



**Frederick Weir Harcourt, KC**

Grand Master (1919-1920 and 1920-1921) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario

and

Grand First Principal (1911-1912 and 1912-1913) of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada (1856-1932)



*Photo from Grand Lodge*

(1856 – 1932)

*Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.*

Frederick Weir Harcourt was born on the 17th of June 1856, near Caledonia. He was one of seven sons born to Michael Harcourt who had come from Ireland and settled in Haldimand County. The 1921 Proceedings of Grand Chapter (p 231) describe Michael Harcourt as “. . . a man of wide sympathies and liberal views. He was a Roman Catholic, yet an opponent of separate schools and a Freemason.” The sons were “brought up in

the faith of their mother who was a devoted member of the Church of England.” Michael Harcourt served in the Parliament of Canada before Confederation.

Frederick attended local primary schools and graduated from Cayuga Collegiate Institute and Upper Canada College. He was a student-at-law and was called to the Bar in 1886 and served in the Hamilton office of McCarthy, Osler, Hoskin and Creelman. He had been appointed as the Official Guardian of the Province of Ontario in 1902 and retired in 1924. In this capacity he was responsible for all children committed to the care of the Province.

He was made a King’s Counsel in 1908. The degree of L.L.D. *honoris causa* was conferred on him by Queen’s University in 1921. He was an active Bencher of the Law Society of Upper Canada, being re-elected to the position five times when, in 1926, he was named a Bencher *ex officio*. In 1924 he was elected the Treasurer of the Law Society and served for three years until ill-health prompted him to decline a further term.

A commentary in The Canadian Bar Review (May 1928) offered considerable praise when announcing Frederick Harcourt’s retirement. It notes that the duties of the office of Official Guardian for infants in care of the Province of Ontario “were so numerous that only a man with a remarkable capacity for work could grapple with them successfully.” Yet Fredrick Harcourt demonstrated abilities to be “patient, tactful, shrewd, and sympathetic, he eased difficult situations and antagonized no one.” The commentary concludes with “A ready and impressive speaker, his speeches are both humorous and witty and are always enjoyed by his audiences.”

As a young man he had a reputation as an athlete and won prizes in long and high jumping, cricket and Rugby football. In this latter sport he was a member of the Hamilton Tigers Rugby Team in his spare time. Active sports were slowly replaced with less violent ones and he became a member of the Toronto Golf & Country Club, Toronto Club, and the York Club.

He married Margaret Mackenzie (1863 – 1963) on October 1, 1884, and had 2 children; Richard Mackenzie Harcourt and Ella Margaret Harcourt. The family were members of the Church of England and Frederick was a director in the Diocese of Toronto.

M.W. Bro. Harcourt died in Toronto on May 2, 1932, and was buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery. It is a family plot, without Masonic ornamentation.

Harcourt Avenue in the Riverdale neighbourhood of Toronto was named to honour Frederick Weir Harcourt.

### **Masonic Career**

In Craft Masonry, he was Initiated a member of Ionic Lodge, No. 25 GRC, Toronto, on May 7, 1889, and served as WM (1899-1900). He became a Life member of the lodge. He also was a founding member and the first Worshipful Master of St. Alban's Lodge No. 514. In time he was named an honorary member of twenty-nine lodges.

He was elected as DDGM of Toronto District (1905 - 1906). His career with Grand Lodge beyond being elected to the Board of General Purposes is not clear but he was elected as Deputy Grand Master (1917 - 1918 and 1918 - 1919) and as Grand Master for the 1919 - 1920 and 1920 - 1921 terms.

M.W. Bro. Harcourt was the Grand Representative of Nebraska, and then of Illinois.

In Capitular Masonry he was exalted in St. Paul's Chapter, No. 65 GRC, Toronto and served as First Principal. He was elected as Grand Principal Sojourner (1905 - 1906). While his Royal Arch career is likewise unknown at present, he was elected as Grand First Principal of Grand Chapter for the 1911 - 1912 and 1912 - 1913.

