

**Howard Olin Polk**

Grand Master (1981 – 1983) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons  
of Canada in the Province of Ontario



*Photo from the Grand Lodge*

(1915 – 2003)

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

Howard Olin Polk, of Irish and Loyalist descent, was born in Lombardy, Leeds County, on October 22, 1915, the youngest son of a family of three. His father, Henry Edwin Polk (married to the former Annie Mable Burns) operated a General Store and a Post Office. Howard completed primary education in the one room brick school, S.S. No. 6, South Elmsley Township, and went on to graduate with Honours from the Smith Falls Collegiate Institute. Howard starred on the Track and Football Teams. He enlisted in the Canadian Army in 1940 and served with the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps until 1945.



He was a sales representative for a national manufacturer of paint and protective coatings throughout Eastern Ontario for 18 years. Howard O. Polk was appointed as a Justice of the Peace for the County of Carleton in 1960. Then in 1963 he was appointed Clerk of the County Court and Registrar of the Surrogate Court for the Judicial District of Ottawa-Carleton. Howard O. Polk was named as the Local Registrar of the Supreme Court of Ontario. The respect he earned from his peer was such that he was elected President of the Sheriffs' and Court Registrars' Association for the Province of Ontario in 1976.

In 1945 Howard Polk married Doris Lola Ullet (1923 – 2011), a dental nurse. Their marriage was blessed with two daughters Pamela Lea (Hoffman) and Penny Heather (Echenberg). The family kept a summer home on Otter Lake near Smiths Falls.

M. W. Bro. Polk and his family were life-long members of the Anglican Church.

He was interested in the National Capital and became active in civic affairs. Howard Polk was a member of the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa-Carleton, Men's Canadian Club of Ottawa, and the Central Canada Exhibition. Doris Polk volunteered for many years at the Ottawa Civic Hospital.

M. W. Bro. Howard Olin Polk died on October 19, 2003, in Ottawa. A Masonic Memorial Service was held at St. Martin's Anglican Church the evening before the funeral.

The mortal remains of M.W. Bro. Howard O. Polk are interred in Pinecrest Cemetery. A bronze plaque includes the Square and Compasses logo and is inscribed "Grand Master 1981 – 1983".

A portrait of M.W. Bro. Howard O. Polk in his regalia as Grand Master is displayed in the anteroom of the Westboro Masonic Centre in Ottawa. There is also a display of an apron and collar he wore.

### **Masonic Career**

M.W. Bro. Polk was initiated in Otter Lodge No. 504, Lombardy, in 1938 and served as Master in 1959. Otter Lodge No. 504 closed with a voluntary Surrender of Warrant in 2019.

After his move to Ottawa, he affiliated with Temple Lodge No. 665, Ottawa, where he was Treasurer for 18 years.

M.W. Bro. Howard O. Polk was a charter member of Bytown Lodge No. 721, Ottawa, and a charter member of West Gate Lodge No. 734, Streetsville. He was given honorary membership in St. James Lodge No. 74, Central Lodge No. 110, Scotland Lodge No. 193, and Cathedral Lodge No. 643.



Although not a Masonic body, it is notable that M.W. Bro. Howard O. Polk was made an Honourable Colonel of the Honourable Order of Kentucky Colonels in Louisville, Kentucky.

He was elected as Grand Registrar in 1962. Then he was elected to the Board of General Purposes in 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974 and 1976. While on the Board of General Purposes R.W. Bro. Polk served on various Committees including Audit and Finance, Masonic Education, Warrants and Printing and Supplies.

R.W. Bro. Polk was elected as Deputy Grand Master in 1979 for a two-year term.

M.W. Bro. Howard Olin Polk was elected the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario in 1981 and held the office until 1983.

He was a member of Carleton Chapter No. 16, Ottawa, and an Honourary Past First Principal. He was a member of Ottawa Preceptory No. 32, Ottawa.

In Scottish Rite, M.W. Bro. Polk was Past Thrice Puissant Grand Master of the Ottawa Lodge of Perfection; a member of Murray Chapter of Rose Croix; a member of Moore Sovereign Consistory, Hamilton; and was an Honourary Inspector General 33°.

He was a member of the Royal Order of Scotland.

### **As Grand Master**

Our 60th Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Howard Olin Polk, opened a Grand Lodge Communication by saying: "We are here today because we love this fraternity, its welfare, its programs, and its progress. As we wend our way through the agenda, let the decisions arrived at transgress your individual personal commitment, generate increased enthusiasm, dedication, and a renewed willingness to make our programs work effectively."

