

William Henry Weller LL.B.

Grand Master (1877 – 1879) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons  
of Canada in the Province of Ontario



*Photo from the Grand Lodge*

(1824 -- 1881)

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

William Henry Weller was born on August 20, 1824, in Canton, New York. His family soon moved to Cobourg, Ontario. His father, William Weller, owned and operated a stagecoach line. He became famously called “The Stagecoach King”. He was the first mayor of Cobourg. In 1835 William Weller and his first wife (William Henry Weller’s mother) Mercy Wilcox Weller, had their portraits painted by the noted Canadian artist Paul Kane. The portrait of Mercy Wilcox Weller is held by the Cobourg and District Historical Society Archives.



William Henry Weller had two brothers and a sister of note: John Laing Weller was a well-known engineer who was in charge of the building of the Welland Ship Canal in the early twentieth century and who gave his name to Port Weller, Ontario. Charles Weller was a judge in Peterborough. A sister, Eliza, married George M. Clark who was solicitor general of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

William Henry Weller married Emma Johnson (1833-1860) on November 9, 1854. Emma died May 16, 1860, when William Henry Weller was 35 years old. They did not have children. William Henry Weller did not remarry.

William Henry Weller trained as a lawyer in Toronto and returned to practice in Cobourg. In 1847 he was appointed to be a Notary Public. By 1871 he was named Deputy Registrar in Northumberland County, and Master of Chancery in the Supreme Court.

He was a member of the Church of England (Anglican Church).

William Henry Weller died in Cobourg on March 15, 1881. The given cause was diabetes.

M. W. Bro. William Henry Weller is buried in St. Peter's Heritage Cemetery, Cobourg. This is one of the important cemeteries in Cobourg and dates from the beginning of the town. There are two vertical stones on the Weller family plot, with two raised tombs for M.W. Bro. Weller and his wife, Emma. Their gravesite sits on a hill, alongside some of Cobourg's most important residents.

A portrait of Mr. William Henry Weller is held by the Art Gallery of Northumberland and is attributed to famed Canadian artist Paul Kane. The official portrait of M.W. Bro. William Henry Weller was painted by noted artist John W. Bridgman, who painted several portraits of Grand Masters. The portrait of M.W. Bro. Weller in Masonic regalia is held by W. Bro. George Burt.

### **Masonic Career**

Mr. William Henry Weller was initiated into St. Andrew's Lodge, No. 16 on the Provincial Registry of Canada West (now St. Andrew's Lodge No. 16 GRC), Toronto, on January 20, 1846. After his move to Coburg, he affiliated with St. John's Lodge, No. 5 PRCW and No. 497 ER, and now No. 17 GRC, Cobourg, and served as WM in 1856, 1858 and 1864. Bro. William Weller, father of M.W. Bro. William Henry Weller, was also a member of St. John's Lodge. In 1849, M.W. Bro. William Henry Weller donated a Lewis to the lodge, the stone resides beside the Secretary's Desk.

He held various offices in the Provincial Grand Lodge of Canada West: Grand Steward (June-November 1850), Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies (November

1850 - June 1851), Grand Pursuivant (June 1851 - June 1852) and Grand Director of Ceremonies (October 1855 - October 1856). He is not listed in further Communications until the last Communication of that Provincial Grand Lodge, September 7, 1857, where he is listed as Grand Pursuivant and representative of St. John's Lodge. At this meeting the "Ancient Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Canada" was pronounced duly formed and M.W. Bro. Sir Alan Napier MacNab was elected as Grand Master. This was a schismatic Grand Lodge formed in opposition to the new Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada. W. Bro. Weller was the Worshipful Master of his lodge when he attended the meeting of July 14, 1858, in the hall of King Solomon's Lodge, Toronto, where the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada and the Ancient Grand Lodge of F. & A.M. of Canada were united.

Under the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada, W. Bro. Weller was appointed Assistant Grand Director of Ceremonies (1858 - 1859). He was three times elected as DDGM of Ontario District (1859 - 1860, 1861 - 1862 and 1866 - 1867). His reports as DDGM show he was fully engaged in matters of jurisprudence, benevolence, and ritual. As an indication of the difficulties of travel in that era, he was not able to visit every lodge in Ontario District in any year of his time as DDGM.

