

Lt. Col. James Moffat

Grand Master (1881 – 1882) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons
of Canada in the Province of Ontario

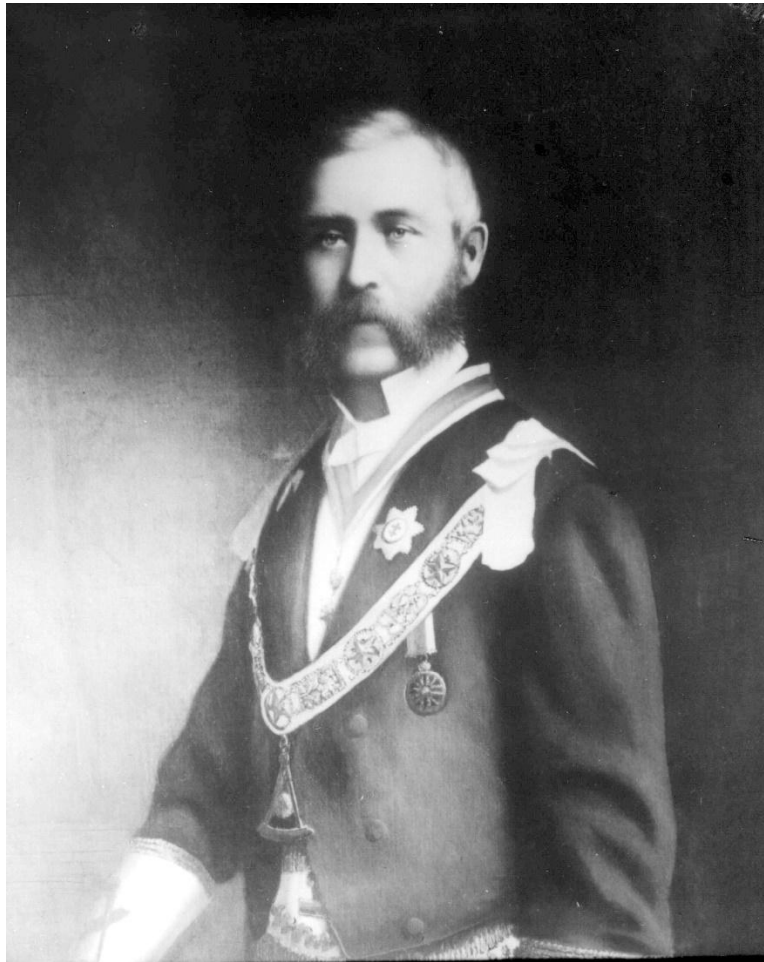


Photo from the Grand Lodge

(1819 – 1894)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

James Moffat was born in Lanark, Scotland on December 16, 1820, the son of James and Rachel (Harromer) Moffat. M. W. Bro. James Moffat's birth date is uncertain with different dates depending on the source consulted: December 16, 1820, in the London Free Press obituary of September 19, 1894; 1811 in his summary biography in Grand Lodge, and 1819 in the St. John's Lodge No. 2 history which conforms to the information on his grave monument that he was 75 years old.



Ontario Masons

He came to New York City in 1841 and moved to London, Canada West, in 1845. He worked as a builder and owned or developed several properties.

He had a strong interest in local political affairs and the growth of the city of London. He was one of the first Aldermen in London and was Mayor in 1860. As Mayor he presented an address on behalf of the City to the visiting Prince of Wales.

He had a significant interest in education and was a member of the Board of Education and Chairman in 1860. He was also a member of the Board of Health and a Director of the Agricultural Loan and Savings Society.

He had a deep interest in military affairs and after a period of military instruction and drill in Montreal in connection with the 47th Regiment, he raised No. 2 Highland Rifles (one of the Companies forming the 7th Battalion of local militia) in 1856. In 1861 he was appointed Musketry Inspector of the 9th Military District of Upper Canada. In 1862 he was gazetted as Brigade Major of No. 2 Highland Rifles and, in 1872, as Lieutenant-Colonel of No. 1 Military District, Ontario. There was a demand for military preparation as this was the era of the Fenian Raids which occurred between 1866 and 1871, and the Red River Resistance of 1869 - 1870.

James Moffat had married Susannah Cox in New York in 1843, and they had eight children. Susannah Moffat died in 1881. In 1887 he remarried, to Helen Wallace Poden, a native of Galston, Ayrshire, Scotland. There were no children from this second marriage.

M. W. Bro. James Moffat was an active member of the First Presbyterian Church in London. He joined Knox Church when it was built and became a member of the Board of Managers. As Christ Church was being built, James Moffat collected funds for the first organ in the church. He also served as President of the St. Andrew's Society of London. He was President of the Ontario Curling Association in 1881 - 1882.

M. W. Bro. James Moffat died on September 18, 1894. While the monument marking his grave does not include mention of his Masonic career, the brethren of St. John's Lodge No. 209 in London placed a further monument at the grave to recognize his office of Worshipful Master of the lodge, and Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada.

A large portrait of M.W. Bro. James Moffat in his regalia as Grand Master is displayed at the London Masonic Centre. The portrait was completed in 1883 by famed artist John Wesley Bridgman, a founding member of the Ontario Society of Artists.

Masonic Career



Ontario Masons

Mr. James Moffat was initiated in Scotland. His mother lodge is Old St. John's Lodge No. 21, GRS. It is known that shortly after his arrival in Canada West he affiliated with St. John's Lodge No. 209 IC, London.

