

Lt. Col. Alexander Allan Stevenson

Grand Master (1868 – 1871) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons  
of Canada in the Province of Ontario



*Photo from the Grand Lodge*

*(1829 – 1910)*

*Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.*

Alexander Allan Stevenson was born on January 15, 1829, in Riccarton parish of Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, Scotland, the son of James Stevenson and Janet Francis Allan. His mother was a cousin of Robert Burns, the Scottish national poet, and the aunt of Sir Hugh Allan. *(See endnote regarding Sir Hugh Allan.)* He was educated at local schools



in Riccarton. Details of his early life are unknown. He moved to Montreal in 1846 and entered the printing business. In 1853 the printing company of 'Moore, Owler & Stevenson' was established. The company published the *Montreal Sun* newspaper. In June of 1856 the first issue of an eight-page monthly newspaper called "*The Canadian Masonic Pioneer*," was published at Montreal. It was edited by R.W. Bros. Bernard and Isaacson and printed for them by Stevenson's company. The Masonic newspaper was short-lived and only one volume was issued.

The printing company was merged with the Montreal Printing Company in 1879 after the first two partners retired from the business.

Alexander Allan Stevenson was active in municipal politics and served on the Montreal City Council 1861-1867, and from 1882-1898 was an Alderman of Montreal. He had one venture into federal politics when in the federal general elections of 1874, representing the Conservatives, he unsuccessfully contested the seat of Montreal West.

One of his particular interests in municipal government was the Montreal Fire Brigade. Mr. Stevenson supported many improvements including the establishment of a fire alarm system for the city. He was Chairman of the Fire Committee when in 1896 he accompanied a detachment of the Montreal Fire Brigade to London, England, where it participated in the World Fire Congress.

In 1855 he joined the Montreal Field Battery and by April 1857 had become the unit's Commanding Officer and Lieutenant-Colonel.

Alexander Stevenson, as a municipal councillor, was the first to put forward a motion to acquire Mount Royal Mountain as a public park. There were no roads on Mount Royal at that time and other councillors expressed skepticism that the mountain could be accessible for public use.

In 1862, the Montreal Field Battery was ordered to stage a 100-gun salute to honour the birthday of the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII). Instead of giving the salute in the centre of the city, Lt.-Col. Stevenson led the men of the battery with four horse-drawn cannons up to the top of Mount Royal where the salute was given. This exercise proved to his fellow municipal politicians that the mountain was accessible as a public park. In the years following that artillery salute Mount Royal was secured as a public park for the city of Montreal.

In 1858 the Montreal Field Battery was invited to march through New York City and Boston with its regimental flags flying. This was the first time British troops had been permitted to parade in either city under the British flag since the American Revolution.

He was Commanding Officer during the Fenian Raids of 1866 and 1870 and received the Fenian Medal. He retired as Lieutenant-Colonel of the unit on April 24, 1891.

In 1883 he was appointed as a Commissioner to enquire into the Public Service in Quebec.

Alexander A. Stevenson was President of various organizations and societies, including: the Montreal Curling Club, Mechanics Institute of Montreal, Caledonia Society, St. Andrew's Society, and the Provincial Council of Arts and Manufactures. His enthusiasm for curling for over half a century was well known and he taught the game to Prince Arthur of Connaught when the Prince resided in Canada in 1880.

He was a Presbyterian by religion and a Conservative in politics. He never married.

Commentaries during his lifetime and obituaries after his death consistently declare that he was one of Montreal's best-known citizens. He was recognized for his cheeriness and bright remarks. His ability and energy made him very popular in society. His farewell speech to the Montreal Field Battery acknowledged the affection and respect he enjoyed from the men under his command.

He died in Montreal on April 9, 1910, and the Grand Lodge of Quebec led his funeral with over 500 Masons in attendance. He is interred in Mount Royal Cemetery, Montreal. A large monument on his grave notes his role as Grand Master together with other roles. The monument is also engraved with field guns, swords, a wreath, and the Latin motto of the Canadian Artillery "Quo Fas Et Gloria Ducunt" (whither right and glory lead).

A photographic portrait of M.W. Bro. Alexander Allan Stevenson is displayed at the Ottawa Masonic Centre.

### **Masonic Career**

Mr. Alexander Allan Stevenson was initiated into St. George's Lodge, No. 19 GRC (now No. 10 GRQ), Montreal on June 15, 1856, and was WM in 1859-1860 and 1862, following M. W. Bro. Thomas Douglas Harrington who had served in that office in 1846, 1847 and 1848. He was elected as DDGM of the Montreal District of the new Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada for 1861-1862 and 1862-1863 and as Deputy Grand Master 1864-1865, 1865-1866, 1866-1867 and 1867-1868.

In July 1868 he was elected as the fourth Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada over three successive terms of 1868-1869, 1869-1870 and 1870-1871. M.W. Bro. Stevenson was just thirty-nine years of age when first elected as Grand Master.

He was elected an Honorary member of Stevenson Lodge, No. 218 GRC, Toronto; the Lodge being named in his honour.

With his home and mother lodge being in Montreal, he became a member of the Grand Lodge of Quebec after St. George's Lodge No. 19 went through the process of changing allegiance to the Grand Lodge of Quebec on September 23, 1874. It was re-numbered and became No. 10 on the Quebec Registry.



