those momentous and troubled times, years that marked the closing phases of the First World War, he presided over our deliberations with dignified yet kindly charm and administered the affairs of Grand Lodge with skill and precision."

M.W. Bro. Wardrope saw an increase in membership of the Fraternity as men returned to civilian life after military service in the Great War. The Armistice which brought an end to the hostilities of the First World War was marked on November 11, 1918, during the second year of M.W. Bro. Wardrope's term as Grand Master. He was eloquent in his address at the end of his term about the losses suffered, the need to comfort the mourners, and the need to maintain "the principles of justice, liberty and truth."

M.W. Bro. Wardrope attended an especial communication of the United Grand Lodge of England at Royal Albert Hall, London, on June 27, 1919. This event is known as the Masonic Peace Conference. He joined with 9,000 Masons to give thanks to the Great Architect of the Universe for the end of the Great War and the blessings of Peace.

M.W. Bro. Wardrope found it necessary to make a number of rulings on Masonic matters. Some rulings dealt with matters of privacy including not providing the press with the names of Brethren being initiated, passed, and raised; and ruling that the lodge summons may be printed by a non-Mason providing there is no information of a private nature included. Of a practical nature, that indicates some of the challenges posed by

the weather, he ruled that a lodge may meet in the ante-room in winter when fuel is too scarce to heat the lodge room proper.

With many men seeking to become Masons, M.W. Bro. Wardrope found it necessary to rule that a man must be able to read and write to become a Mason, and he encouraged Grand Lodge to permit individual Lodges to admit into membership men who had served in the war and had been wounded provided the applicants were able to understand the ritual. But he also ruled that a man missing his left hand, or the fingers of his left hand, was not eligible to become a Mason.

Other rulings are specific to the governance of our Fraternity: elected officers may not be installed by proxy, it is improper to have four Stewards of a lodge, no amendment to a lodge by-law is retroactive, and that it is irregular for a Brother to hold two offices simultaneously in the same lodge.

The death of Past Grand Master M.W. Bro. John Ross Robertson figured into the comments of M.W. Bro. Wardrope at the 1918 Grand Lodge Communication. After noting M.W. Bro. Robertson's various roles of publisher, collector, and philanthropist, M.W. Bro. Wardrope added "as a Mason his loss is almost irreparable." This was followed a year later by the death of M.W. Bro. Sydney Albert Luke, the immediate Past Grand Master. He was praised for "his quiet, dignified, judicial manner and his capacity for business".

Amongst the several cornerstone-laying ceremonies conducted by M.W. Bro. Wardrope was that of the new Masonic Temple at the corner of Yonge and Davenport Streets in Toronto on November 17, 1917.

Sources:

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- (3) *Commemoration of the Graves of the Grand Masters*, October 2022. A project of the Museum and Archives Team.
- (4) *An overview of some significant or interesting contributions during the terms of the Grand Masters of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario, revisited* R.W. Bro. John W. Reynolds; 'The Architect' December 2012
- (5) McLeod, Wallace editor, *Whence Come We?* (Hamilton, Grand Lodge of A.F.&A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario, 1980)
- (6) Herrington, W.S., and Foley, R.S., editor Dunlop, Wm. J. 'A History of the Grand Lodge A.F.&A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario' (1955) McCallum Press Ltd., Toronto.
- (7) Greene, B.M., *Who's Who in Canada* (1927) International Press Limited, Toronto
- (8) Hastings, David *Historical Sketch of Acacia Lodge No. 61* (1905) The Spectator, Hamilton