



GRAND CHAPTER ROYAL ARCH MASONS OF NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR



AS A RECIPIENT OF THE MOSES MUNROE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE JEWEL, IT IS FELT, BY THIS GRAND CHAPTER, THAT YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF SOME OF THE HISTORY OF THE MAN AFTER WHOM THIS AWARD HAS BEEN NAMED. THE FOLLOWING IS AN ACCOUNT OF THIS DISTINGUISHED MASON.

Moses Munroe was born in Moria, County Down, Ireland in 1842. He was educated at the Royal School, Armagh and Queen College, Galway. On completion of his education, he worked with a firm which manufactured lines and cambric goods. In 1861, at the age of 19 years, he came to St. John's, Newfoundland under the sponsorship of his uncle, the Reverend Moses Harvey, who was a Presbyterian Minister.

He started work with the firm McBride and Kerr as a clerk and salesman, and soon advanced to the position of Manager and Buyer. The firm was purchased in 1869 by James Goodfellow, and then operated as Goodfellow and Co., and, in June, 1870 Moses Munroe was made a Junior Partner. Thus began an illustrious business career which lasted until December 10, 1894 when Newfoundland's two private banks collapsed.

In 1871, Moses Munroe married Jessie McMurdo, the daughter of Thomas McMurdo, a prosperous drug store owner. In 1873, he established his own dry goods and fishery supply business on Water Street in St. John's. The business became a success, supplying merchants and fishermen throughout the Island and Labrador. In 1885, he became involved in the Bank Fishery by hiring ships and their crews from the Burin Peninsula. In 1885, he outfitted twelve vessels with crews of 120, and four years later, the number had risen to 40 vessels carrying 500 men who caught 30,000 quintals of fish. He also invested with other merchants in the West Coast Lobster Factories.

Moses Munroe was also reported to have invested in many joint stock companies. His major interests lay in The Newfoundland Boot and Shoe Factory (1875), the Newfoundland Pioneer Woolen Co. (1881), the Colonial Cordage Co. (1882), the St. John's Electric Light Co. (1885), and the Atlantic Bridge Co. (1885). He was a leading force behind the establishment of the Atlantic Hotel which opened in 1885.

In 1884, he was appointed to the Legislative Council, where he fought against denominational education. He also envisioned a cross-country railway, and did all he could to have it built. In 1888, he won election as councillor for Ward 3 of the newly established Municipal Council of St. John's. He quickly established his presence, and dominated Council affairs. The government of the day claimed that he had a conflict of interest because he was Secretary of the St. John's Electric Co., and Council had a contract with the company for street lights. During his term on Council, he took great pride in his contribution to the general improvements around the city, including construction of a new sewer system, the establishment of Bannerman and Victoria Parks, widening of streets, and construction of sidewalks in the commercial district. After 1890, there was no formal opposition party, and Moses Munroe was generally acknowledged as a leading opponent of the government. In 1895, he filed a petition in the Supreme Court under the 1889 Corrupt Practices Act, charging certain Government Members with illegal use of public funds during the campaign. Subsequent judgment of the court led to the unseating of Whiteway, Morris, and other Members, forcing the resignation of the Government.

Considering the amount of time taken up in such an illustrious business and public career, it is a wonder that Moses Munroe had time for a Masonic career. However, he was Initiated into St. John's Lodge No. 579 on June 3, 1864. He was passed and raised in this Lodge, took Office in the Lodge, and on December 27, 1869 was installed as Master. During his term as Master, the question of building a Masonic Temple came before the Lodge, and on March 9, 1870, he appointed a committee of Bro. G. G. Geddes, Wor. Bro. R.T. Rankin and himself to discuss it with other Lodges. Discussions took place with committees from Avalon Lodge and Lodge Tasker. One Lodge purchased some land, but it was not agreeable to the other Lodges. With differences of opinion, it took time before the work of the committee bore fruit. However, in 1885, a Temple was built on Long's Hill. The building was built of wood. It had, for lighting, Mercury Arc Lamps, which were installed by St.

