

Walter Stevens Herrington, KC, FRSC

Grand Master (1931 – 1932 and 1932 – 1933) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario



Photo from the Grand Lodge

(1860 – 1947)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

Walter Stevens Herrington was born on a farm in Ameliasburg, Prince Edward County on July 14, 1860. His family history can be traced back several generations to United Empire Loyalists.

He graduated from Victoria College and Osgoode Law School in 1886 and moved to Napanee where he practiced as a lawyer. He was a partner in the law firm of Herrington, Warner and Grange. He was named as the solicitor for the Town of Napanee. He was named a Queen's Counsel in 1901 (and subsequently a King's Counsel). He served as Historian of the Law Society of Upper Canada. For the years 1939 through 1941, Walter

S. Herrington served as a Bencher of the Law Society of Upper Canada (a governor of the Law Society). In politics he was known to be a Liberal.

Amongst several notable cases handled by Walter Herrington is that of William Ponton. In August of 1897 it was discovered that \$32,000 was missing from the Dominion Bank in Napanee. There was no damage to the inner or outer doors of the vault, it was suspected that 'an inside man' was involved. Bank teller William Ponton was arrested and charged. Three other men, known criminals, were also arrested. Herrington was the Crown prosecutor for the case. Such a large crowd gathered to support the innocence of William Ponton that the sheriff in Napanee feared violence and had to read the riot act to disperse the crowd. The trial had to be moved from Napanee to Cobourg. The proceedings of the case received extensive coverage in the press, including international newspapers. When the jury finally deliberated, they returned in less than an hour to acquit William Ponton and convict the other three men. It is noteworthy that William Ponton is the nephew of M.W. Bro. William Nisbet Ponton, of nearby Belleville. M.W. Bro. Ponton was Grand Master in the years 1921 – 1923.

On the 7th of May, 1890, Walter S. Herrington married Margaret Matilda Tilley (1867 – 1927). Together they had three children: Margaret Eleanor, MA, OBE (1891 – 1970), Mary Caroline (Sneath) of Napanee and Walter H.G., later a Kingston lawyer. After 37 years of marriage, Margaret died in 1927. A year later, on the 22nd of August, 1928, Walter S. Herrington married Cora Ashton (Moles) Benjamin, who died four years later in 1932.

Walter S. Herrington was an avid historian and wrote numerous articles and books including: *History of the County of Lennox and Addington* (Toronto, 1913) and also *History of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario 1855-1930* (Hamilton 1930).

His book *Pioneer Life Among the Loyalists in Upper Canada* (1915, Macmillan) has been selected by scholars as culturally important. The book *Heroines of Canadian History* (1909) was used as a school textbook. These, and other published histories of pioneer life, particularly connected to the United Empire Loyalists, were noted when he was elected to the United Empire Loyalist's "Hall of Honour" in 2004.

Walter Herrington served as President of the Napanee Historical Society, and founded the Lennox and Addington Historical Society. He served as Chairman of the board of the Napanee Public Library. In addition to his interest in history, he was also a Shakespearean scholar.

A keen sportsman, Walter Herrington was a noted fisherman and curler. A history of golf in Napanee notes that Herrington was a founder of the Napanee Golf Club, and a course champion. For many years he and a group of friends played golf on a course



designed by constructed by Walter Herrington at Camp Le Nid. Both he and his wife held roles as President of golf leagues in Napanee.

Whist was a popular card game in the late 1800s. Walter Herrington was a competitive player, President of the Canadian Whist League in 1904, and reached the finals of a Dominion tournament. Later he excelled at bridge as it became more popular. Herrington turned to painting in his later years with such skill that some of his works are owned by public art galleries.

In 1919 he became a member of the Royal Society of Canada.

M.W. Bro. Walter Stevens Herrington died on July 17, 1947. The published obituary notes that he died on the day after a celebration of his 87th birthday. His funeral was held at Mary Magdalene Church, where he and his family were members, and he is buried in Riverside Cemetery, Napanee. The monument for his grave includes an engraved Square and Compasses logo.

Masonic Career

The future 35th Grand Master was initiated January 31, 1890; passed February 28, 1890, and raised May 2, 1890, in Union Lodge No. 9, in Napanee. M.W. Bro. Herrington was an active and enthusiastic member of his lodge. He served as Worshipful Master in 1894, 1899, 1900, 1901 and again in 1905. In 1905 he was elected District Deputy Grand Master for Frontenac District.