In Knights Templary he was a member of Richard Coeur de Lion Preceptory, No. 7 KT, Montreal and held the office of Presiding Preceptor. He was a member of the Sovereign Great Priory of Canada, Knights Templar. In respect of the latter Order, Morgan carries the interesting comment that he was “appointed by the Prince of Wales as Head of Knights Templary in Canada” (Morgan Part II, p. 967). This was not true as M. Em. Kt. William James Bury MacLeod Moore had that honour until his death, although Rt. Em. Kt. Stevenson was Provincial Grand Prior of the Quebec District.

Over the course of his Masonic career with the Grand Lodge of Canada he accepted appointments as the representative of the Grand Orient of Brazil, the Grand Lodge of Connecticut, and the Grand Lodge of Minnesota at the Grand Lodge of Canada.

## **As Grand Master**

In current times we celebrate Canada Day to mark July 1<sup>st</sup> as the day when the Dominion of Canada became a sovereign nation by the confederation of four Provinces. They were Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. The years after Confederation were times of dissention and frustration for Freemasons in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. For several years there were meetings and discussions by some Masons in Quebec to form the Grand Lodge of Quebec. These culminated in a convention held October 20, 1869, at which the Grand Lodge of Quebec was declared to be a new and independent Grand Lodge.

The details of those days have been recorded by several authors. For the purposes of this biography of our fourth Grand Master M.W. Bro. Alexander A. Stevenson it may be sufficient to note that he was particularly well-placed to understand the issues because he was the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada, having most of its lodges and membership in the Province of Ontario, while he himself lived and worked in Montreal, in the Province of Quebec.

The Proceedings of those trying times throughout the three years that M.W. Bro. Stevenson was Grand Master include the reprinting of letters from many quarters appealing for rulings and adjudications of conflicts.

There was still attachment to the idea that the Grand Lodge of Canada should have jurisdiction over all the Dominion of Canada except where new Grand Lodges were established such as in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. M.W. Bro. Stevenson supported this idea and objected to “the unsatisfactory and anomalous position we occupy as a supreme governing Masonic body, having no control whatever over a considerable number of lodges, still existing in Canada under the authority of other Grand Lodges, although within our territorial jurisdiction.” This led to the appointment of a special committee to open negotiation with the officers of those lodges.



## Ontario Masons

M.W. Bro. Stevenson was unable to arrive at a conclusion that permitted harmony amongst all the parties.

A Masonic asylum or care home had been proposed and discussed since the formation of the Grand Lodge of Canada. Funds were raised and invested in the hope that this venture would come to fruition. M.W. Bro. Stevenson did not support this effort. Eventually the idea was quietly dropped.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1869, M. Bro. Alexander Allan Stevenson was in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He had the honour of installing the new Grand Master of the new Grand Lodge of Nova Scotia, M.W. Bro. Alexander Keith.

In 1871 petitions were received from Bro. E.C. Cooper of Chatham, and Bro. J.J. Moore and others of Toronto, representing lodges of Prince Hall Masons (referred to as Colored Masons in the *Proceedings*). The petitions offered to surrender the Warrants held by these two lodges from the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of New York and accept Warrants from the Grand Lodge of Canada. The Board of General Purposes responded that because the Grand Lodge of Canada recognized the Grand Lodge of New York and not the Prince Hall Grand Lodge, such action cannot be considered. Instead, personal application by each candidate could be made to a regular lodge in our jurisdiction. With this decision the Grand Lodge of Canada used the doctrine of exclusive territorial jurisdiction to avoid recognition of Prince Hall Freemasonry. This was finally resolved in 2005 under M.W. Bro. Donald H. Mumby when mutual recognition and rights of visitation were achieved.

Four requests to form lodges in Manitoba were received, and dispensations granted by M.W. Bro. Stevenson. There are enthusiastic reports by the DDGM for the District of Manitoba in the 1870 and 1871 *Proceedings* regarding the condition and growth of Masonry in Manitoba. The Grand Lodge of Manitoba was instituted in 1875.

In his 1870 Address, M.W. Bro. Stevenson acknowledged that he and other Grand Masters had rendered decisions that are not within the scope of the Book of Constitution. For example, in 1869 M.W. Bro. Stevenson declined all requests for dispensations to allow men who were physically impaired in some way to become Masons. He explained that he was unable to discriminate what physical impairment would be admissible over what would be non-admissible and so he refused all requests. Also in 1869, he also reinforced that “merit and ability alone are the true grounds of preferment among Masons” as he admonished those who canvassed or campaigned to be elected to a Masonic office. In his final year as Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Stevenson recommended that all such rulings and decisions be compiled as a record of Canadian Masonic Jurisprudence.

### **As Past Grand Master**



M.W. Bro. Stevenson's mother lodge, St. George's Lodge No. 19, changed its allegiance to the Grand Lodge of Quebec on September 23, 1874. In the re-numbering of lodges in 1879, it became No. 10 on the Grand Registry of Quebec. M.W. Bro. Stevenson remained an active member of the lodge.

In 1875 M.W. Bro. Stevenson was part of the official delegation from Quebec to attend the funeral of M.W. Bro. William Mercer Wilson. He was also part of the official delegation at an Emergent Communication of the Grand Lodge of Quebec on June 2, 1883, to participate in the Masonic funeral for M.W. Bro. Wm. B. Simpson, another Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada.

**Endnote:** *Sir Hugh Allan* See the "Dictionary of Canadian Biography" for details. *Sir Hugh Allan was a shipping magnate, railway promoter, financier, and capitalist; born 29 Sept. 1810, died 9 Dec. 1882. He was dominant in Quebec, and Canadian trade and commerce.*

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