

James Seymour

Grand Master (1871 – 1872) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario

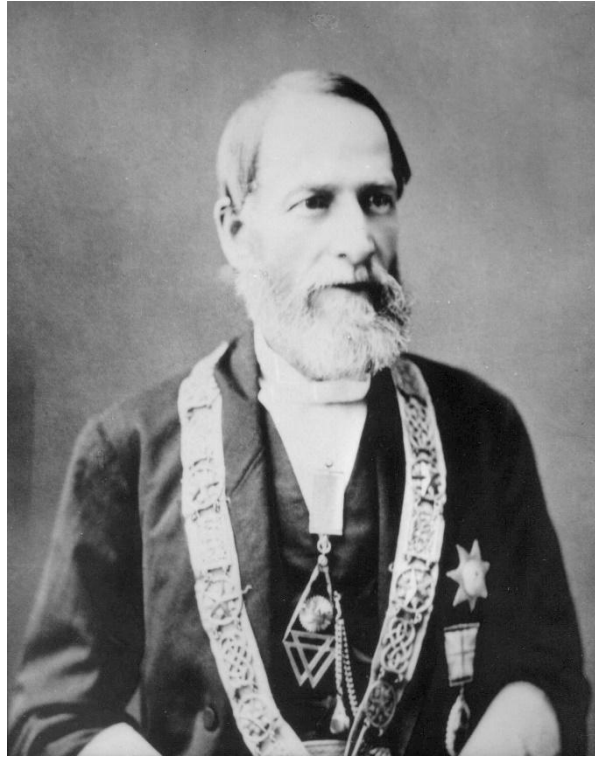


Photo from Grand Lodge

(1825 – 1888)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

James Seymour was born in Limerick, Ireland, on November 5, 1825, and came to Halifax in 1828, where he remained for some years. In the late 1840s he was in Hamilton and became associated with the *Toronto Globe* and the *Hamilton Spectator* newspapers. While working for the *Spectator* he met Elizabeth Murton (1827 – 1903), daughter of John Walter Murton. Later, he married her. Elizabeth's father was a Mason and founder of Murton Lodge of Perfection (Scottish Rite) which was named to honour him. There were eight children by this marriage, one boy and seven girls. In 1853, James Seymour purchased the *Constitutional Newspaper* in St. Catharines and was editor and publisher until 1871. This was a very influential weekly newspaper. As the owner and editor, James Seymour joined with others in the field of journalism to found the Canadian Press Association.



James Seymour joined with others in the district around St. Catharines to organize a Loyal Canadian Society for social and benevolent purposes. At their organizing meeting in January of 1847, they decided to meet annually on the 13th of October, the anniversary of the Battle of Queenston. Sir Allan Napier MacNab consented to be the patron of the Society. James Seymour was elected to a term as President of the Loyal Canadian Society in 1868.

In 1871, he received an appointment from the Federal Government as Collector of Internal Revenue which became his career until his death.

James and Elizabeth Seymour's only son, Joseph Richard Seymour (1858 - 1933), was a druggist in St. Catharines. Bro. Joseph Richard Seymour was a member of Temple Lodge, No. 296, St. Catharines, and was elected Master in 1887, 1888, and 1889. In 1892, he moved to Vancouver. He followed his father's footsteps in Masonry and became a Mason of great renown. Bro. Joseph Richard Seymour is recognized for pioneering and organizing Scottish Rite Masonry for the Province of British Columbia.

In religion, James Seymour was a Methodist and loved to see all his family in St. Paul Street Methodist Church of which he was a member. He was a regular attendant for church devotions.

It was noted that "although suffering for a number of years with a lung condition, his spirit was never quenched and his energy and devotion to the fraternity were unimpaired." He died on January 9, 1888, at the age of 64 years.

At the time of his death, it was reported that "the respect and esteem in which he was held by his fellow citizens was shown in a marked degree by the large attendance at his funeral and by the throngs which lined the streets through which the solemn procession passed to the city of the dead. A very large number of Grand Officers and members of the fraternity attended the last rites accorded to our distinguished brother." M.W. Bro. Hugh Murray, P.G.M., conducted the full Masonic Memorial ceremonies, assisted by M.W. Otto Klotz, P.G.M.(Hon).

M.W. Bro. James Seymour is buried in Victoria Lawn Cemetery, St. Catharines. The monument to mark the grave is simple, without Masonic symbols.

Masonic Career

Mr. James Seymour was initiated into Masonry in The Barton Lodge No. 6. Hamilton, on February 13, 1850.

He was a charter member of St. John's Lodge, No. 231 IC, now No. 40 G.R.C., whose charter was dated July 2, 1852. He was one of the first officers and was invested as Junior



Deacon. He was also an honorary member of Niagara Lodge No. 2, being No. 103 on the Lodge's register of members. After his move to St. Catharines, he affiliated with St. George's Lodge, No. 15, on July 7, 1857. Almost immediately a group of St. George's members, headed by the lodge secretary, Bro. Wm. McGhie, along with Bro. James Seymour and Past Master Fred Parsons, began meeting to form a new lodge. Success was soon attained and Maple Leaf Lodge, No. 103, St. Catharines, received its charter on July 29, 1858. Bro. James Seymour was named in the charter to the office of Junior Warden.

