

James Patterson Maher

Grand Master (1949 – 1951) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario

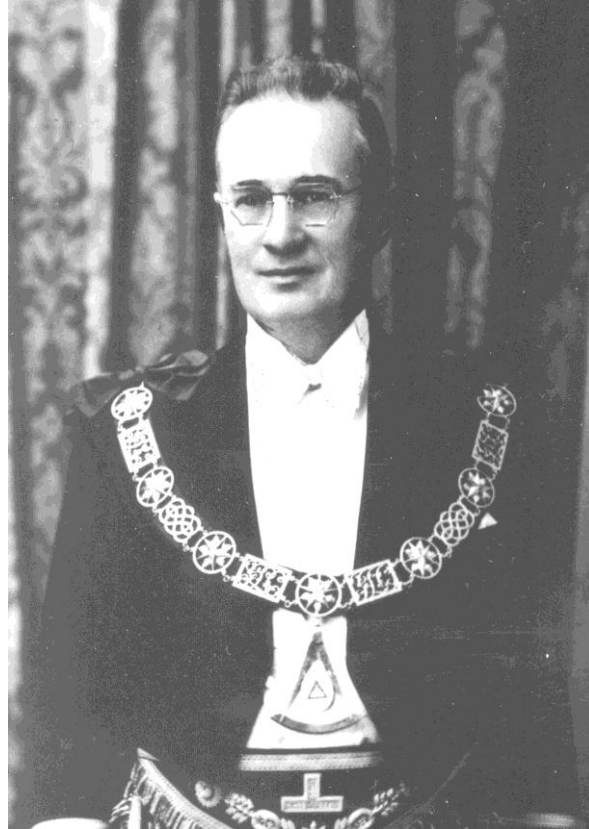


Photo from the Grand Lodge

(1890 – 1961)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

James Patterson Maher was born in Toronto on February 6, 1890, of Irish parents who had travelled to Canada some years before. While he was still an infant, his family moved to Picton where he spent his boyhood days, receiving his education in Picton Public and High Schools.

In 1909 he returned to Toronto where he began his work career. In 1911 he entered the shoe manufacturing industry by founding the Reliance Shoe Company. By 1920 he was the founder and president of Maher Shoes and had purchased several competitors. The company was so respected that he expanded from manufacturing into retail and opened a chain of retail stores throughout the province under the name Maher Shoe Stores. The company continued beyond his death until the early 1990s when it went out of business. At its peak, Maher's company sponsored the extremely



popular 'March of Toys' variety show on radio station CFRB in Toronto, with all proceeds going to the British war Veterans' fund. The company was active in sponsoring local hockey, baseball and soccer teams.

The Shoe Manufacturer's Association of Canada was organized in Montreal in 1919. James P. Maher was present at that meeting and continued as a member. He supported the manufacturing industry through the Canadian Council on Distribution, and the Board of Trade of the City of Toronto. During the war years he served as Director of the Advisory Committee of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board.

He was active in community life and served as a Director of the National Sanitarium which administered the Muskoka Free Hospital for Consumptives (a term for those with tuberculosis), the Weston Sanitarium and the Gage Institute. He served as Chairman of the Toronto City Planning Board and Vice-Chairman of the Toronto and York County Planning Board. He was Director of the Property Owners' Association and a Director and Past President of the York Masonic Temple Ltd. He was a member of the Granite Club of Toronto, Empire Club of Canada, and the Toronto Hunters' and Anglers' Club. He enjoyed returning to his boyhood home of Picton and was a member of the Prince Edward Yacht Club there.

In his personal life, James P. Maher, married Reta Beatrice Hall (1888 – 1954) on September 10, 1913. They did not have any children. After Reta's death, James P. Maher married Leta Louise LeGear (1894 – 1954), in 1936. Their marriage continued until her death in 1954. Then James P. Maher married Marjorie Fullerton Rennie (1902 – 1983) in 1956.

He was a member of St. Michael and All Angels Anglican Church, Toronto, and remained active in St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church in Picton.

M. W. Bro. James Patterson Maher died on August 2, 1961. The funeral at St. Michael and All Angels Anglican Church was well attended by Grand Master Treleavan, many Past Grand Masters, members of the Board of General Purposes, and a large number of Masonic friends. He is interred in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Toronto. His third wife, Marjorie, is interred with him. A plain monument, without Masonic identifiers, marks their grave. M.W. Bro. Maher's previous wives are interred in the Forest Lawn Mausoleum.

A large portrait of M.W. Bro. Maher wearing the regalia of Grand Master is proudly displayed at the York Temple in Toronto, home of his Mother Lodge, York Lodge No. 156.

Masonic Career

Mr. James Patterson Maher was initiated into York Lodge No. 156, Toronto, on November 22, 1912. He was Passed on May 9, 1913, and Raised on November 28, 1913. He served as Worshipful Master for 1930. He was elected and served as District Deputy Grand Master of Toronto District C for 1934 - 1935. Twenty-seven lodges comprised Toronto District 'C' under the care of DDGM Maher. "The spirit of harmony is very pronounced throughout the district." He struck a committee to take charge of Masonic education in the District, with members of the committee responding to requests for Masonic education by the lodges. In his report he noted that some lodges were not protecting their property with adequate insurance, and he advised the lodges to consider getting insurance. He gave special mention to the role of Past Masters in the lodges saying, "The Past Masters are rendering a real service to the Craft, and are ever keeping the high ideals of Masonry before the brethren."

He was first elected to the Board of general Purposes in 1939 and served as Chairman of various Committees including: Printing; Audit and Finance; Regalia; and Benevolence. He was elected Deputy Grand Master in 1947.

