

Citizens – George H. Mason

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George Haynes Mason was the oldest of five children born to Lawrence Mason and Bessie Smith on 1 February 1862 in Lindsey, Ontario, Canada. He came to Montague at the age of eighteen where he worked as a bookkeeper for his uncles in the Mason Brother store. He lived with his grandparents, Richard and Emmeline Mason, and his uncle William in a house on Dowling Street, behind what is now the Montague Museum. He resided in Montague for twenty-eight years, until his untimely death.

On 3 September 1885, in anticipation of his upcoming marriage, George H. Mason purchased the house on the corner of Prospect and Custar from William Hunt and his wife Alice for the sum of \$1,000. Many people still refer to this house as the Mason House due in part to the fact that the house has what looks like a large “M” in the front peaks. However, this is purely coincidental and is more of a decorative element. Neighbors at the time were Samuel Henry (S. H.) Lasley, bank executive and Lafayette Gilbert (L. G.) Ripley, druggist. During Mason’s ownership of the house, a wrap-around porch was removed, and the house was raised allowing for a basement to be built underneath it. An enclosed porch was also added on the side of the house.

George married Emma Catherine Dalton on 4 November 1885 in Montague. They had two sons: George Dowling (1887-1961) and William Lawrence (1890-1971). Emma was born at the site of the original Dalton mill on Silver Creek in Whitehall Township on 20 November 1860, to early pioneers Peter Dalton and Maria Lanford. She came to Montague as a small girl when her father and uncle moved their mill to

the north side of White Lake, on what is now known as Dowie Point. She grew to womanhood in the family home, located on what was once known as the Pack Estate.

Mr. Mason was described as a progressive, energetic and bustling businessman and a very generous and tolerant man.

By 1886 George had taken over ownership of the Mason Brothers general store in Montague and moved the store to the building he renovated at the corner of Ferry and Bridge streets. While the Montague store was his primary focus, he also had branches for a time in Shelby and Ferry and seasonal stores at Michillinda (later Lakeside Inn) and Sylvan Beach (Wabaningo). He was an agent for the Goodrich Transit company and postmaster at both Sylvan Beach and Michillinda. In 1897 and 1904 he was elected president of the Village of Montague. Among his civic and social activities, George was a member of the Montague Masonic Lodge, of which his father-in-law Peter Dalton was a founding member.

In 1893 George's wife Emma took over ownership of the former Dalton mill property from her siblings and other heirs. The store was opened there in 1898 in one of the old mill buildings and serviced the resorts in the area including Sylvan Beach. As roads in the area were not much more than cart paths, Mr. Mason brought goods from his store in Montague by boat, a real convenience for the resorters.

In November 1899 it was announced that George H. Mason had purchased half interest in the Montague Iron Works. He had been negotiating for the purchase of Mr. N. P. Hendrie's interest in the Iron Works for some time. As George became involved in the Iron Works, his brother Fred ran the Montague store for a time, then Walter Nelson of Whitehall ran it until it was sold in 1901 to Fred Sweet, a long-time employee of the store. (The store, located at the corner of Ferry and Bridge streets at the time, later became Nesbit's.)

George enjoyed sailing and participated in races on White Lake in his sailboat, the Mermaid. In the early 1900s, a disagreement arose among members of the fledgling White Lake Yacht Club over the location of a new clubhouse. George Mason offered a compromise and, around 1906, leased some of the old Dalton mill property on White Lake to the Yacht Club for a clubhouse, on what some would consider very generous terms - a 49-year lease at one dollar per year with an option to buy within the first 10 years. A clubhouse was built on the property and it is still the home of the White Lake Yacht Club today.

George H. Mason was a friend of Prof. Joseph Sadony, who relayed two incidents about George at the end of Chapter V of his book "Gates of the Mind".

"For a while, my secretary Clarence Christian worked for George Mason, Sr., as office manager of the Montague Iron works. Mr. Mason became a very good friend, and I began to feel anxious about his health.

