

Nelson Collins Hart, MA, LL.D. (Hon.)

Grand Master (1951 – 1953) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons
of Canada in the Province of Ontario



Photo from the Grand Lodge

(1888 - 1959)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

Nelson Collins Hart was born on June 11, 1888, in Ops Township, Victoria County. He was educated at a one-room rural school, S.S. No. 12, at Ops, and at the Omemee High School and Lindsay Collegiate Institute. He graduated from the University of Toronto with BA degree in 1915 and then earned his MA in 1916.

Before entering the University of Toronto, he taught public school from 1908 – 1911. Immediately after graduation from university he worked as a bacteriologist with British Acetones in Toronto.

In 1919 Nelson C. Hart joined the University of Western Ontario (UWO) as a lecturer and in 1924 was appointed Professor of Botany and head of the Department. For twenty-



five years he served as Chairman of the Convocation Committee and Marshall of all Convocation processions. Professor Hart was examiner-in-Chief for botany and zoology for the Ontario Department of Education 1924 - 1926 and was a member of the Special Revising Board for the Department since 1941. Professor Hart retired from UWO in 1956.

He was named a Fellow of the American Geographical Society in 1931.

The Professor was one of the founders of the Western Ontario Secondary Schools' Association (W.O.S.S.A.) and was its honorary secretary for ten years. Under his care this Association grew to be a flourishing organization which promoted competition in athletics, sports, public speaking and debating in Western Ontario.

At the level of university athletics, he was a member of the University of Western Ontario Athletic Association for almost thirty years and represented UWO on the Canadian Intercollegiate Athletic Union (CIAU) for twenty-five years. He was a member of the Board of Reference of the CIAU and in 1950 - 1951 was its president.

His reputation as a sportsman is wider than Western Ontario and the Intercollegiate Union, for he was Honorary Secretary of the Canadian Olympic Association from 1938 through 1949. He was Vice-President, Chairman of the Publicity Committee and Editor of the Bulletin of the Canadian Olympic Association. Nelson C. Hart was named the Chef de Mission of the Canadian Olympic Team which competed at the London 1948 Olympics. On his return, Professor N. C. Hart donated a large number of items dealing with Canada at the Olympic Games to the UWO Library.

His particular interests have been curling and lawn bowling. In 1939, he and his partner won the Doubles Championship of the Provincial Lawn Bowling Association. He has served as president of the Provincial Lawn Bowling Association of Ontario and of the Canadian Lawn Bowling Council. In the national council he held the office of Official Umpire.

Professor Hart served with the Canadian Officers Training Corps during two world wars and was the commanding officer of UWO's University Naval Training Division from 1943 onwards. He held the rank of Commander in the Royal Canadian Navy Reserve (RCN(R)), considered a Special Branch of the Navy. He was attached to the Shore Establishment known as H.M.C.S. Prevost, in London, Ontario.

He married Marjorie Ross (1894 - 1985) of London on December 29, 1926, and they had two daughters, Sheila and Helen. The family was active in the Methodist Church and after Church Union in 1925, they became members of First-St. Andrew's United Church of London.

After a very short illness, M. W. Bro. Nelson Collins Hart died on December 7, 1959.

A Masonic Memorial Service was led by Tuscan Lodge No. 195 and attended by Grand Lodge officers including the Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Grand Secretary and many Masons of the jurisdiction.

M.W. Bro. Nelson Collins Hart is interred at Woodlawn Cemetery, London, in a plot shared by his wife's family. When he passed away, there were no Masonic markings on the monument for his grave. On June 9, 2012, a Masonic plaque was added to his grave with members of his family present. M.W. Bro. Bill Pellow presided over the ceremony at Woodlawn Cemetery. The plaque and dedication ceremony were coordinated by members of The Tuscan Lodge No. 195.

A portrait of M.W. Bro. Nelson Collins Hart wearing the regalia of a Grand Master is displayed at the London Masonic Centre. The artist, June McCormack, completed the portrait in 1958. A plaque to honour the Masonic career of M.W. Bro. Hart was added to the frame of the portrait by members of The Tuscan Lodge No. 195.

Masonic Career

He was initiated on July 2, 1914, passed on August 6, 1914, and raised on September 3, 1914, at Lorne Lodge No. 375, Omemee. In 1920 he affiliated with The Tuscan Lodge No. 195, London, and served as Worshipful Master in 1929. He was elected as District Deputy Grand Master of London District for 1938 – 1939. His report on the twenty-three lodges under his care was complimentary to the quality of ritual work. There were three District lodges of instruction were held to exemplify the three degrees. DDGM Hart was concerned that some lodge buildings were not insured, and several secretaries and treasurers were not bonded. About one hundred applications for initiation were received across London District during his term.