John's Electric Light Co. without cost, and at no cost for operations. (The President of St. John's Electric Light Co. was Rt Wor. Bro. A. McKay, PDGM, S.C.; the Secretary was Wor. Bro. Moses Munroe; and all the other Directors were Masons). In 1870, the District Grand Lodge was formed with Rt Wor. Bro. J. Shannon Clift as District Grand Master, and he appointed Wor. Bro. Moses Munroe as District Grand Director of Ceremonies.

Bro. Moses Munroe joined St. John's Chapter No. 579 RAM, and in 1875 he became the First Principal of the Chapter. A number of the Companions who traveled to Canada and the United States visited various other Chapters, but they often found they had to retire when the Chapters were conferring degrees which they did not have. They requested that Ex. Comp. Munroe inquire if the degrees could not be conferred in the St. John's Chapter. However, it was discovered that the Grand Chapter of England did not recognize the Degrees of Mark Master Mason, Past Master, or Most Excellent Master. After much correspondence with the Grand Scribe of England and the Grand Secretary of Grand Chapter of Nova Scotia, the St. John's Chapter No. 579 RAM withdrew its allegiance to England, and requested a Charter from the Grand Chapter of Nova Scotia. Because Nova Scotia already had a St. John's Chapter No. 8, it was felt to be necessary to change the name of the Newfoundland Chapter. Subsequently, it was changed to Shannon Chapter No. 9 in honor of Rt Wor. Bro. J. Shannon Clift, D.G.M. who was the First Principal of St. John's Chapter. Ex. Comp. Moses Munroe was installed as the first Most Excellent High Priest of Shannon Chapter, and the next year, 1877, he was appointed by the Grand High Priest as his Representative in Newfoundland, a position he held for many years. He was given the Honorary Rank of Past Grand Scribe.

After the new Temple was opened in 1885, Rt Ex Comp. Moses Munroe presented the Chapter with three chairs for the principal officers, and, in a covering letter to the Chapter, he requested that the Companions not to disclose outside the Chapter who gave these chairs. Rt Ex Comp. Munroe was a charitable man who did not let his right hand know what his left hand was doing.

In 1876, at a meeting of District Grand Lodge, Wor. Bro. Munroe moved that a delegation, consisting of two members elected from each Lodge, should meet with a similar delegation from Lodges under the Scottish Constitution to enquire into the practicality and desirability of forming a Grand Lodge of Newfoundland. Much discussion took place, and some progress was made.

Yet, there was opposition from some Lodges. At a meeting of District Grand Lodge, Wor. Bro. Munroe made a report from the committee and stated that they recommended the founding of a Grand Lodge of Newfoundland. The District Grand Master stated that it was not an activity report, and that it did not give any information on its findings. This caused quite a debate in District Grand Lodge. The District Grand Master stood firm, and thus ended the debate on a Grand Lodge of Newfoundland.

It is worthy of note that it took over one hundred years from that time for a Grand Lodge of Newfoundland to be erected, and it goes to show that Rt Ex Comp. Moses Munroe was a hundred years ahead of his time in his Masonic ideas.

In 1878, Wor. Bro. Munroe was appointed District Grand Senior Deacon.

In 1881, he was installed as Master of his Lodge for a second time.

In 1890, the District Grand Master appointed Wor. Bro. Munroe as his Deputy Dist Grand Master

In 1894, Wor. Bro. Munroe took an active part in the laying of the corner stone for the former Masonic Temple on Cathedral Street in St. John's.

In February of 1895, because of health reasons, Rt Ex Comp. Munroe left for vacation in his native Ireland. He returned in April of 1895, and despite appearance of having fully recovered, on May 19, 1895, he suffered another stroke and died. His funeral was one of the biggest ever seen in St. John's up to that time. He was buried in the General Protestant Cemetery, Waterford Bridge Road. His estate was probated in August, 1895, and was valued at \$10,500. Two years later, the residents of St. John's established a memorial to him in Victoria Park, which he had helped to establish during his term as Municipal Councilor. The inscription in part read, "Erected by voluntary subscription of all classes and denominations as a token of respect and esteem with which they cherished his memory".