One day I told him that if he did not take a rest within three weeks, he would be forced to go to bed, and perhaps never get out of it again. But he could not see his way clear to abandon his work for a vacation, so he ended up at the hospital in Muskegon.

During this time Clarence carried on his work for Mr. Mason and stayed at his home. One day, Clarence became so nervous he asked me to stay with him. As I entered the parlor in Mr. Mason's home, I said, "Clarence, listen to this peculiar music that comes to my mind."

I sat at the piano and played what I heard in my mind. It was so solemn and sad that it affected both of us. Then suddenly I realized that I was playing a funeral march. I imagined seeing a coffin and the remains of George Mason. My eyes filled with tears, and when Clarence asked me what was the matter, I told him.

A few mornings later I was notified that if I did not come to see Mr. Mason before noon, I would not be able to see him alive. It was impossible for me to get there in the morning, because it was already past train time. I told Clarence, "George Mason shall live till I see him. He cannot die. He shall not die."

I did not "pray" that he might live. I "willed" him to live until I might see him once more. Perhaps my assurance was based on a feeling that he would. Perhaps he would have lived until afternoon, in any case. But in all probability George Mason himself had something to do with it. For when Clarence and Charley and I arrived at the hospital, at three forty-five that afternoon, he clasped my hand, and said, "I can go, now that you have come."

My vision and the music that I had played on the piano in Mr. Mason's living room were materialized at the funeral.

For some time previous to the illness of George Mason, the large iron safe in his office had not been locked fully. The tumblers had not been thrown over. But one night after his death, Mr. Mason's son accidentally closed and locked the safe. It was then realized that no one but George Mason, Sr., had known the combination. His personal papers pertaining to the estate were in the safe, and it was now necessary that it be opened. As office manager and acting secretary, Clarence made every effort to open the safe, but without success. As a last resort, before breaking the lock, Clarence asked me to try to open it.

This was the kind of spontaneous necessity that I was always watching for as a basis for experiment. If George Mason had asked me, while living, to see if I could open his safe "just for fun," in order to see whether or not I could do it, I would not have tried it, and would not have expected to succeed if I had, unless I should sandpaper my fingers and try it as an exercise in safecracking. But with Mr. Mason dead, with no one else knowing the combination, and with the pressing need that it be opened, ideal conditions were set up for a real experiment.

I took off my hat and coat and sat at Mr. Mason's desk, just as he had always done, bending over an open ledger. I asked Clarence to blindfold me so that I would not be distracted by sight or by muscular effort to hold my eyes closed. I asked him to wait long enough for me to fully think myself into George Mason's personality, then, while I was pretending to be Mr. Mason, suddenly to ask me to open the safe.

This Clarence did, and scarcely knowing what I was doing, I turned to the safe and, to his astonishment and mine, opened it in about ten seconds. But I still do not know the combination, and immediately afterward could not have done it again with my eyes open."

George Mason had been gradually failing in health and his doctor was summoned to his home in early September 1908. At the doctor's suggestion, Mr. Mason was taken on the Steamer Cayuga to Muskegon where he was admitted to Hackley Hospital. Mr. Mason was suffering from nervous prostration. George died at the hospital on 5 September 1908. He was just 46 years old. Emma continued to live in the

home that she and George shared on Prospect Street (now Old Channel Trail) until she died on 25 January 1939. She was 78 years old. They are both buried in Oak Grove Cemetery.

After Emma died in 1939, her son George D. Mason and his wife Nettie Tallant lived in the house. George had taken over the operation of the Post Office and store at Michillinda after his father died and by 1913, they were renting rooms over the store during the summer, calling it Lakeside Inn. In 1917, they sold the property to Glen Tallant, brother of Nettie Tallant Mason, and his wife Gertrude Dahl. The Tallants continued to expand the Lakeside Inn until they sold it to the Groessl family in 1936.

George D. Mason was the Postmaster in Montague for 38 years before retiring in 1948. He died in July 1961 and Nettie in March 1970. They are both buried in Oak Grove Cemetery as well.

My thanks to Mary Mason for providing some of the information about the Mason family and helping with the timeline of events. B