

Salmon, Charles Carty (Carty): Speaker 1909–1910

John Hawkins

Charles Carty Salmon (1860–1917), medical practitioner and second Speaker of the House of Representatives, was born on 27 July 1860 at Amherst, a gold rush town near Maryborough, Victoria, sixth child of English-born parents Frederick Browne Salmon, storekeeper, and his wife, Susannah Carty, née Arnell. Carty attended Scotch College, Melbourne, before his uncle gave him a position at his tobacco importing and manufacturing company, Dudgeon & Arnell. Such work had little appeal and, in 1886, he enrolled in medicine at the University of Melbourne. During his studies, he honed his public speaking skills at Trinity College's Dialectic Society. After two years, he proceeded to Scotland, where in 1891 he completed his medical studies. While in Scotland, he began attending political meetings, finding himself drawn to conservatism. Returning to Melbourne, he set up a general practice at South Yarra.

Salmon soon established himself as a major figure in beneficent causes, including service as honorary surgeon for the South Yarra Relief Committee. He became close friends with Alfred Deakin, who encouraged him to stand as an independent at the December 1893 by-election for the Legislative Assembly seat of Talbot and Avoca, which included Salmon's place of birth. Having won the seat, the well-spoken and highly presentable new member was featured in the press as someone with a promising political future. In 1894 he joined the Victorian Mounted Rifles as surgeon-captain. He served as president of the Australian Natives' Association (ANA; 1898–99) and was a minister in Allan McLean's short-lived government of 1899–1900—initially as minister without portfolio and subsequently as minister for public instruction and commissioner for trade and customs. On 3 October 1900, Salmon married Nancy Anne Harris, daughter of the mayor of Sydney and member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, Sir Matthew Harris, at St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Sydney. They were to have three sons. As a supporter of improved industrial working conditions, protectionism, and Federation, Salmon was a natural ally for Deakin and, in 1901, stood successfully as a Liberal Protectionist for the federal seat of Laanecoorie, which encompassed his state seat. In the first Commonwealth

'ORDER, ORDER!'



Figure 57: Carty Salmon.

Source: National Library of Australia, PIC/7269/1-2 LOC Drawer PIC/7269, Swiss Studios Melbourne.

parliament, he became a Temporary Chairman of Committees. He maintained his involvement with the military, transferring to the Australian Army Medical Corps in 1903 and being promoted to lieutenant-colonel in 1912.

At the general election of December 1903, Salmon was re-elected, easily defeating a free-trade candidate. However, the Chairman of Committees in the preceding parliament, John Chanter, lost his seat, with the result that, on 17 March 1904, Salmon was successfully nominated as his successor, narrowly defeating Labor's Lee Batchelor. Initially, this appointment was only to 15 December 1904, the then practice being for the House to vote on the Chairmanship at the start of each parliamentary session. During the long parliamentary recess that followed, rumblings arose about reverting to Chanter, who had lost his seat due to an electoral official's error and regained it at a by-election ordered by the High Court. Some Labor members felt aggrieved by Salmon's rulings, and an argument circulated that the circumstances of Chanter's defeat in the first place made it only fair that he be reinstated as Chairman. Deakin stayed firm in supporting his ally and, on 2 August 1905, Salmon was re-elected Chairman, 35 votes to 27 (VP 1905/25–26, 2.8.1905).

Despite this seeming vote of confidence, Salmon's accommodating nature made it hard for him to assert the chair's authority, fuelling dissent from many of his rulings. During November 1905, he was criticised for his management of calls for a quorum, rulings on relevance and repetition in debate, and even on whether members could bring bedding into the chamber, on which he obligingly felt reluctant to 'deprive honorable members of any comforts which they may require to maintain their attendance here' (H.R. Deb. 16.11.1905, 5371). He was reported also to have proposed declaring parliamentary precincts to be part of the House for determining quorums, including the billiards and smoking rooms.

On 20 June 1906, when Deakin moved (on notice) the election of a Chairman of Committees, sufficient Free Trade members who felt aggrieved by Salmon, particularly over his ruling against stonewalling in debate, voted with Labor members to elect Charles McDonald in his place. The political journalist D. H. Maling reflected that 'a Chairman or Speaker is born, not made, and Mr Salmon's preparation did not commence early enough' ('Ithuriel' 1906). By contrast, McDonald was said to sleep with a copy of the standing orders under his pillow. In congratulating the new Chairman, Deakin spoke of Salmon having held the post 'under circumstances which placed the greatest strain upon both his knowledge of parliamentary practice and his resolute courage in doing his duty' (H.R. Deb. 20.6.1906, 475). More fundamentally, some sections of the press feared that this 'attack on the honesty of the Chair' amounted to 'an open intimation that the Chairman is expected to decide disputes in the interest of party and that any adverse decision will be punished by

a deprivation of office' (*Age* 1906, 4). At the general election of December 1906, Salmon narrowly defeated a Labor challenger. In July 1907, the House re-elected McDonald over Salmon, but Salmon again became one of the Temporary Chairmen.

