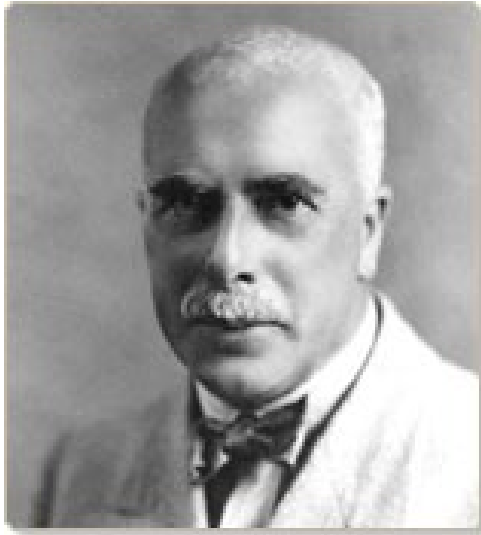


CULTURAL MOMENT FOR OCTOBER 6, 2025 CELBRATES CHARLES A. WOODWARD



Charles A. Woodward in 1910.

Charles A. Woodward was a titan of business during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Woodward was born on July 19, 1852 in Gore, Ontario (near Hamilton). Though the date is unknown, at some point his family relocated to Mount Forest. It was here that Woodward received his education and first got a taste of the entrepreneurial spirit.

It is believed that Woodward left Mount Forest in 1875 to be a storekeeper on Manitoulin Island. It was there he began to hone his skills as a merchant. After several years of mixed success, including time spent in Thessalon, Ontario, Woodward sought greater opportunities in the

rapidly growing city of Vancouver, British Columbia.

In 1892, he opened his first store in Vancouver at the corner of Main and Georgia Streets. Later that year, he moved the business to Hastings and Abbott Streets and incorporated as Woodward's Department Stores Ltd. This flagship location would become a cornerstone of Vancouver's retail scene and a symbol of innovation in Canadian shopping culture.

Woodward's store quickly gained popularity, especially during the Klondike Gold Rush (1898–1903), when demand for goods surged. His business model emphasized quality, affordability, and customer service - principles that resonated with working-class families. By 1926, Woodward expanded to Edmonton, and by 1975, the chain had grown to 18 stores, making it the largest department store chain in Western Canada.

Beyond retail, Woodward was deeply involved in public life. In 1924, he was elected as a Liberal Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Vancouver City, serving one term. Known as the "workingman's friend," he advocated for fair business practices and better representation for Vancouver in provincial politics.

Woodward was also a dedicated Freemason, affiliated with Acacia Lodge No. 22 in Vancouver. He is interred in the only mausoleum in the Masonic Cemetery in Burnaby, British Columbia - a testament to his prominence and respect within the community.

His legacy continued through his descendants. His son, William Culham Woodward, served as Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia from 1941 to 1946, and his grandson, Charles N. "Chunky" Woodward, led the company and later became the owner of the Douglas Lake Cattle Company, Canada's largest ranch.

Though Woodward's Department Stores eventually succumbed to changing retail trends and were acquired by Hudson's Bay Company in 1993, the brand remains a cherished part of Canadian history. The original Vancouver store has been preserved as the Woodward's Building, a landmark that honours the entrepreneurial spirit of a man who began his journey in Mount Forest.

Submitted by the Wellington North Cultural Roundtable