

John Albert Dobbie, BA, MD, CM

Grand Master (1939 – 1941) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario



Photo from the Grand Lodge

(1874 – 1945)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

Dr. John Albert Dobbie was born in Guelph on December 19, 1874. His father died while John Dobbie was a child, leaving his mother to raise four children.

He began his career as a teacher in Central Ontario. He moved to Ottawa in 1900 to be an Art Instructor in the Model School. He entered Queen's University, Kingston, where he graduated in Arts in 1911, and Medicine in 1913, becoming a medical doctor and Master of Surgery. He spent some time practising in Montreal before returning to Ottawa and continuing in private practice. He was appointed the Assistant Superintendent of the Ottawa Civic Hospital in 1927. He became the Superintendent in 1939, resigning in 1942 when ill health caused him to be absent from his post. It was reported that he served as Superintendent with exceptional ability, overseeing the internships of many young doctors. Dr. Dobbie was prominent in medical circles,



serving as secretary of the Ottawa Medico-Chirurgical Society (now the Academy of Medicine Ottawa).

Dr. Dobbie never married. In late 1940 he began to suffer a prolonged illness. He died suddenly in Ottawa on January 6, 1945. A large Masonic Memorial service was conducted for the late M.W. Bro. John A. Dobbie. Two Brethren of The Builders Lodge No. 177 accompanied his body to Guelph where he was interred in a family plot at Woodlawn Memorial Park.

By his Last Will and Testament, upon the death of the last survivor, his entire estate, a very substantial amount, was left to The Builders Lodge No. 177 to be used for the education of promising sons and daughters of the brethren of his Mother Lodge. The lodge now awards two scholarships each year. The first is an award to a medical student at the University of Ottawa. The second is to a student in the Paramedic program at Algonquin College. Both of these scholarships were established by The Builders' Masonic Lodge in recognition of Dr. John Dobbie's contributions to medicine, along with his belief and practice of the fundamental principles of Freemasonry: brotherly love, relief and truth.

Masonic Career

Mr. John Albert Dobbie was initiated into The Builders Lodge, No. 177 (Ottawa) on November 14, 1902. Always manifesting a keen interest in Masonry, Bro. Dobbie was soon appointed an officer of The Builders Lodge but took his demit in order that he might study at Queens' University Medical School at Kingston. After graduation and some time in Montreal, Bro. Dobbie returned to Ottawa and established a medical practice. Shortly after his return to the Capital City, Bro. Dobbie was reinstated a member of The Builders Lodge and almost immediately was again appointed an officer and became Worshipful Master in June of 1925.

W. Bro. Dobbie was elected District Deputy Grand Master of the Ottawa Masonic District in 1928. In his local Masonic activities in Ottawa, he devoted himself to the formation of the Masonic Bureau of the City of Ottawa and Westboro.

R.W. Bro. Dobbie was a Member of the Board of General Purposes (1926-1932) and a member of the Committee on Masonic Education (1926-1932), for three years of which he was Chairman. He was elected as Deputy Grand Master for the 1937-1938 and 1938-1939 terms.

He was elected and installed as the 39th Most Worshipful the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario on July 20, 1939.

He was the Grand Representative to the Grand Lodge of North Dakota.



He was an active member of the Scottish Rite. He received the 33rd degree on October 7, 1925, and became an Active member of Supreme Council on October 4, 1933. Ill. Bro. Dobbie held the role of Grand Marshal for a time.

He was a member of the Royal Order of Scotland (1935)

A portrait of M.W. Bro. John A. Dobbie was painted by Cleeve Hoane and is displayed at the Ottawa Masonic Centre on Walkley Road.

As Grand Master

In 1940, Past Grand Master M.W. Bro. Copus suggested that the children of Masons in the UK be looked after if they were sent to Canada. It was M.W. Bro. Dobbie who sponsored and promoted the idea of Ontario Masons opening their homes to evacuated British children of Masonic parentage during WWII. This proposal was developed with the support of the federal Department of Immigration, and the Children's Aid Society. But the plan was dropped within a year because the British Government declined the offer.

M.W. Bro. Dobbie traveled across the province in his first year as the 39th Grand Master. He participated in several ceremonies of Installation. But he also received reports from DDGMs about Installations in a few lodges where the Auditor's Report was not being produced for the meeting. M.W. Bro. Dobbie was polite, and firm, as he expressed his disappointment that the Auditor's Report was not being prepared in a few lodges. He emphasized that this cannot be omitted from the ceremony. An annual accounting is necessary for the brethren to trust the Secretary and Treasurer, and the lodge to be assured it is financially solvent.

To the few lodges still setting their meeting nights by the phases of the moon, M.W. Bro. Dobbie recommended they amend their Bylaws and fix the date of their regular meeting each month. This is a benefit to visitors and the DDGM so they can plan their visits.

During the 1940 Grand Lodge Communication, M.W. Bro. Dobbie introduced M.W. Joseph E. Perry, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. M.W. Bro. Perry presented to M.W. Bro. W. H. Wardrope and to M.W. Bro. J. A. Dobbie the Henry Price Medal of Massachusetts.

In his address to the 1941 Grand Lodge Communication, M.W. Bro. Dobbie spoke about the war. He stated "The dictators of Europe have striven to suppress Masonry and Masonic influence. They may seemingly outwardly accomplish this, in part; but, when good men have joined the Order, have understood its teachings, and have endeavoured

to practise the tenets thereof, no amount of compulsion will ever cause them to forsake the Masonic Order and its principles.”

M.W. Bro. Dobbie lauded the work of various committees to raise money for the war effort and the relief of those in need. He also applauded the commitment of individual Masons to enter the armed services.

Due to his own illness, including a stay in hospital, M.W. Bro. Dobbie had to cancel many engagements and activities in the last few months of his term as Grand Master. He expressed deep appreciation for the way Deputy Grand Master R.W. Bro. J. A. McRae, and all the DDGMs, stepped forward to continue the work.

As Past Grand Master

As a Past Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Dobbie was constrained by his illness. He accepted a role on a committee for our Constitution and Jurisprudence.

After his death, eulogies were full of praise for M.W. Bro. Dobbie. It was noted that his memory skills meant he probably knew more Masons by name, and where they lived, than anyone else. He was respected for his absolute integrity, and unsurpassed loyalty to his many friends. At his funeral a quote from M.W. Bro. Dobbie was shared: “Not what I gain, but what I give, measures the worth of this life I live.”

Sources:

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- (4) 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.
- (5) McLeod, Wallace editor, *Whence Come We?* (Hamilton, Grand Lodge of A.F.&A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario, 1980)
- (6) Reynolds, John W., (2012) *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* ‘The Architect’ December 2012
- (7) Runnalls, J. Lawrence (1979) *Our Past Grand Masters* privately published
- (8) Smith, Pemberton; ‘*Early Canadian Masonry 1759 – 1869*’ Montreal, Quality Press 1909
- (9) *The Builder’s Lodge No. 177 History 1865 – 1965*
- (10) Newspaper article “Dr. J.A. Dobbie, Former Superintendent of Ottawa Civic Hospital, Passes On”, publisher and date unknown.
- (11) Scottish Rite Proceedings for 1944
- (12) Queen’s University Archives