

Frank Armitage Copus

Grand Master (1933 – 1935) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario



Photo from the Grand Lodge

(1879 – 1960)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

Frank Armitage Copus was born in Guildford, Surrey, England on March 22, 1879. He attended local schools and on graduation came to Canada and entered newspaper work in Stratford and London, Ontario. Returning to Stratford in 1905 he entered into the life insurance business. He became Agency Manager for the Mutual Life Assurance Company in Perth and Huron counties until retirement in 1945.

He was involved in the community and the local Board of Trade. He was a lay delegate from St James Anglican Church at Stratford and later St. George's Church at Owen Sound and a member of the Synod of Huron Diocese, serving on the Executive Committee. He was Rector's Warden at St. James and a lay reader at St. George's.



On New Year's Day of 1903 he married Christena Stewart of Stratford (1879 – 1969). They had one son, Duncan Stewart Copus, and three daughters: twins Mary and Jean, and Christene. Jean Copus died the same day she was born. Frank and Christena Copus celebrated 57 years of marriage.

When he retired in 1945, Frank A. Copus and his wife moved to Owen Sound. M. W. Bro. Frank Armitage Copus died at his home in Owen Sound Ontario on May 1, 1960. A private funeral service was held at his home in Owen Sound. His body was carried to Stratford for a public funeral at St. James' Church. The public funeral was well attended by many friends as well as the Grand Master, many Past Grand Masters, and leaders in other Masonic bodies. M.W. Bro. Frank Armitage Copus was interred on May 4, 1960, in the Stratford Mausoleum at Avondale Cemetery. After her death, his wife Christena was interred beside him.

A formal portrait of M.W. Bro. Frank A. Copus in the regalia of the Grand Master is held by Stratford Lodge No. 332. The artist was Francis J. Haxby (1905 – 1976), a prominent portrait artist in Ontario. This lodge also has a display of several significant mementos of our Grand Master, including his Grand Master's apron and collar.

Masonic Career

Mr. Frank Armitage Copus was initiated in Tecumseh Lodge No. 144, Stratford, on April 18, 1907, passed on May 17, 1907, and raised on June 28, 1907. No doubt he was influenced in his decision to become a Mason by his father, Bro. Henry White Copus, who was a member of St. John's Lodge No. 1564, United Grand Lodge of England.

Bro. Frank A. Copus served as Worshipful Master in 1912. He was elected as District Deputy Grand Master of South Huron District for the 1919 – 1920 term. South Huron District had eighteen lodges under the care of DDGM Frank A. Copus. He expressed concern about the rapid increase in the number of applicants for Masonry and reminded his lodges to make proper inquiry of each applicant. The keeping of minutes of meetings, and the retention of records, drew his scrutiny. He recommended that some lodges need to improve their meeting rooms to provide suitable fire escapes and exits. DDGM Copus observed that the most efficient lodges in his District were those where the Worshipful Master is supported by his Past Masters.

He was first elected to the Board of General Purpose in 1924 and was Chairman of Benevolence starting in 1929.

He was elected as Deputy Grand Master for the years 1931 – 1933.

M.W. Bro. Frank Armitage Copus was elected as the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of A.F. and A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario for the 1933 – 1935.



He was also a life member of The Barton Lodge No. 6, Hamilton; St. Andrews' Lodge No. 16, Toronto; Acacia Lodge No. 61, Toronto; St. George's Lodge No. 88; North Star Lodge No. 322, Owen Sound; Stratford Lodge No. 332, Stratford; University Lodge No. 496, Toronto; Ulster No. 537, Toronto, and Kilwinning Lodge No. 565, Toronto.

In Capitular Masonry, he was a Life member and First Principal of Tecumseh Chapter, No. 24, Stratford and Past Grand Superintendent of Huron District.

In Knights Templary, he was a member and Past Preceptor of St. Elmo Preceptory No. 22, Stratford.

He was a member of London Lodge of Perfection, Rose Croix Chapter and Moore Sovereign Consistory. He was coroneted an Honorary Inspector-General 33° in 1924 and made Sovereign Grand Inspector General of the Supreme Council A. A. S. R. for the Dominion of Canada in 1935.