He was Worshipful Master of Maple Leaf Lodge No. 103 for 1860, being installed December 27, 1859. He was Treasurer for Maple Leaf Lodge from 1862 through to 1865.

Maple Leaf Lodge No. 103 has been active in the area since its formation. In 1870, on the initiative of some brethren of Maple Leaf Lodge, Mountain Lodge, No. 221, Thorold, was constituted. And in 1872 Seymour Lodge, No. 277, Port Dalhousie (now in St. Catharines), was similarly formed. Both have prospered.

In 1860 M.W. Bro. Seymour was appointed the Grand Junior Deacon. This was followed in 1861 with an election to the office of Grand Junior Warden. In 1863 he was elected to the Board of General Purposes.

He was elected DDGM for 1863 - 1864 and again in 1866 - 1867 for Hamilton District.

In 1868, he was elected Deputy Grand Master and re-elected in 1869. M.W. Bro. James Seymour was elected the fifth Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Canada in 1871. He served as Grand Master for only one year. The complexity and difficulties with what is termed 'The Quebec Question' were such that Past Grand Master M.W. Bro. Wm. Mercer Wilson was prevailed upon to return to the office of Grand Master, to which he was duly elected in 1872.

Through 1870, a group of Masons worked toward the organization of a company to build a Masonic Temple at 23 Centre Street, St. Catharines. One of the leaders of the movement was M.W. Bro. James Seymour. An agreement was found in the local registry office dated January 12, 1871, to form the Masonic Association of St. Catharines to oversee the construction of the new Masonic Hall. The completed Masonic Hall continues today.

In 1861, members of the two lodges who had attained the rank of Royal Arch Masons, joined together to found Mount Moriah Chapter No. 19, in St. Catharines. M.W. Bro. James Seymour became the First Principal of Mount Moriah Chapter for 1861 - 1862. Dr. Edwin Goodman of Maple Leaf and Dr. Theophilus Mack of St. George's Lodge were also charter members. M.W. Bro. Seymour worked diligently on behalf of the Grand Chapter



of Royal Arch Masons of Canada and was elected as Grand First Principal of Royal Arch Masons in 1874.

In Knights Templar, he was consecrated in Godfrey de Bouillon Preceptory, Hamilton. In 1866, Sir Kt. James Seymour, along with many of the charter members of Mount Moriah Chapter No. 19 became charter members and founded Plantagenet Preceptory No. 8. Sr. Kt. Seymour was installed as the charter Eminent Commander (Presiding Preceptor) in 1866 and re-elected for the year 1867. He was treasurer for Plantagenet Preceptory for each of the years 1868, 1869, 1870, 1873, 1874, and 1875. He was appointed as Very Eminent Knight in 1874. He was elected as Provincial Grand Prior several years later.

M.W. Bro. James Seymour held the position as Representative of the Grand Lodge of Mississippi.

A grandson of M.W. Bro. James Seymour, Bro. Murton Seymour was named after Bro. John Walter Murton. Bro. John Murton was the father-in-law of M.W. Bro. James Seymour and is honoured as a founder of Scottish Rite in Canada. On December 7, 1966, Bro. Murton Seymour presented Seymour Lodge No. 277 with the Master's Chair in memory of his grandfather who had founded the lodge in 1872.

A large portrait of M. W. Bro. James Seymour hangs in the Masonic Hall, Gertrude and Main Streets in St. Catharines. This picture had hung in the Masonic Temple, Davenport Road and Yonge Street, Toronto for almost a century and was given to Seymour Lodge No. 277, St. Catharines in 1963.

As Grand Master

Our fifth Grand Master had to deal with a number of significant issues. The state of Freemasonry in Ontario and Quebec was unsettled. This had been the case since the Grand Lodge of Canada was instituted and included some lodges in Quebec. There were active efforts to establish a Grand Lodge of Quebec. Many Grand Lodges in the United States devoted pages in their annual proceedings to describe the ongoing situation. There were ongoing discussions between representatives of the Grand Lodge of Quebec and the Grand Lodge of Canada to arrive at an amicable agreement. These included travel and joint meetings as well as letters. But during the term of M.W. Bro. Seymour the negotiations were suddenly broken off. It wasn't until February 17, 1874, that delegates from Quebec and Ontario reached an agreement and amity was achieved.

During his one-year term and within his own jurisdiction, M.W. Bro. Seymour granted dispensations for 21 new lodges. Seymour Lodge No. 272, Ancaster, (Warrant No. 272 was issued for Seymour Lodge on July 11, 1872) was named in his honour.



One cornerstone ceremony was reported in a newspaper of the day as well as the Grand Lodge Annual Proceedings. The foundation stone of the Great Western Air Line Bridge crossing the Grand River at Cayuga was laid in place with Masonic honours led by M.W. Bro. James Seymour, with M.W. Bro. Thomas B. Harris, and members from lodges in Cayuga, Dunnville, Caledonia, and York. The event was so well attended that businesses in the town were closed for the occasion.

As a Past Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Seymour was a member of a committee that was given responsibility for consultations on the Ritual.

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- (5) McLeod, Wallace editor, *Whence Come We?* (Hamilton, Grand Lodge of A.F.&A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario, 1980)
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