

Arthur Prentice Rugg (1862-1938)

Arthur P. Rugg of Worcester was Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court from 1911 until death in 1938.

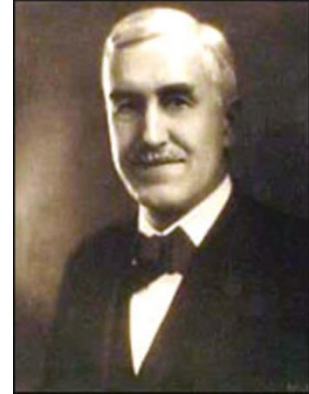
Originally from Sterling, he made his career in law in Worcester, with service on the Common Council, as assistant district attorney, and as City Solicitor from 1897 to 1906 when he was appointed to the supreme court of the state.

He maintained a home in Worcester, on Pleasant Street, throughout his career on the court, as well as a summer home in Sterling.

In addition to an editorial and obituary notice in the *Gazette*, a link is provided here to a memorial tribute to Rugg entered at a special session of the Court, April, 1939:

<https://www.mass.gov/person/arthur-prentice-rugg>

The tribute contains clues to his judicial leanings in references to landmark cases, but is not political in nature, and it provides a good summary of his rise from unknown to recognized leader in the field of law. The tribute said of him that *"In twenty years, with no aid whatever and depending solely on his character, industry, and professional attainments, he made himself one of the recognized leaders of the Worcester County Bar."*



MONDAY, JUNE 13, 1938.

The Death of Chief Justice Rugg

The courts of this commonwealth have produced many eminent judges. Some of these have attained national prominence. In this distinguished group, the members of the legal profession long ago gave a leading position to Chief Justice Arthur Prentice Rugg of the Supreme Judicial Court, who died yesterday at his Summer home in Sterling.

Born of a family that traced its line back to the early colonial days, his character was formed, and his ambition was stimulated, by a boyhood in which hard work was an essential element. From his father's farm in Sterling, he went to the High School in Lancaster, and then worked his way through Amherst College, and later through the Law School of Boston University.

The discipline of this youthful experience, reinforcing his natural bent, gave him a marked capacity for hard work. Genial and pleasant, and conspicuously democratic, in his social life, he had few of those habits which consume time and require idleness for their cultivation.

But it was the quality of his work, and the type of intelligence he brought to it, which distinguished him, even in his early life, before his character was widely recognized. His inbred integrity, his sense of fairness, and his devotion to duty, formed the background for a personality which gained early prominence through his sound judgment and marked professional ability.

Arthur P. Rugg

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(editorial)

As a young man, he brought these qualities to the service of the public in Worcester, as a member of the City Council, and later as city solicitor. In his legal work for the city, and in his private law practice, he had become widely known to members of the bar. And when Governor Curtis Guild, in 1906, appointed him as associate justice of the Supreme Judicial Court, though he was only 44, and the youngest man ever named for the position, there was no question of the eminent fitness of his appointment.

Since then, for more than thirty years, his career has been recorded in the decisions of one of the country's leading courts. His work on the bench was early recognized, and there could hardly have been a better tribute to his qualities than the fact that, though he had been a lifelong Republican, he was appointed chief justice, after five years of service, by a Democratic Governor, Eugene Foss.

A judge of such character and attainments could not fail to exert a potent influence during his years of service on the bench. And there can be no more fitting comment on his career than the recognition by the members of his profession that he was largely instrumental in maintaining the best traditions of the state's judiciary.

RUGG FUNERAL SERVICES TO BE ON WEDNESDAY

Rites for Chief Justice Will Be at 3 o'Clock at Unitarian Church

The funeral of Arthur Prentice Rugg, 75, Sterling farm boy who rose to Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, and who died yesterday after a week's illness from bronchial pneumonia, will be in First Unitarian Church at 3 o'clock Wednesday afternoon, attended by high dignitaries of the nation, state and city. Burial will be in Oak Hill Cemetery, Sterling.

Rev. Dr. Maxwell Savage will officiate.

Chief Justice Rugg, once spoken of as "the last of the Puritans," left behind him volume upon volume of important decisions which will continue to guide man's dealings with man. Many of his opinions written while serving Worcester as its 14th city solicitor, from 1897 to 1906, are still the guiding rulings in many of today's problems.

Chief Justice Rugg was the 14th president of the American Antiquarian Society, the council of which met this afternoon and adopted a memorial to him.

He was personally responsible for the selection of President

Coolidge as president of the society and succeeded him on his death, in 1933. When the presidency was under consideration, Mr. Rugg offered to secure President Coolidge for the position and made a personal motor trip to the President's Northampton home to talk with him. President Coolidge was announced as the new head of the society on Rugg's return.

Last Official Act

The last documents to which Chief Justice Rugg affixed his signature, were diplomas electing five historical students to membership in the society. This was in his Worcester office on June 4 and immediately after, he was escorted to his home in Sterling by a son. He never left his sickbed.