In 1934 he was admitted to membership in the Royal Order of Scotland.

As Grand Master

As the 36th Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Copus led the fraternity through the middle of what is called the Great Depression. As he began his term he acknowledged the world-wide economic distress. He met with the Grand Secretary, Grand Treasurer, and Supervisor of Benevolence to consider temporary measures to ease the financial burdens of some lodges. At the time, 80% of monies received by Grand Lodge were directed to benevolence.

M.W. Bro. Copus had the sad duty of announcing the death of Past Grand Master M.W. Bro. Elias T. Malone. M.W. Bro. Malone had been the Grand Master in 1898 through 1900. In the letter to all lodges announcing the death of M.W. Bro. Malone, it was noted that "In 1903 he was elected Grand Treasurer and for thirty years thereafter this Grand Lodge had the benefit of his sound and skillful judgment in that capacity. For many years he undertook the instruction of the incoming District Deputy Grand Masters, the installation of the officers of Grand Lodge and the chairmanship of many important special committees."

On administrative matters, M.W. Bro. Copus consulted with Past Grand Masters on the perennial question of newspaper publicity for lodge proceedings, meetings, and events. He emphasized that there shouldn't be publicity of matters of interest only to Masons, and that Masonic titles "are meaningless to the outside world and therefore should not be used in reference to Masonic events in the newspapers." He also criticized the practice of printing the names of all members of a lodge on the summons. His concern was the use of the list of names for commercial or other non-Masonic purposes. He called for "preserving a high standard of dignity and decorum in the wording of our lodge summonses."

Grand Master Copus spoke of the musical ritual that was formally adopted in 1916. He ruled that any other musical ritual is barred except by special permission of the Grand Master. In this ruling he reinforced “that Grand Lodge definitely controls the ceremonial work of the lodges”.

Grand Master Copus encouraged the ongoing use of Masonic Education in lodges, particularly “a serious study of our history, our traditions, our symbolism and our philosophy and the result cannot but be wonderfully stimulating.” He extended the resources available by allowing lodges to borrow books from the Grand Lodge Library.

M.W. Bro. Copus is one of five Grand Masters responsible for the Veteran Jubilee Medal. It takes its origin from the Communication of Grand Lodge held at London in 1928, when M.W. Bro. John S. Martin presented those Past Masters who had attained the age of seventy years with a small commemorative jewel. Citing this as his inspiration, M.W. Bro. Frank Armitage Copus, in his Address to the 79th Annual Communication held at Toronto, recommended the issue of a Veteran Jubilee Medal to honour all members of the Craft upon completion of fifty years of uninterrupted service. A special committee was struck consisting of M.W. Bro. R. B. Dargavel, Past Grand Master, R.W. Bros. W.M. Logan, Grand Secretary and W.J. Moore, Chairman. The medal was authorized in 1935. It was withdrawn in 1963 on the recommendation of M.W. Bro. Russell Williams Treleaven, Grand Master 1961 - 1962, and temporarily revived in 1971 by M.W. Bro. Bruce Brown Foster, Grand Master 1969 - 1970. M.W. Bro. Terence Shand, Grand Master 2001 - 2002, authorized the restoration of the Veteran Jubilee Medal in 2003. As a ‘medal specially designed and authorized by Grand Lodge’ it may be worn in a lodge.

There had been a growing concern about the distribution of lodges into Districts in the jurisdiction. Until this time the Districts were set up largely on the basis of railway connections. But the rapid spread of automobiles and the network of roads across the Province forced a reconsideration. M.W. Bro. Copus struck a committee to examine re-distribution of the Districts, with an expectation of a report for his successor.

Concurrent with the discussion of the redistribution of Districts was Grand Master Copus’ concern of the “rotation” method of selecting a DDGM. In this method, each lodge in a District will, in a scheduled turn, put forward someone who will be elected DDGM for a term. While Grand Master Copus acknowledged “the thought that the honor of having a District Deputy Grand Master should be shared equally by all the lodges’, he tactfully asserted the need to have “a past master who is qualified for the office.”