He served on the Board of General Purposes from 1940 – 1949, serving as Chairman of the Printing Committee, and then seven years as Chairman of the Masonic Education Committee.

He was elected Deputy Grand Master for the 1949 – 1950 and 1950 – 1951 terms. He was elected the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario for the 1951 – 1952 and 1952 – 1953 terms.

M.W. Bro. Nelson C. Hart was a member of the Royal Arch Masons.

In Scottish Rite, he was a member of London Lodge of Perfection and served as Thrice Puissant Grand Master. He was a member of London Sovereign Chapter of Rose Croix where he served as Most Worshipful Sovereign. And he was a member of Moore Sovereign Consistory, Hamilton, and was coroneted as an Honorary 33° by the Supreme Council.

He became a member of the Royal Order of Scotland in 1947.

M.W. Bro. Hart was the Grand Representative of the Grand Lodge of California near our Grand Lodge.

As Grand Master

As the 45th Grand Master M.W. Bro. Nelson Collins Hart began his Address he noted the ongoing conflicts in the world. The Korean War was underway, the 'Cold War' was flaring up in unexpected places, and a general tension existed. This led to increasing taxation, "incessant propaganda which is far from peaceful and conciliatory", and uncertainty. To this, M.W. Bro. Hart added that: "The tendency has been to emphasize the importance of financial, or other material rewards, and there seems to have been a slackening of interest in things which are fundamental in the development of the church, the home and the community." He continued and quoted both Edward Gibbon in his "*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*", and Bro. Joseph Fort Newton as he expanded on his view of the world.

M.W. Bro. Hart noted in 1953 that "The peoples of the world are slowly learning that the spirit of 'live and let live' must prevail, and that, with increasing education and enlightenment, the underprivileged and undeveloped countries must no longer suffer from selfish and coercive exploitation. Surely it should be possible for the great nations of the world to relinquish some of their national pride, prestige and prejudice in the interests of the peaceful pursuits of mankind."

Turning to his role as Grand Master, he proclaimed: "There is a role for Masonry in the re-birth of peace and in the recovery of a clear concept of a proper basis for a full and satisfactory life. Our Fraternity is founded on a belief in the existence and guidance of a Supreme Being, on the brotherhood of Man, and on the recognition of personal liberty. There are over three and one half millions of Masons on this continent. What a tremendous influence for good they can exert by precept and example!" He reminded his audience of the "objective of our Craft – 'To be happy ourselves and to communicate that happiness to others'."

M.W. Bro. Hart had the sad duty to announce the death of King George VI. King George VI was initiated in Navy Lodge No. 2612, London, England, in December, 1919. He affiliated with Glamis Lodge No. 99, Scotland, and was installed as Grand Master Mason of Scotland on November 30th, 1936. On June 30th, 1937, he was invested as a Past Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England. Grand Master Hart noted that "He was an active and well-skilled member of our Fraternity, and believed it to be an important instrument for the promotion of good."

With the Grand Secretary, M.W. Bro. Nelson C. Hart attended the Especial Communication of the United Grand Lodge of England for the Installation of the Grand Master, the Earl of Scarbrough, at the Royal Albert Hall, London, England, on the 6th of November, 1951. M.W. Bro. Hart was one of only five brethren requested to address the



United Grand Lodge of England with greetings, salutations and congratulations to the new Grand Master.

M.W. Bro. Hart had the sad duty to announce the death of Past Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Roderick Barnard Dargavel, who died on September 21, 1952.

Grand Master Hart acknowledged the accession to the throne of Queen Elizabeth II. Sincere expressions of loyalty and allegiance were sent to her.

Grand Masters are the final arbiters of jurisprudence in Masonry. Grand Master Hart presented the details of several cases where disciplinary actions, including suspensions, were given. There were several instances of jurisdictional violations; one involved a man living in Quebec improperly seeking initiation by a lodge in Ontario; another of a man with a cottage in the Muskoka area being rejected by a lodge in the area three times and then being accepted for initiation by a lodge in Toronto that was unaware of the prior rejections. Grand Master Hart went on to remind the audience that "Our Fraternity can maintain its reputation for being composed of good men only by a careful screening of all petitioners. In their interest and enthusiasm for the Order, members must not neglect to assure themselves of the reliability of all petitioners, and our Lodge must undertake serious and thorough investigation."

Disciplinary actions by Grand Master Hart included: a severe reprimand to a new Mason who wrote out a portion of the ritual; suspensions of several brethren involved in mis-representing the residence of a man seeking initiation; a declaration that balloting for candidates in a lodge was 'null and void' because several members broke the secrecy of the ballot; and investigations of un-Masonic conduct were started in several instances. An instance of canvassing for office by a candidate for a Grand Lodge office was promptly dealt with through a reprimand and instruction by Grand Master Hart to discontinue this action, which the Mason accepted.

