



The institution of the original RASC Fellowships (FRASC) is shrouded in some mystery. At the very beginning of the 1890s (the period of the effective revitalization of the Society), some “active” members (*i.e.*, “ordinary” members) of the Astronomical & Physical Society of Toronto (A&PST, as the RASC was then known), were using the post-nominal designation M.A.P.S. This was doubtless a down-market imitation of the sanctioned custom of members of the Royal Society (FRS), and the Royal Astronomical Society of London (FRAS). Among members of the A&PST, however, the practice was neither sanctioned, nor customary. It was, in fact, strongly discouraged by prominent members of the A&PST:

“Some discussion arose regarding the standing of the members of this society [the Astronomical & Physical Society of Toronto], as such and it was moved by Mr. Howell seconded by Mr. Miller that the following resolution be adopted: Resolved, that it is not advisable for any member of this society to write after his name the letters M.A.P.S. which would naturally signify “Members of the Astronomical & Physical Society”. This was carried”; “Minutes of the Astronomical & Physical Society of Toronto for 1891”, p. 81.

It is difficult to determine how wide-spread this usage was at the time, or even to discover the names of those affecting such a sign of unmerited status.

By October of 1900 the Society’s post-nominal thoughts had evolved. The Society was more than a “club”, and as a Society it could aspire to host a higher class of active membership, known as the “Fellows”. Unlike the earlier unsanctioned practice of those presumptuous members affecting the designation M.A.P.S., the Fellowship was not to be conferred on anyone and everyone who managed to be elected an Associate Member (the designation for the majority of active members); the Fellowship was meant to be uncommon, it had to be earned, and seen to be earned. Although nationality was not specified, in practice the Fellowship seems to have been bestowed on outstanding active members who were Canadians, whether professional or amateur in status, whereas the Corresponding Fellowship and the Honorary Fellowship were chiefly (though not exclusively) reserved for honouring major foreign figures in the astronomical world.¹

The By-laws of the Toronto Astronomical Society of 1900 give us the precise wording of the legislation, and they specify the mechanics of how one could become a Fellow of the Society:

¹ *E.g.*, **U.K.**: Agnes Mary Clerke, elected Corresponding Member in 1891; Sir Robert Ball, elected Honorary Member in 1894; **France**: Camille Flammarion, elected Honorary Member in 1901; **U.S.A.**: George Ellery Hale, elected Corresponding Member in 1894, & Honorary Member in 1900; Mary Proctor, elected Corresponding Member in 1896; Edward Emerson Barnard, elected Corresponding Member in 1899, & Honorary Member in 1901. Among the Canadians one finds the Galt industrialist John Goldie, elected a Corresponding Member in 1890, & Clement Henry McLeod, elected a Corresponding member in 1894. The available sources are not always as clear as one might like, *e.g.*, McLeod subsequently appears in the list of five prominent members elected to the category of “Fellows of the Society”, that is, to the “domestic” Fellowship! *JRASC* 3, 4 (1909 July-August), 55.

“BY-LAWS.

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...MEMBERSHIP...

III. The Active Members shall consist of persons duly elected to be Associates, Life Associates, Fellows and Life Fellows, respectively...

(b) The Fellows shall be chosen from among the Associates in virtue of scientific attainments or services...

ELECTION AND ADMISSION OF FELLOWS.

XIV. An Associate, not in arrears and being otherwise eligible, may be nominated as a candidate for Fellowship. The nomination shall be according to Form No. 5, and shall be read aloud at a regular meeting of the Society, whereupon it shall be posted by the Recorder in the Library until the next regular meeting, when the President shall take the pleasure of the Society on the question whether it shall be referred to the Council for a report. If the decision of the Society be in favor of such reference, the Council shall take the matter into consideration and shall have due regard to the qualifications of the candidate, including, if they exist, his application as a student, his fitness as a teacher, his success as an observer, his original work, the value of the papers he has contributed, the regularity of his attendance on the meetings of the Society, and the interest he has manifested in its welfare and usefulness. When prepared [p. 10] to do so, the Council shall make a special report as to the fitness of the candidate, and such report may be accepted, modified, tabled or rejected by the Society at a regular meeting. Voting at any stage in a candidature for Fellowship shall be by ballot, and unless a two-thirds vote, whether in Council or in general meeting, favors election, the nomination shall be held to have failed”; CHARTER AND BY-LAWS OF THE TORONTO ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY Adopted 16th October, 1900 (Toronto: Toronto Astronomical Society, ca. 1900), pp. 7-10.

And the model form for nomination survives:

FORM NO. 5—NOMINATION PAPER FOR A FELLOW.

We, A.B. and C.D., being of opinion that E.F., an Associate of this Society in good standing, is eligible for and worthy of advancement to a Fellowship therein, do hereby nominate him, the said E[.]F[.],<,> as a fit and proper person to be elected a Fellow of The Toronto Astronomical Society.

.....
.....

Toronto, 19 .

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I hereby certify that the formalities imposed in this behalf by the By-laws of the Society have been complied with and that this nomination is now ready to be dealt with by the Society.

Recorder.