Grand Master Copus demonstrated his eloquence as an orator in his addresses to the Grand Lodge Communication. While the challenges of the Depression weighed

heavily on the affairs of individual Masons, their lodges, and the Grand Lodge, M.W. Bro. Copus strove to encourage and inspire.

"But I suggest also the thought that we may well pause to take stock, to ask ourselves quo vadis, whither goest thou, and whither the Craft we love so well, to seek if perchance we may find wherein we have failed to measure up to the noblest and the best that Freemasonry has to offer. Perhaps in such a quest we shall make some surprising, some disconcerting discoveries. And if we do so, shall we not mark this important occasion by a new, a real rededication to Freemasonry and to the promulgation in public and private life of those principles of belief and conduct for which it stands?"

I would that you and I might here and now seek if haply we might recapture that white flame, that first fine rapture of devotion that characterized our entry to the Craft. I would that each of us from the Grand Master to the latest Entered Apprentice might catch a new, a nobler Vision. I would that you and I might realize in all humility and yet in all its amplitude the opportunity and the responsibility that now lie to our hands, might grasp the fact that as good citizens we are called to play an important – perhaps a decisive – part at one of the great evolutionary crises in the history of our race. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

This much may well be said – that it is no light thing to be a man among men in the year 1935. It is a challenge to the best that is in us, a challenge to our manhood, to our fortitude, to our imagination and to our faith. Not he who has never trembled in the face of imminent danger, but he who conquers his fear and presses forward is the truly brave man. And if to each of us in these trying days have come our moments of doubt and perhaps of despair – and what thinking man has not had such experiences of late? – it is surely for us as good Masons and good citizens of Ontario to face forward with courage, with faith and with imagination. For as Masons we are thrice armed in that we are avowed followers of the only doctrine of life that offers a permanent solution to the problems that trouble mankind.

The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man! How often, how glibly and how thoughtlessly is the phrase on the lips of Freemasons! How reluctant we are to explore its inner meaning! How ineffectually we understand it in all its implications! Yet it is worthy of our best attention, for its sums up in a few words the combined experience of humanity as to how best men may live happily together and face eternity unafraid. It enunciates the one worthwhile secret of Freemasonry, the one worthwhile secret of a happy life, the only permanent basis of heart's ease for bewildered and suffering humanity.

The scandal-mongers, the trouble-makers and the agitators have been busy indeed, busy planting in men's minds hatred, covetousness, envy and greed and all that makes men hateful and hating one another. It would seem that too many have



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forgotten that after all mankind lives "not by hate but by love, not by envy but by admiration, not by fear but by hope and faith, not by malice and all uncharitableness but by homage to whatsoever things are true, lovely, pure, noble and of good report, and by encouraging those interests that are increased not diminished by sharing them." It would appear that too many have forgotten that it is a levelling-up, not a levelling down, that is needed and that the hall marks of the perfect state are not material but are ever and always of the spirit— peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety.

Let us at least refuse to longer live complacently in a fool's paradise of smug satisfaction with things as they are. We dare not simply "muddle through". Let us candidly recognize that the last word has not yet been spoken in the science of economics or in the art of self government for mankind, that a system so clumsy, so expensive and so inefficient as is our own must be improved and that it never will be improved until plain, ordinary citizens, men just like you and me, insist upon such improvements and insist also that our legislators should face the facts of a serious situation with minds centred less upon the interests of a political party and more on the needs of the country as a whole.

It seems to me that if you and I are to discharge our duty, to accept our responsibility as Freemasons and as good Canadians it will be necessary for us to enlarge our horizons, to seek to develop a new spirit of toleration, of sympathy and of willingness to see the other fellow's side. Thousands of our fellow citizens are drinking of the bitter waters. They have a just complaint against a dead weight of almost unbearable social conditions — make no mistake about that. It is a soul-searing experience to tramp the streets looking for work that does not exist, to hear wife and children crying for bread and shelter and clothes and the decencies of life and to be unable to provide them. I tell you that we shall never get anywhere in the solution of these pressing, these immediate problems if we shut our eyes to the heartbreak that is all round us. Let us not be afraid to recognize the fact that probably before these problems are finally solved some of our most cherished conceptions of life and of life's conditions will have to be altered.