He was elected as Deputy Grand Master (1875 - 1876 and 1876 - 1877). He was elected and installed as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada for the 1877-1878 and 1878-1879 terms.

M.W. Bro. Weller was named as the representative of the Grand Lodge of Prince Edward Island near our Grand Lodge. He held the same position with respect to the Grand Lodge of New Hampshire.

In Capitular Masonry, Bro. Weller was a member and First Principal of St. John's Chapter, No. 42 GRC, Cobourg. He served Grand Chapter in various capacities and was elected as Grand Second Principal in 1875. He was Grand Representative of the Grand Chapter of Wisconsin.

### **As Grand Master**

M.W. Bro. Weller started his Address as Grand Master by enumerating some events he had attended. These include number corner-stone ceremonies, and consecrations of lodge rooms. He adds that he was pleased with the several Lodges of Instruction that occurred during his term as Grand Master.

As DDGM, he devoted time to dealing with matters of conduct, and jurisprudence. This continued when M.W. Bro. Weller was the Grand Master. In particular, M.W. Bro. Weller refused to accept the Bylaws of various lodges because those Bylaws conflicted with the Constitution and Regulations. He suggested to R.W. Bro. Hugh Murray of

Hamilton (later to become M.W. Bro. Hugh Murray, Grand Master in 1886 – 1886) to prepare a set of 'model Bylaws', which was done.

Fraternal relations between Grand Lodges occupied M.W. Bro. Weller. There was a dispute regarding jurisdiction between the Grand Lodge of Quebec, and the Grand Lodge of Scotland, with M.W. Bro. Weller deciding "in the interests of Masonry, it is not desirable that we should actively interfere in this matter at present, nor, with the information I have yet had, express any opinion upon it." He acknowledged that our Grand Lodge was being asked to provide formal recognition to other recently formed Grand Lodges.

M.W. Bro. Weller spoke directly in his address to "certain fundamental laws, or landmarks, as they are usually called, which are binding upon all Freemasons throughout the world." He added: "The most important of these landmarks is the belief in God." This was a preamble for the very significant decision he made regarding the Grand Orient of France. That Masonic body had decided to repeal the clause or landmark, thus permitting the initiation of atheists. M.W. Bro. Weller withdrew the credentials of our representative near the Grand Orient "as I could not continue to recognize it as Masonic."

The formation of Grand Lodges is often fraught, with differences and disagreements leading to division. Such was the case with Freemasonry in the Province of Manitoba. As the population grew and Masons met to form new lodges, the Grand Lodge of Canada received petitions and granted warrants. By 1875 conditions were proper for the formation of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba, which received recognition from our Grand Lodge. Some of the lodges in Manitoba used the Canadian Ritual, while others, having first been warranted from other Grand Lodges, used the 'American Rite'. This led to several years of argument, and to the creation of a 'Schismatic' Grand Lodge. With more discussion, harmony was finally reached. Both rituals were authorized for use in the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. This state of affairs prompted M.W. Bro. Weller to state: "The differences existing amongst our brethren in Manitoba have been happily terminated, a settlement, of which I have been notified, having been made on 24th June last. (1878)"

The experience of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba of having a 'Schismatic' Grand Lodge exist for a while was similar to the experience of our own Grand Lodge. R.W. Bro. Alan Napier MacNab was the third Provincial Grand Master appointed by the United Grand Lodge of England to govern Masonry in what is now the Province of Ontario. With the formation of the Grand Lodge of Canada in 1855, Provincial Grand Master MacNab gathered several lodges and formed a schismatic Grand Lodge. Discussions between the Grand Lodges continued, and harmony was achieved on July 14, 1858, with the dissolution of the schismatic Grand Lodge, and the members being welcomed into the Grand Lodge of Canada. It was with apparent relief and satisfaction that M.W. Bro. Weller included in his address: "It will be gratifying to you to learn that what was

called the Grand Lodge of Ontario has ceased to exist. The Seal used by it has been delivered up to be, and has been destroyed, and the other formalities considered necessary for its extinction have been complied with.”

### **As Past Grand Master**

M.W. Bro. Weller suffered with diabetes and was not in good health after his career as Grand Master. His sister, Caroline, attended to him until he died.

### Sources:

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- (13) Personal communication with W. Bro. George Burt, July 2024