

J. W. HARRIS

John Walter Harris was born in the Township of Oxford, County of Grenville, Ontario, on February 26th, 1845. His father, John Harris, and his mother, Jane (Jones) Harris, were born in Ireland, but came to Canada early in life. He received his primary education at the Public School at Oxford, and at Grammar School at Kemptville. At Toronto he took a special course in mathematics, probably at the Normal School or the University.

Deciding upon Surveying and Engineering as his vocation, he became articled to his mother's brother, the late Francis Jones, P.L.S., of Kemptville, (see Report, 1916), and qualified as a Provincial Land Surveyor on October 6th, 1866.

Mr. Harris apparently did not practise his profession in Eastern Ontario, but from 1867 to 1870 he conducted a public and graded school in the Western States. In Iowa he devised and successfully taught an abbreviated system of making arithmetical calculations, popularly known as lightning calculations, and the author became known as the Lightning Calculator.

In 1871, he returned to this province and engaged in the lumber manufacturing business at Batchewanning, Lake Superior.

On August 3rd, 1873, Mr. Harris landed at Fort Garry, one year before the place was incorporated as Winnipeg.

In 1872, he had received his commission as a Dominion Land Surveyor, and was employed on various Government Surveys including surveys of Indian Reserves at Fort Alexander and at St. Peters, also Red River Valley settlements.



He was also employed as Drainage Engineer for the Province of Manitoba.

In 1879, he retired from the employ of the Government and opened a private office. In this year he made his first assessment for the City of Winnipeg. The population was then 4,113, valuation of real estate \$2,886,665 and personal property \$533,400.00.

In 1882, he accepted the position of City Surveyor and Assessment Commissioner, taking the combined office at the solicitation of the City Council, a position he held until 1916 when he retired.

In 1890-1894, a special survey of the city was made under his supervision, which survey was afterwards extended to cover the greater city.

It is stated that the city never lost a cent at law as a result of faulty assessment.

In 1893, he introduced what became known as the business tax assessment which was in force for fifteen years and was adopted by the National Tax Association of the United States.

Mr. Harris was a member of the Engineering Institute of Canada, and a charter member of the Association of Manitoba Land Surveyors. He was President of the Association in 1907 and again in 1916. For twenty-one years, he was a member of the Board of Examiners, and for about twenty years was the secretary.

He was also a member of many other local societies and organizations. Since 1883 Mr. Harris was a Justice of the Peace.

Mr. Harris took an active interest in fraternal circles. He was a member of the Knights Templars, a noble of Mystic Shrine, etc., etc.

In 1913, the honor of "Past Grand Master" was conferred upon him by the Masonic Grand Lodge of Manitoba.

He was an ardent baseball enthusiast, and introduced the game to Winnipeg. About 1923 he was appointed to life membership in the Winnipeg Amateur Baseball Association. When the Industrial Exhibition flourished in Winnipeg, he was invariably called up to act as official time keeper for the athletic sports and horse racing.

In 1878, Mr. Harris married Susan E. Smith, of Iowa. On their honeymoon, she accompanied her husband on his

out-of-town surveys, mounted on a Pinto pony, with her knitting or crochet work. Two children were born of this union, but both died in infancy. His wife died in December, 1918, and on June 15th, 1921, he married Mrs. A. J. Millions, of Boissevain, Man., who survived him only a few months. Two nephews, Clifford Spencer, of Dubuque, Iowa, and William Scott, of Los Angeles, survive.

Although Mr. Harris did not practise in the Province of Ontario, his name has appeared on our register for many years, and for ten years or more he has taken an interest in the Veterans' luncheons. Every year he has favored us with an interesting and inspiring letter written in a beautiful coperplate hand, so seldom seen in this generation.

Mr. Harris died at Anvers Apartments, Fort Rouge, Winnipeg, on Saturday, March 19th, 1926. At his funeral on March 24th, His Grace Archbishop Matheson officiated, followed by burial honors of the Masonic Order.

An incident in his career is worth recording. About 1895, the Molson Bank, Winnipeg, was robbed of \$60,000, of which sum \$58,000 was found buried on C.P.R. right-of-way on east side of Louise Bridge. Following the evidence as it appeared in the newspapers, Mr. Harris concluded that the missing \$2,000 was hidden in a certain spot, and in less than an hour he recovered the amount.

Mr. Harris was a romantic figure in the history of the City of Winnipeg.