Examples of the use of Masonic Halls for non-Masonic events were reported to the Grand Master. M.W. Bro. Hart stated: "Your Grand Master, therefore, insists that all those who are in control of Masonic properties exercise the greatest care in permitting their use by organizations and associations which are not associated with our Fraternity, and which might tend to create an unfavorable reputation of Masonry. All doubtful cases must be submitted to the Grand Master for review and decision."

With regards to the ceremonies of Masonry, M.W. Bro. Hart gave particular attention to the Installation of the Worshipful Master. In his comments he said: "It is my opinion that the Past Masters of each Lodge should consider it a privilege and duty to install the Worshipful Master and invest the other officers each year. They should take especial pride in rehearsing and doing this work in a highly efficient manner." And to this he added: "The custom of inviting the District Deputy Grand Master and other Present or Past Grand Lodge Officers to install and invest the officers of Constituent

Lodges should be curtailed. It is an admission of inability, or indolence, or indifference by the Lodge, and places a burden on the District Deputy Grand Master, which he should never have to assume.”

Revisions to the Masonic Funeral Services were prepared by R.W. Bro. W.L. Wright, a Bishop in the Anglican Church and later to become the Grand Master for 1955 through 1957. The recommendation to permit the Masonic Funeral Service to be offered to any Mason regardless of rank, and that when the depositing of the evergreen by all the assembled brethren may be difficult or inconvenient, then it is acceptable for the Worshipful Master to perform this task alone.

M.W. Bro. Hart raised the administrative challenge of re-distribution of some Districts. He directed that any proposed changes to Districts should be submitted through the Grand Secretary to the Board of General Purposes for consideration.

Grand Master Hart was concerned that some Masonic buildings were being used by non-Masonic organizations. He reminded the audience of several previous rulings on the matter. He emphasized that ignoring these decisions could expose members to Masonic censure.

M.W. Bro. Hart shared with his audience that he was aware of criticisms of Freemasonry. He responded to the criticism that Masonry is a religion. He asserted: “Every brother of the Craft should remember that Masonry makes no claim to be a Religion, However, it is based on the fundamental principles and tenets which form the foundations of all great beliefs. It is, therefore, interdenominational in its aspects, and might well become a potent factor in the development of friendliness and peaceful relations between various peoples throughout the world. Masons should attempt to meet this criticism by an increased adherence to their duties as members of those religious organizations and denominations to which they give support.” He added a general observation that: “Masonry and other organizations interested in moral, social and spiritual improvement will be criticized from time to time, and not much can be done about it. However, members of the Fraternity can meet all criticisms by meeting the requirements of the fundamentals of the Order through worthy deeds and upright conduct.”

As he concluded his Address he continued to exhort his audience to fulfil the precepts of Masonry. He stated “may I again emphasize the great opportunities which we, as Masons, have for the betterment of ourselves and the influencing of society in good works. It is not too pessimistic to assert that our religious organizations need support and encouragement. They need our assistance in their attempts to combat the material tendencies which are disrupting our fundamental principles.”

As Past Grand Master

M.W. Bro. Nelson C. Hart, on June 8th, 1955, was made an Honorary Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alberta, and on June 16th, 1955, an Honorary Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Saskatchewan.

The Nelson C. Hart Trophy is awarded annually to the university accumulating the highest point score in the men's competition of the U SPORTS National Swimming Championship. The trophy was originally presented for competition at the University of Western Ontario Relays and was rededicated in 1965. Nelson C. Hart, who passed away in 1959, was a Professor of Botany at the Western University, President of the Amateur Athletic Association of Canada, Secretary of the Canadian Olympic Association and Manager of the 1948 Olympic Team, President of the Canadian Intercollegiate Sports Central from 1950 - 1951, and represented his university for 25 years. (USPORTS is the successor organization to CIAU, Canadian Intercollegiate Sports, and other university-level athletic organizations.)

Nelson C. Hart was named to the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame in 1960, in the category of 'Builder'. The Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame honours 'Builders' as those Olympic figures influential in the development of specific sports, or the Canadian Olympic Movement as a whole.

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) 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
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- (9) USPORTS website <https://en.usports.ca/landing/index> Accessed November 2024
- (10) Canadian Olympic Committee <https://olympic.ca/2011/03/18/canadas-olympic-heroes-live-forever-in-hall-of-fame/> Accessed November 2024
- (11) University of Western Ontario Academic Calendar, several years: 1922, 1928, 1943, 1950.
- (12) The Canadian Navy List for July 1949 (1949) Department of Nation Defence, Ottawa.