M.W. Bro. James Patterson Maher was elected Grand Master of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario for the 1949 - 1950 and 1950 - 1951 terms.

In 1922 he was exalted in York Royal Arch Masonry in York Chapter No. 62, Toronto.

M.W. Bro. Maher became a member of Moore Sovereign Consistory, Hamilton, in 1948, and in 1949 he was coroneted as an Honorary Inspector General 33°.

He was Initiated a member of the Royal Order of Scotland in 1947.

M.W. Bro. Maher was the Grand Representative of the Grand Lodge of Alberta near our Grand Lodge.

As Grand Master

Our 44th Grand Master began his Address with a review of the state of the world. "We view with apprehension and great concern the general condition of mankind throughout the world; many are suffering, many are merely existing." He continued: "There never was a crisis in history such as there is today - not a war for territory but a war for principles - a war of minds and standards and ideologies." He spoke specifically of communism as the threat facing the world. "Happily there is another side. It isn't so spectacular, so dramatic, so exciting; it isn't noisy and often its colours are subdued but it is a part of the world of today, just as it was a part of the world of yesterday and will be tomorrow. It is eternal and in it grow the roots of faith, hope and

charity. The spark of Divinity in man has not been lost. There still dwells in his heart the spirit of love.”

In the same vein, M.W. Bro. Maher said: “Our only hope for a happy world seems to rest upon the ability of nations and peoples to understand one another, for without understanding there can be nothing but strife and tragic aftermaths.” And he added: “However, eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”

Grand Master Maher did list many of the travels and visits he, with other Grand Lodge officers, made over his term. He spoke of his enjoyment of meeting Masons in their own lodges, and of seeing lodge rooms full because chartered buses brought members from distant lodges to attend a meeting with senior Grand Lodge officers.

He did not elaborate on matters of jurisprudence, and deferred many administrative details to reports of committees. He did draw attention to the fact that over \$22,700 was raised and forwarded to relief efforts after the devastating Manitoba Flood of 1950. This urgent appeal and compassionate response was greatly appreciated.

Grand Master James P. Maher struck a committee to add another medal to those which might be used to honour Masons in our jurisdiction. The Veteran’s Jubilee medal was used to recognize those with 50 years of continuous membership in Masonry. The Long Service Medal was available to honour those who achieved 50 years as a Past Master. Grand Master Maher’s committee provided the design and criteria for a medal to honour sixty years of membership.

After all his travels, M.W. Bro. Maher offered his opinion and direction on the state of lodge rooms across the jurisdiction. While some well-appointed and well-maintained lodge rooms received his praise, he expressed concern about the state of house-keeping of some lodge rooms. He exhorted the officers of all lodges to do their best to maintain clean lodge rooms, well-arranged, and adequately furnished. This is not only to encourage the members to be proud of their lodge room, but also to give a favourable impression to candidates. He asserted: “We all have a duty to maintain the dignity and high importance of the Fraternity on the highest plane”.

This led to his concern about the insurance status of lodges. During his term, two Masonic Temples were entirely destroyed by fire, just as three had experienced similar loss when he was the Deputy Grand Master. As Grand Master M.W. Bro. Maher warned all lodges and Temple Corporations to make sure they have insurance, and that it is adequate. He added that the original warrant, and lodge records, can be lost forever. He encouraged that lodges have a fireproof vault for such documents.

In his Address, M.W. Bro. Maher spoke of candidates for admission. He reminded the members that “Masonry makes no secret of the fact that it never invites or solicits an application for membership from anyone. Nor does it hold secret the additional

fact that only men of good repute, honourable men who have already demonstrated the quality of character that is likely to fit itself to Masonic standards, will be acceptable.” Given his understanding of the world situation, he felt compelled to add that “Many of you have repeatedly heard me mention that we should screen carefully the aspirants to membership in our Masonic Fraternity. I cannot too strongly emphasize its significance and its importance, especially in these days of crisis and of strain and stress when infiltration of enemies of our country might possibly occur in some places. In such times it is really dangerous to be too complacent, to be too credulous.”

Should a man become a Mason, and the Worshipful Master has concern about his proficiency or worthiness, Grand Master Maher ruled that the Worshipful Master has the power to refuse to initiate or advance any candidate if he deems it to be in the interest of the lodge or Craft to do so.

M.W. Bro. Maher shared in his Address that many hours of labour by Grand Lodge committees, and individual Masons, were necessary to compile and prepare the Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge. He expressed his concern that some Secretaries received the Annual Proceedings and set them aside. He encouraged that the members be told of the publication of the Annual Proceedings, and that “interesting parts of the Proceedings can well be read at lodge meetings”.

With the centennial anniversary of our Grand Lodge coming in 1955, just a few years after M.W. Bro. Maher served as Grand Master, he urged that planning for the event commence. He had every expectation that “when the history of this centennial is written, it will be looked upon as a glorious success and as a landmark in the annals of Freemasonry in the Province of Ontario.”

As his term came to a close, or as M.W. Bro. Maher described it: “the sands of my glass have nearly run out”, he concluded by saying: “if I have succeeded in leaving some thought, some inspiration with Lodges or individuals as I have journeyed amongst you, if I have done some act or said some word that will count for good, then I shall feel that my efforts have not been in vain.”

As Past Grand Master

M.W. Bro. James P. Maher actively led the preparations and arrangements for the 1955 celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of the Grand Lodge of A.F.&A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario.

Sources:

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- (3) *Commemoration of the Graves of the Grand Masters*, December 2018. A project of the Museum and Archives Team.
- (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?* (1980) Hamilton, Grand Lodge of A.F.&A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario
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- (9) V.W. Bro. Duncan Skinner, Secretary of York Lodge No. 156, personal communication, October 2024