What then of the Craft in the days towards which our faces are set? Who shall fix metes and bounds to Universal Freemasonry and to its mission among men? Let us never forget, brethren, that if there is a contagion of fear abroad in the world, it is possible, thank God, to instill also a contagion of courage. Let us then lead the world in courage. If there is a contagion of despair there is also a contagion of hope. Let us then have hope. If there is a contagion of unbelief there is just as surely a contagion of faith. Let us then have faith. Above all, if the world suffers from a contagion of hate there is a contagion of love that far overshadows hate. Let us then lead the world in love, in sympathy and in toleration, for such is Freemasonry and such its mission.

As your Grand Master I conclude this my final message to you on a note of courage and of hope. It is in that spirit that we should approach the year that lies immediately ahead. Let us keep foremost in our minds the thought that to-day as never before the world is in a fluid state, ready to the hands of men of good will. Mankind would fain close the record of the past few years with all its set-backs and its mistakes. They would like to think that for them the future holds a better and a happier experience and for their children the promise of lives spent under conditions when much that is so unfair, so unMasonic and so unchristian in our present civilization will have passed into the limbo of forgotten things. It is but a dream to-day. It may be a happy reality to-morrow – but only if we the men of to-day have done with lesser things and come to realize that the happiness, the real welfare of the next generation or two lies in our hands. For it is quite certain that what spirit will inform the men and women of to-morrow, how they will approach the solution of so many and so pressing problems depends to a large extent upon the intelligence, the sanity and the sympathy that shall characterize the leadership of to-day.

So let US have an end to the divisions, the quarrels, the recriminations and the suspicions of the past few years. Let us replace these old, unhappy conditions with a new spirit of mutual helpfulness and of brotherhood, a brotherhood that shall include all who sincerely desire an end to present unhappiness. Let it be Masonry's high task to dedicate herself to a mission of reconciliation, a spiritual reunion with men of goodwill everywhere, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, Roman Catholic and Protestant, employer and employee, differing in so many respects but alike in this, that we are all children of a common Father and therefore brethren, fellow pilgrims towards the light of that better day we all so passionately desire. In this Freemasons can be at one with all good men everywhere. In this we can sink all differences of class, of color, of creed, of race, of politics, of worldly possessions. This is the unique, the outstanding appeal of genuine universal Freemasonry, and from that appeal may neither you nor I turn away."

As Past Grand Master

M.W. Bro. Copus served as Chairman of the Fraternal Relations Committee from 1956 until his death. For many years he was the Grand Representative of the United Grand Lodge of England near our Grand Lodge.

The Grand Lodge of Scotland conferred on M.W. Bro. Frank A. Copus the Honorary Grand Rank of Senior Grand Warden in 1941.

A contemporary account states "the crowning glory of his Masonic activities was the installing of his son as Worshipful Master of Harcourt Lodge in December of 1959." Harcourt Lodge No. 581, Toronto, was named to honour another Past Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Frederick W. Harcourt. The son of M.W. Bro. Frank A. Copus, R.W. Bro.

Duncan Stewart Copus, served as Worshipful Master of Harcourt Lodge No. 581 and later was elected the DDGM for Toronto District 5 in 1963.

Sources:

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- (4) 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.
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- (6) McLeod, Wallace editor, *Whence Come We?* (1980) Hamilton, Grand Lodge of A.F.&A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario
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- (8) Reynolds, John W., (2012) *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* 'The Architect' December 2012
- (9) Runnalls, J. Lawrence (1979) *Our Past Grand Masters* privately published
- (10) Family information confirmed via Ancestry.com and FindAGrave.com.
- (11) Memorabilia of M.W. Bro. Frank A. Copus preserved and held by Stratford Lodge No. 332.
- (12) B2B Facifacts (2009) Vol. 4, issue 1. Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario
- (13) Letter from Grand Lodge of Scotland to M.W. Bro. Copus dated December 3, 1941, now held by Stratford Lodge No. 332.