He served on the Board of General Purposes at Grand Lodge (1917 to 1947). He served as Chairman of the Committee on the Fraternal Dead for seven years (1920 -1926); and Chairman of the Committee on the Condition of Masonry for two years (1926 - 1928)

He was elected the Deputy Grand Master (1929-1930 and 1930-1931 terms) and Grand Master (1931-1932 and 1932-1933 terms) of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario.

He was also a member of Ancient St. John's Lodge No. 3, Kingston; Moira 11, Belleville; Queen's Lodge No. 587, Kingston, and a number of other Lodges.

He was a member of the Kingston Lodge of Perfection, Rose Sharon Chapter of Rose Croix and Moore Consistory. He coroneted as an Honorary 33o.

As Grand Master

Our 35th Grand Master raised the concerns about the Depression in his Address of 1932. M.W. Bro. Herrington spoke of the paradox that while crops were abundant, larders in home were empty. While there was “plenty of everything and to spare to supply all our needs”, many citizens were unexpectedly reduced to poverty and want. M.W. Bro. Herrington lauded the efforts to provide relief, and decried Communism. He spoke of the efforts of federal, provincial, and municipal governments, as well as agencies such as the Red Cross Society, to address the unemployment situation. He hailed the efforts of lodges across the jurisdiction to provide relief to Brethren.

M.W. Bro. Herrington also deplored the increasing militarism he saw around the world, and added “is it not a significant fact that where Freemasonry has its firmest foothold there we find the strongest advocates for peace?”

Turning his attention to lodges in the jurisdiction he rebuked lodges that sought to raise funds for various projects through lotteries and similar games of chance. He commented on the need for adequate ventilation in lodge rooms. M.W. Bro. Harrington also expressed concern for wasting time in lodge meetings emphasized that “the rules of order should be strictly observed.” He devoted part of his address to reprove those who were participating in forwarding chain letters.

Masonic Education was being addressed by a Grand Lodge committee and M.W. Bro. Harrington commended the skill and thoroughness being demonstrated to provide a curriculum of Masonic Education for all DDGMs to put into effect. He repeated this focus in his second year as Grand Master with specific advice to Worshipful Masters of lodges to use the Annual Proceedings as a source of information for regular Masonic Education.

M.W. Bro. Herrington added his concerns to those of previous Grand Masters regarding the Order of the Eastern Star. He ruled that no Masonic Lodge room could be used for meetings of the Order of the Eastern Star. And he ruled that no Freemasons should openly or tacitly recognize the Order of the Eastern Star.

M.W. Bro. Herrington did not attend the 1933 Grand Lodge Communication held at St. Catharines. Instead he was at a special meeting of the United Grand Lodge of England to dedicate a Masonic Memorial Temple in London, England.

M.W. Bro. Herrington again commented on international affairs including trade negotiations, the ongoing efforts to heal the wounds from the ‘Great War’ of 1914-1918, and coping with the impact of the ongoing economic Depression. He added that the efforts by some lodges to reduce fees and dues was short-sighted. He was asked to approve the formation and incorporation of a co-operative venture by a group of Masons; which he opposed on the basis that “it is improper and contrary to all

precedents to make membership in the Craft an essential qualification to participating in the anticipated benefits of such business.”

He further ruled that a candidate must receive his first degree in the lodge that received and accepted his application. And he ruled that the regalia of the District Deputy Grand Master should be paid for through a per capita fee for the lodges in each District.

As M.W. Bro. Herrington completed his term of office as Grand Master, he explained that he was “in that fortunate position that I leave behind me no tangled skeins for Grand Lodge to unravel and no special burdens to be assumed by my successor for whom I bespeak that same consideration and loyalty that have been so unsparingly accorded to me.”

As Past Grand Master

M.W. Bro. Herrington was named Historian of Grand Lodge after the death of Edward Betley Brown in 1935 and served until his death in 1947.

He contributed four of nine chapters of the updated *History of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario 1855-1955* which was produced for the centennial of Grand Lodge.

Sources:

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- (5) Jenkyns, Michael, *Lodge History of Union Lodge No. 9* (2021)
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