In his Annual Addresses at the Grand Lodge Communication, M.W. Bro. Polk gave attention to the usual administrative expectations of his role as Grand Master. Then he turned his attention to the functioning, operation, and expectations for lodges in the jurisdiction.

After the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution, questions arose regarding the formalities and toasts to be used in Masonic events. M.W. Bro. Polk asserted that the Loyal Toast "is an ancient usage and custom of ancient Freemasonry". He declared "Therefore, the Toast should be continued, unaltered and undisturbed." With regard to the singing of anthems, Grand Master Polk reminded the brethren that our Ritual and Constitution bear no reference to anthems. He stated his preference that, where



it is customary to sing anthems, that the Royal Anthem be used at the beginning of a lodge meeting, and the meeting close with O Canada.

To support consistency in our Ritual, Grand Master Polk announced that a new 'Handbook on the Ceremony of Installation and Investiture of the Officers of a Lodge' was authorized for distribution. A newly revised Ritual of Book of the Work, including the Charges in the Three Degrees was released. Grand Master Polk gave a reminder of the requirement that only authorized jewels of Craft Freemasonry are permitted to be worn in lodges at work.

Grand Master Polk reminded his audience that "the Directive of April 15, 1980, relative to the making available and consumption of alcoholic beverages in lodge premises is still in effect as of the date of issue." He was dismayed by the number of requests for dispensation for relief from this Directive. He refused all the requests. Grand Master Polk charged Worshipful Masters of lodges and District Deputies "not to permit any act that would give cause to erode the trust and obligation of office that rests upon you by permitting a disregard of this granted privilege." He cautioned his audience that the rights of the Directive may be withdrawn and "The many will then be forsaken by actions of a few."

An Advisory Committee on Lodge Finances was created in 1980. Their report was presented at the 1983 Grand Lodge Communication with a request that the report be accepted as a recommendation for use by lodges rather than for adoption by Grand Lodge. Grand Master Polk explained "This will eliminate the possible thought of interference by Grand Lodge with respect to the autonomy of lodges."

Grand Master Polk shared that he enjoyed the pleasure of visiting eight brethren of the ages of 99, 100, and 101. These brethren lived in Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Warkworth, Erin, and Woodstock. Each shared with him their interest in our Craft. Our Grand Master offered this benediction: "May God's richest blessings continue to pour down on our dear Brother Masons of such elongated service to the Craft."

Before he concluded, M.W. Bro. Polk reminded his audience that "We, as Masons, profess to have principles we cherish; a belief in a Supreme Being, Brotherhood, concern for our widows, respect for law and order, ideals of honour, integrity and morality. Those attributes have brought out the good in man – inspiration, patriotism, liberty and the will to live by the Golden Rule. Would anyone change them? Your answer is no, you would not."

"The practice of Brotherhood is essential to maintaining a vigorous fraternity. When we exemplify Masonry in such a manner we indicate to nonmasons that we are builders, with a deep concern for others."

“This is the challenge that confronts Ancient Freemasonry today – an exciting and hopeful one! By practicing what we learn in our Temples we are building that better, happier, rewarding world each of us so earnestly seeks.”

To conclude his term as Grand Master, M.W. Bro. Howard Olin Polk asserted “My contention is that Freemasonry in all its glory will steadfastly endure.”

### **As Past Grand Master**

To mark their 50th wedding anniversary, M.W. Bro. Howard Polk and his wife Doris, created a legacy fund: "The Doris and Howard Polk Research Fund" at The University of Ottawa Heart Institute. Each year the University of Ottawa Heart Institute hosts the Ottawa Cardiovascular Research Day and delivers the Polk Award for a successful presentation.

### Sources:

- (1) Jenkyns, Michael *Biography of PGM Howard Olin Polk* 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: 1983, 1984, 2004, 2020.
- (3) *Commemoration of the Graves of the Grand Masters*, December 2018. A project of the Museum and Archives Team.
- (4) McLeod, W., and Jenkyns, M. *Whence Come We? Volume II* (2010), Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario.
- (5) 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
- (6) Family information confirmed via Ancestry.com and FindAGrave.com.
- (7) *The Freemason* magazine, Vol. 102 No. 2 September 1982.
- (8) Ottawa Citizen, obituary notice for Howard O. Polk, October 21, 2003
- (9) Ottawa Citizen, obituary notice for Doris Polk, May 31, 2011
- (10) University of Ottawa Heart Institute <https://www.ottawaheart.ca/researchers/conferences-and-events/ottawa-cardiovascular-research-day-2024> Accessed January 2025