

Right Worshipful Brother and Sir Arthur William Currie

(December 5, 1875 - November 30, 1933)

A Notable Canadian and Mason; Originally from Sarnia District

Prepared for Sarnia District by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern, Grand Historian, and Sarnia District Historian & Librarian

Outside the Strathroy Museum, on Centre Street (and not far from the Lodge Hall used by Beaver Lodge No. 83), is an imposing bronze statue of Sir Arthur Currie. The plinth on which the statue is mounted notes that it memorializes “General Sir Arthur William Currie, GCMG, KCB, VD. General Officer Commanding The Canadian Corps from 1917 – 1919”. There was a time when the honorifics and post-nomial letters would be promptly recognized. Now, some research is required to realize how prominent Sir Arthur Currie was during his life.

There are three published biographies of Sir Arthur Currie to consider. Most of the material deals with his military career. He was a diligent planner, and very concerned to minimize the loss of life amongst his troops. We recall him today as the leader of the successful attack on Vimy Ridge in World War I. He had the unique distinction of starting his military career on the very bottom rung as a pre-war militia gunner before rising



Figure 1: Photo by V. W. Bro. Marshall Kern

through the ranks to become the first Canadian commander of the four divisions of the unified Canadian Corps of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was the first Canadian to attain the rank of full general. Currie's success was based on his ability to rapidly adapt brigade tactics to the exigencies of trench warfare, using "set piece" operations and "bite-and-hold" tactics. He is generally considered to be among the most capable commanders of the Western Front, and one of the finest commanders in Canadian military history. He commanded the First Canadian Corps in France in the War of 1914-18 from June 1917 to the signing of the Armistice.

There is more to his life than his military career.

Arthur Curry was born in Naperton, near Strathroy. The "Dictionary of Canadian Biography" describes his early life as being filled with challenges. His studies and circumstances led him to become a teacher. He abruptly left Strathroy for the west coast. There he became a teacher and made contacts through several activities. It was in British Columbia that he changed the spelling of his name to Currie. He married in 1901 and had a son and two daughters.

The records of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon document that he was Initiated into our Fraternity August 3, 1898, in Vancouver and Quadra Lodge No. 2. He was Worshipful Master of the Lodge in 1904. Having earned the esteem of the Brethren he became District Deputy Grand Master of Victoria District in 1907.

Sir Arthur Currie left his military service in 1920. He became the principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University in Montreal. "The Canadian Encyclopedia" records that he was extraordinarily successful as a university administrator. A plaque on the memorial at Mount Royal Cemetery explains "During his tenure (at McGill University), new buildings and departments were added and the worldwide reputation of the university much enhanced."

There was a controversy about his decisions as World War I came to a close that led to a lawsuit for libel. The case was decided in Currie's favour, with complete vindication of his actions. Still, the controversy weighed on him, and he suffered a stroke soon after the trial. He did not recover his vigour and had another stroke in November 1933. He died on November 30 at the age of 58.



Figure 2: Photo by V. W. Bro. Marshall Kern

The funeral for Sir Arthur Currie, and the procession to the cemetery, were noted as being the largest in Canadian history to that time. He was buried with full military and academic honours.

The monument to his memory in Mount Royal Cemetery prominently features a Cross of Sacrifice.

His family donated several Masonic items to the Canadian War Museum. Among them are a Master Mason apron, and both a Past Master Apron and Collar that were presented to R.W. Bro. Arthur Currie on his return to Victoria in 1919.

We in Sarnia District can recognize the abilities and achievements of a Brother originally from our home.

Sources:

Tim Cook, "CURRIE, Sir ARTHUR WILLIAM," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 16, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed October 29, 2021, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/currie_arthur_william_16E.html.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sir-arthur-currie> Accessed October 2021

Canadian War Museum artifacts: (accessed October 2021)

MM Apron: <https://www.warmuseum.ca/collections/artifact/1828827>

PM Apron: <https://www.warmuseum.ca/collections/artifact/1828793> "PRESENTED BY THE MASONIC BRETHREN OF NO. 1 DISTRICT A.F. & A.M. G.R.B.G. TO WOR. BRO. ARTHUR W. CURRIE. ON HIS RETURN HOME FROM THE GREAT WAR VICTORIA B.C OCT. 8TH 1919"

PM Collar: <https://www.warmuseum.ca/collections/artifact/1828796> "PRESENTED TO WOR. BRO. A.W. CURRIE BY THE MASONIC BRETHREN DISTRICT No. 1 VICTORIA B.C. OCT.7.1919"

Articles on the Grand Lodge of British Columbia & Yukon website (accessed October 2021)

https://freemasonry.bcy.ca/biography/currie_a/currie_a.html

<https://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/ebee/InThePast1.html>

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