A short anecdote is indicative of Frederick Harcourt's diligence within all branches of Freemasonry. Another Past Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Aubrey White, was elected to the office of Grand Third Principal for the 1915-1916 term. Tragically, R. Ex. Comp. Aubrey White died at his summer home at St. Elmo, Muskoka, on July 14, 1915. R. Ex. Comp. Frederick Harcourt accepted an appointment to that office for the balance of the year.

He was a member of the Scottish Rite as a member of the Toronto Lodge of Perfection, Toronto Rose Croix Chapter, and Moore Consistory. He was coroneted as an Honorary Inspector General 33° of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of the Dominion of Canada in 1921. He was a member of the Royal Order of Scotland.

### **As Grand Master**

Our 29th Grand Master saw great growth in the Fraternity. He cautioned the lodges to "guard your portals with unremitting diligence." During his term there were 46 lodges dedicated or consecrated in the ceremonies of our Grand Lodge.

On specific questions regarding other bodies, he was cautious. He forbade Masons from joining "The Grotto". This was consistent with decisions by several other Grand Lodges and based on the concern that The Grotto was new organization seeking to build itself on the reputation of Freemasonry. He declined to rule on whether the Order of the Eastern Star was a clandestine organization. The detailed explanation he gave is recorded in the Proceedings of 1920. M.W. Bro. Harcourt first states "I know nothing about the Order, and have been assured by some of the male patrons that the Order does not claim to be Masonic." He then shared a ruling from the United Grand Lodge of

England that any body which admits women as members is clandestine and irregular. His final statement on the matter reinforced that a Mason must be a man and “our secrets and Lodge proceedings should be a closed book to all outsiders.” It is important to note that the Grand Chapter of Ontario Order of the Eastern Star was organized April 27, 1915. It is clear that many Masons have supported and joined the Order of the Eastern Star. The Order of the Eastern Star is now seen as an independent Masonic organization in Ontario.

M.W. Bro. Harcourt delayed discussions with the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons until after Grand Lodge of 1921. It must be noted that discussions were finally resolved many years later when the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario and the M.W. Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario and Jurisdiction granted each other formal recognition and rights of visitation in 2005.

In the summer of 1920, R.W. Bro. James Haywood and R.W. Bro. George H. Smith gathered other Masons and proposed to form a new Lodge. With support of the Brethren, they applied to M.W. Bro. Frederick Harcourt during his term as Grand Master for a dispensation and charter. The name they proposed was to honour the Grand Master. Thus, Harcourt Lodge No. 581 G.R.C. was instituted on May 18, 1921. Harcourt Lodge was consecrated on the 19th of October, 1921 on which occasion M.W. Bro. Harcourt was elected an honorary member of the lodge. Harcourt Lodge No. 581 meets at the York Masonic Temple in East York.

#### Sources:

- (1) Jenkyns, Michael *Biography of PGM Frederick W. Harcourt*. Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario
- (2) *Annual Proceedings* of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario: 1911, 1912, 1921.
- (3) *Commemoration of the Graves of the Grand Masters*, December 2018. A project of the Museum and Archives Team.
- (4) *An overview of some significant or interesting contributions during the terms of the Grand Masters of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario, revisited* RW Bro. John W. Reynolds; 'The Architect' December 2012
- (5) McLeod, Wallace editor, *Whence Come We?* (Hamilton, Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario, 1980)
- (6) Herrington, W.S., and Foley, R.S., editor Dunlop, Wm. J. 'A History of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario' (1955) McCallum Press Ltd., Toronto.
- (7) Annual Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario, 1921, and 1932.
- (8) History of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada 1857-1932, pamphlet produced for the 75th Anniversary of Grand Chapter, 1932.
- (9) Globe and Mail, May 6, 1932
- (10) Family information confirmed on Ancestry.com
- (11) Whyte, Gerald; "The Streets of Riverdale" published by the Riverdale Historical Society
- (12) 'History of Harcourt Lodge No. 581'
- (13) 'The Canadian Bar Review', May 1928