Chief Justice Rugg and President Coolidge always had been the closest of friends and the Chief Justice and Mrs. Rugg had been guests at the White House as well as on the Presidential yacht.

His attention to the diplomas was typical of his sense of duty. Attention to detail and serious interpretation of the term duty, marked him throughout his long life. Although some matters could be taken care of by subordinates, Chief Justice Rugg regarded public trust as something that could not and should not be relinquished for one second.

Death followed by little more than a week, his last opinion as the chief legal interpreter for the Commonwealth, that affecting birth control material, within the boundaries of the state. Four socially prominent women had been convicted after a series of raids throughout the state and had appealed to the state's highest tribunal.

Chief Justice Rugg was born in Sterling, not far from where he died, on Aug. 20, 1862. His father farmed and taught school. As a boy, the Chief Justice aided with the chores about the farm and went to the nearby school. He next went to Lancaster High School.

Was Amherst Graduate

Like President Coolidge, he was graduated from Amherst. Class of

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'83 and later went to Boston University Law School coming direct to Worcester upon his graduation in 1886, where he conferred with U. S. Rep. John R. Thayer, ardent Democrat. He entered his office and five years later, Mr. Rugg, a strong Republican, became Mr. Thayer's partner.

Mr. Rugg was graduated with honors from B. U. and was class orator, although he had found it necessary to work his way through school as a waiter in a Boston restaurant. He was admitted to the Massachusetts bar the year he was graduated.

His degree from B. U. was only one of many that were conferred upon him by institutions of higher learning, and only last week, at Commencement exercises, Boston

College gave him the honorary degree of Doctor of Law. It was accepted for him by a son, Charles B. Rugg, Boston lawyer. The honor touched the Chief Justice deeply. He had received honorary degrees from Amherst, Harvard, Williams, Dartmouth and Boston University.

The Chief Justice also has received many honors from other sources and in 1924 was chosen by the American Bar Association to represent it at a gathering of the Inns of Court, a group of law students and practitioners of law in London. He regarded his address there as one of his most interesting experiences and while in London, he and Mrs. Rugg were presented to the late King George V and Queen Mary. After the ceremonies, the King asked that Mr. Rugg return and they had a long chat, the nature of which never was divulged.

Youngest Associate Justice

Mr. Rugg was appointed by Gov. Curtis Guild as an associate justice of the Supreme Court in 1906. At 44, he was the youngest man ever to receive that high honor.

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Five years later, when Governor Foss, Democrat, appointed him as chief justice, the advancement aroused intense interest through the state and the Governor was praised highly for the selection.

Chief Justice Rugg was a member of the Worcester City Council in 1894 and its president in 1895. He followed this by service as assistant district attorney, resigning in 1897 to become city solicitor, succeeding William S. B. Hopkins. He continued as city solicitor until appointment to the Supreme Court bench.

Chief Justice Rugg was reticent, refusing practically every invitation to attend public gatherings and was admired for his ability to devote long hours to difficult tasks. He had given few public speeches, one of his few appearance before a large group being to give an address before Congress at the Coolidge memorial services.

He was stricken with pneumonia last year, but after a long rest at a Boston hospital and at his home, recovered.

On June 3, he returned from Boston to Sholan Lodge, his Sterling home, tired after a difficult and long court day.

When a son, Arthur P. Rugg, Jr., found him the next morning in his Worcester office, signing the Antiquarian Society diplomas, he immediately urged his father to go home with him and he was taken to his Worcester home, at 488 Pleasant street and later was removed to Sterling.

His condition did not become serious until Saturday. When Drs. A. Wilson Atwood and Bancroft C. Wheeler, his Worcester physicians, called Dr. Paul D. White, Boston heart specialist, into consultation. Members of his family were summoned.

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Held Many Offices

Mr. Rugg was a trustee of Clark University, Amherst College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and was a trustee of Boston University from 1909 to 1922.

He was vice-president of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts; member of the American Law Institute, Massachusetts Historical Society, Bunker Hill Monument Association, of which he was vice-president; a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

He was a member of the Sterling School Committee, 1887-1890; librarian of the Worcester Free Public Library, 1905-1915, and the Worcester County Law Library.

He was a member of the Worcester Club, Bohemian Club, Amherst Alumni Association, Worcester Economic Club, Shakespeare Club, St. Wulstan Society, Unitarian Laymen's League, Worcester Agricultural Society, Worcester County Horticultural Society, Worcester County Mechanics Association and Worcester County Club.

He is survived by his widow, Mrs. Florence May (Belcher) Rugg, whom he married April 10, 1889; two sons, Arthur P., Jr., and Charles B. Rugg; a daughter, Mrs. Mrs. Carrie H. Sylvester, and three grandchildren.

Flags on all state and city buildings have been ordered at half-staff until after Chief Justice Rugg's funeral Wednesday afternoon. Immediately on being informed of his death, Governor Hurley issued the state order, affecting buildings throughout the Commonwealth and Mayor Bennett today issued a similar order.

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