The fusion of Deakin's protectionists with the free-traders in May 1909 and the ensuing fall of the Fisher Labor government created an unusually tense atmosphere in the parliament. This may well have contributed to the untimely death of the Speaker, Sir Frederick Holder, on 23 July 1909 following a stormy all-night sitting, presenting the House for the first time with the task of finding a replacement Speaker. Holder had been a staunch advocate of Westminster-style independence for the Speaker, including the selection of a Speaker not being the sole preserve of the ruling party. Deakin disagreed, and his determination to elevate Salmon to the Speakership marked a decisive break with the Westminster ideal.

The former Victorian premier (Sir) William Irvine, former prime minister (Sir) George Reid, and the truculent Free Trade member Bruce Smith were all mentioned as possible successors to Holder, but each declined. In a party room ballot, the Fusion chose Salmon over Agar Wynne, reportedly by a mere couple of votes and with a significant number of members unhappy with the result. Salmon's nomination was greeted in the House with anger. Labor proposed the more capable McDonald, with William Morris Hughes dismissing Salmon as a 'notorious partisan' (H.R. Deb. 28.7.1909, 1698). A third candidate, Chanter, was nominated by David Storrer and Sir William Lyne, two former protectionists who opposed the Fusion. Labor's James Hutchinson and King O'Malley then proposed Wynne, evidently hoping to win over defectors from the government. After several hours of debate, controversially and unhappily presided over by the Clerk of the House, (Sir) Charles Gavan Duffy, Salmon was finally elected, 37 votes to 29 (VP 1909/61–62, 28.7.1909).

As Speaker, Salmon was portrayed by the press as 'a Deakin satellite' (*Punch* 1909, 6). He again struggled to assert himself over unruliness in the House—not helped by the circumstances in which he became Speaker. Early in his Speakership, he pleaded ineffectually that 'honourable members must really show a little more consideration for the occupant of the chair' (H.R. Deb. 5.8.1909, 2092). Despite Labor's continuing hostility and the frequent misgivings of party colleagues, Salmon held on as Speaker until 30 June 1910 when, in the wake of a comprehensive Labor election victory, he was replaced with McDonald. In Laanecoorie, Salmon was again re-elected narrowly over a Labor candidate. One of his successors as Speaker, Norman Makin, concluded that he 'seemed to lack firmness and, to a degree, resolution' (c. 1962), as well as suffering from comparison with the highly respected Holder. Salmon's 'pleasant drawing room manner of speaking' was seen by contemporaries as 'exactly suited to the ANA' but not 'to the platforms or in the Parliaments of the country' (*Punch* 1909, 6).

After Laanecoorie was abolished in a redistribution, Salmon narrowly failed to win a Senate seat at the election of 1913. In 1914 he sought preselection for the safe Melbourne suburban seat of Balaclava but then deferred to William Watt, another future Speaker. Salmon finally returned to the Commonwealth parliament by winning the western Victorian seat of Grampians at a by-election in February 1915, but he was never again seriously considered for the Speakership. Outside parliament, he continued to hold an impressive array of leadership positions, including managing director of Dudgeon & Arnell, lay canon of St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, and membership of the councils of the Melbourne diocese, Trinity College, and Melbourne Grammar School. In 1914 he became Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons of Victoria, and commanded a military base hospital in Melbourne. He enjoyed golf, walking, rowing, cricket, gardening, and collecting books, and remained popular for his 'unassuming and genial disposition' (*Malvern Standard* 1917, 5).

Just three days after easily retaining Grampians at the election of May 1917, Salmon collapsed at his Dudgeon & Arnell office and withdrew to his home at South Yarra. He died there on 15 September from a cerebral tumour. His funeral service at St Paul's was attended by Prime Minister Hughes and opposition leader Frank Tudor, with the archbishop of Melbourne delivering the panegyric. A funeral procession with Salmon's coffin mounted on a gun carriage proceeded to the Melbourne general cemetery where the interment was conducted with full military honours and Masonic rites. The scale of proceedings was a measure of the regard in which he continued to be held for service to the community, his indifferent performance as a presiding officer notwithstanding.

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