

M.W. Bro. Henry Holgate Watson: Rare Achievement
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Long service to the Craft is an achievement both admired and celebrated among the Brethren. There are, as we know, various kinds of long service, from the simple, but commendable, continuous membership and participation in ones Lodge, through to active service as an officer or committee member over many years. In the latter category, there is the rare achievement of M.W. Bro. Henry (Harry) Holgate Watson who served as a Grand Lodge Officer for an incredible forty-nine years. So, you may ask, how was this possible?

H.H. Watson was born in Milton, Ontario, on December 26, 1867. He was educated at Milton Public School, Upper Canada College, the Ontario School of Pharmacy. He moved to Vancouver in 1889 to work for H. McDowell & Co., Druggists. On April 25, 1892, H.H. Watson was initiated in Cascade Lodge No. 12. On July 18, he was raised a Master Mason. Only one year later, he became Secretary of Cascade Lodge, a position he held for two years. In 1895 he was J.W., then S.W. in 1896, and Worshipful Master in 1897. He served neither as Junior Grand Warden nor Senior Grand Warden, but was elected Deputy Grand Master in 1899. He was installed as the twenty-second Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia on June 23, 1900, serving until June 21, 1901. One year later, in June 1902, he was elected Grand Treasurer, a position he held for an astonishing forty-seven years. He entered the G.L. Above on January 19, 1949.

M.W. Bro. Watson's tenure as Grand Master was eventful. In 1901, he ruled that Lodges must be at labour when conferring Degrees. This Ruling was prompted by a question from Cumberland Lodge No. 26: "Is it legal to do the work of the second section of the Master Mason's Degree while the Lodge is at refreshment?" The Grand Master's answer: "The Lodge must be at labor while conferring degrees." This official answer became a Ruling, published in the Book of Constitutions and Regulations ever since it was made in 1901. Another interesting event during M.W. Bro. Watson's year took place on March 18, 1901, when he exercised his prerogative and assumed the Master's Chair in his own Lodge. Then, he objected to the presence of a Brother who had written an "unmasonic letter" to a local newspaper criticizing Masonic Lodges in Vancouver. The Grand Master put the Lodge at refreshment, and asked the said Brother to leave. When the Brother wished to speak, M.W. Bro. Watson ruled him out of order, and the Brother retired from the Lodge room. The Grand Master then returned the gavel to the Worshipful Master, and the Lodge resumed labour.

M.W. Bro. Watson's Masonic career was also devoted to a number of concordant bodies. He was Exalted in Vancouver Chapter No. 2, Royal Arch Masons, and served as First Principal in 1894, then as Grand First Principal of British Columbia. Active in the Knights Templar, he was Presiding Officer of Columbia Preceptory No. 34 in 1898

and, later, served as Provincial Prior. In January 1909 M.E. Companion Watson was given the Honorary Rank of Past Grand Zerubbabel by the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario. He was an Active Member, 33 Degrees, of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Canada, and Deputy for the Province of British Columbia. Noble Watson was one of the early initiates into Gizeh Shriners. He was a Knight and Most Puissant Sovereign (1927) in Western Canada Conclave No. 25, Red Cross of Constantine (Scottish Constitution), Victoria. He also served as Provincial Grand Master, Royal Order of Scotland, from 1933 until 1949.

This exemplary Freemason was also a civic leader. He served two terms as a Member of the Legislature, Province of British Columbia, in 1909 and 1912. As a professional pharmacist and businessman, he had an interest in two successful drug stores in Vancouver.

Perhaps the finest tribute given to M.W. Bro. Henry Holgate Watson was that of V.W. Bro. John T. Marshall, Grand Historian, when he wrote, "It is doubtful whether such a [Masonic] career has ever been equalled, or that it will be ever again."

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