He was a charter member of St. John's Lodge No. 20 when it was warranted on November 26, 1855. He served St. John's Lodge No. 20 as Worshipful Master for 1855 - 1856, 1856 - 1857, 1857 - 1858 and 1868 - 1869. He was a strong supporter of the expansion of Freemasonry and was a charter member of Tuscan Lodge, No. 195 GRC, London in 1868 where he served as Worshipful Master in 1871. He followed this with becoming a charter member of Union Lodge, No. 380 GRC, London in 1879 and served as Worshipful Master in 1879.

In 1855, Bro. Moffat was appointed as a member of a committee along with W. Bros. A. S. Abbott and J. Daniel, to attend a convention in Hamilton and to support the efforts of Lodges to establish the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada - which culminated on October 10, 1855.

He was elected as District Deputy Grand Master of the London District for the 1858 - 1859 term. He served in many capacities at the Grand Lodge of Canada, including serving as Deputy Grand Master (1879 - 1880 and 1880 - 1881) and was elected as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada for the 1881 - 1882 term. He served just one year, choosing to step down from this high office.

He was made an honorary member of Albion Lodge, No. 80 GRC, Newburg in 1864. In 1881, while on a visit to Scotland, St. Clair Lodge No. 349 of Edinburgh and St. George's No. 333 of Glasgow held crowded meetings in his honor, and both elected him an honorary member of their lodges.

In Capitular Masonry he was First Principal of St. George Chapter No. 5 RAMO, London in 1862. He was also Eminent Preceptor of Richard Coeur de Lion Preceptory No. 4 K. T. Canada in 1870 and was Grand Registrar of the Sovereign Great Priory of Canada. He received the Grand Cross of the Temple from HRH the Prince of Wales, Grand Prior of the Great Priory of England.

In 1885, while again in Scotland, he took the degree of the Royal Order of Scotland.

He was also a Knight of Rome and Constantine and a Royal Ark mariner.

He was a charter member of London Chapter of Rose Croix 18° in 1868 and served as Most Wise Sovereign 1871 - 1872 and 1878 - 1873. He was also a member of Moore Consistory, Hamilton and of the London Lodge of Perfection.

As Grand Master

Our 9th Grand Master began his Address at the 1882 Grand Lodge Communication by noting with dismay the assassination of US President James A. Garfield in September of 1881.

He had the sad duty to announce the death of M.W. Bro. T. Douglas Harrington, who died on January 13th, 1882. The funeral was held on January 17th and Grand Master Moffat attended with three Past Grand Masters, M.W. Bros. Simpson, Seymour, and Stevenson. Many other notable Masonic leaders were also present, "showing the love and fraternal esteem in which our departed Past Grand Master was held." Later, M.W. Bro. Moffat arranged for the expenses of the funeral to be paid by our Grand Lodge.

Attended two Lodges of Instruction and described them as not as successful as he had hoped. He encouraged the Grand Lodge to arrange a meeting once a year of all the District Deputy Grand Masters, at a central point in the Province and soon after the annual Grand Lodge Communication. "Two days would be quite sufficient for the exemplification of the work and other matters connected with the office which they hold." His expectation is for uniformity of the work all over the jurisdiction.

M.W. Bro. Moffat expressed concern that the Royal Solomon Lodge No. 298 in Jerusalem, Palestine, had not communicated with Grand Lodge in some years. While in Scotland, M.W. Bro. Moffat met several Masons who visited the lodge in Jerusalem. Their comments were positive, but M.W. Bro. Moffat was concerned about the regularity of the lodge proceedings.

Questions of jurisprudence consume the time of every Grand Master. M.W. Bro. Moffat commented "When the brethren get into a real old-fashioned, genuine snarl, it requires the greatest care, prudence and judgment to set matters right again." He then shared details of several cases where he was called to render a decision.

Financial considerations also are the concern of every Grand Master. M.W. Bro. Moffat spent time in in Address to express concern about the number of members who were not paying dues, in some cases for years. He recommended that Masons must be in good standing with a Craft Lodge to become and remain a member in other Masonic bodies or rites.

M.W. Bro. Moffat called for adoption of a uniform set of By-laws for lodges. Although Grand Lodge had approved a set of By-Laws prepared by R.W. Bro. Hugh Murray (later to be elected the 11th Grand Master), some lodges continue to submit By-Laws that are not in accord with that uniform code.

As Past Grand Master



Ontario Masons

Moffat Lodge No. 399 was named to honour M.W. Bro. James Moffat when it was formed and Warranted in 1882.

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?* (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) Robertson, J.R., '*The History of Freemasonry in Canada from its Introduction in 1749*', (1900), George N. Morang & Company.
- (8) Runnalls, J. Lawrence (1979) *Our Past Grand Masters* privately published
- (9) Family information confirmed on Ancestry.com, FindAGrave.com, and Accessgenealogy.com. Accessed December 2021
- (10) London Public Library Digital Collection, accessed August 2024
- (11) Jenkyns, Michael *History of Tuscan Lodge No. 195. History of St. John's Lodge No. 20. History of Moffat Lodge No. 399.*
- (12) *History of the County of Middlesex, Canada.* (1889) W.A. & C.L. Goodspeed, Publishers. Toronto and London.
- (13) Obituary from the London Free Press, September 19, 1894