From the *CHARTER AND BY-LAWS OF THE TORONTO ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY Adopted 16th October, 1900* (Toronto: Toronto Astronomical Society, ca. 1900), p. 20. *Editorial conventions: editorial additions appear between [], editorial omissions appear between < >.*

The Society went through several name changes at the turn of the century, culminating in the present appellation of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, a result of a successful petitioning of the Crown for the privilege to use the style “Royal” (granted in 1903; “Minutes of the RASC 1903”, regular meeting, 1903 March 3, p. 16; R.A. Rosenfeld, “The Society’s “Royal” Charter”, *JRASC* 107, 4 [2013 August], 162–164, at p. 163). Buoyed by confidence in the Society’s new Royal status, the leadership further refined the process of nomination of Fellows by assigning the task to a Committee:

“Mr. Miller, Mr. Musson and the President were appointed a committee to nominate candidates for “Fellows” of the R[.]A[.]S.C. Move[d] by G.E. Lumsden sec[onded] A. Harvey, carried”; “Minutes of the RASC 1903”, Council meeting for 1903 March 6, p. 17 (a draft report reads: “Mr. Miller[,] Mr. Musson & the Pres[iden]t [to] be a Committee to nominate Fellows of the R.A.S.C. Carried R.F.S. [=R.F. Stupart]”; *ibid.*).

As Richard Jarrell remarks:

“When the RASC was first incorporated with a royal charter, it attempted to emulate its British namesake, the RAS, not only in its national and international aspirations but in its election of fellows and honorary fellows from overseas. Those who bore the title FRASC were those who had contributed to the society, such as John R. Collins, the long-time secretary, and distinguished amateurs, such as A.F. Miller, or professionals, such as King, Klotz, Plaskett, and De Lury”; Richard A. Jarrell, *The Cold Light of Dawn: A History of Canadian Astronomy* (Toronto–Buffalo–London: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 140 (note, this is mistaken in one respect—the RASC, while incorporated, never received a royal charter; <https://www.rasc.ca/societys-royal-charter>).

No list of Fellows of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (FRASC) seems to have ever been published by the Society in the years of the original RASC Fellowship ca. 1900–ca. 1944. The following list, pulled together from various sources, is at best partial:

Prof. C.A. Chant (1865–1956), M.A., PH.D., FRSC, FRASC https://www.rasc.ca/clarence-chant
John R. Collins (1865–1957), FRASC https://www.rasc.ca/john-collins
Prof. Alfred DeLury (1864–1951), M.A., FRSC, FRASC https://www.rasc.ca/alfred-delury
Dr. William Frederick King (1854–1916), CMG, D.L.S., LL.D., FRSC, FRASC http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/king_william_frederick_14E.html <i>JRASC</i> 3, 4 (1909 July-August), 55
Dr. Otto Klotz (1852–1923), D.L.S., LL.D., D.SC., FRSC, FRASC https://www.rasc.ca/otto-klotz <i>JRASC</i> 3, 4 (1909 July-August), 55
Clement Henry McLeod (1851-1917), FRSC, FRASC

https://www.rasc.ca/corresponding-member-clement-henry-mcleod <i>JRASC</i> 3, 4 (1909 July-August), 55 (note the discrepancy between these sources; see note 1 <i>supra</i>)
A.F. Miller (1851–1947), FRASC https://www.rasc.ca/allan-miller
John Andrew Patterson (1876–1930), KC, M.A., FRASC http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/paterson_john_andrew_15E.html
Dr. J.S. Plaskett (1865–1941), CBE, FRS, FRAS, FRSC, FRASC https://www.rasc.ca/john-stanley-plaskett <i>JRASC</i> 3, 4 (1909 July-August), 55
R.M. Stewart (1878–1954), M.A., FRAS, FRSC, FRASC https://www.rasc.ca/robert-meldrum-stewart <i>JRASC</i> 3, 4 (1909 July-August), 56
Sir Frederick Stupart (1857–1940), FRSC, FRASC http://articles.adsabs.harvard.edu/full/seri/JRASC/0035//0000140.000.html

How long was this honour bestowed by the Society? That too is mysterious. No document survives to inform us why and when the practice was discontinued, but Peter Broughton, FRASC, speculates that the honour died during the upheavals of WWII:

“Corresponding Members and Fellows were recognized classes within the Society for many years but they ceased to exist by 1944”; R. Peter Broughton, *Looking Up: A History of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada* (Toronto–Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1994), p. 38.



Awards and distinctions are common in the world of astronomical societies, professional and amateur. At their best they are potentially available to any member who can satisfy the criteria for qualification, and they’re an instrument of recognition to spur the growth of the discipline, the individual, and the institution. An ever-present danger to the effectiveness of astronomical awards and distinctions is what may be called the “cheapening of the coin of the realm”, when over time the general quality of the successful recipients slips from the standards set at the time of an award’s inception. A glance at the partial list of original RASC Fellows (see above) assures that the standard of the honorees was reasonably consistent throughout the life of the award. Only time will tell if that will be the case for the new Fellow of the RASC award created in 2013.

–R.A. Rosenfeld, FRASC
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