

Coppridge, William Maurice ^[1]

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William Maurice Coppridge. Image courtesy of the History of Medicine.

^[2]William Maurice Coppridge, physician, teacher, statesman, pioneer urologist in North Carolina, clinical professor of urology at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[3] School of Medicine in Chapel Hill, and chief of urology and director of clinical laboratories at Watts Hospital in [Durham](#) ^[4], was born in Danville, Va., the son of William David Coppridge, an insurance man of Danville and Roanoke, Va., and Mary Ellen Ferguson Coppridge of Milton, N.C. He attended public schools in Danville and in Roanoke, when his family moved there in 1910. He entered St. Mary's College in Belmont, N.C., in 1911 and transferred from there in 1913 to The University of North Carolina; in 1916 he enrolled in the then two-year medical department, from which he earned a certificate of satisfactory accomplishment in 1916. He transferred to [Jefferson Medical College](#) ^[5], Philadelphia, receiving an M.D. degree in 1918 and spending a year of postgraduate work in the Philadelphia Polyclinic Hospital. There he came under the influence of Dr. B. A. Thomas, a distinguished teacher and professor of urology in the [University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine](#) ^[6]. Coppridge's interest in the specialty of urology and in the chemical pathology of urinary tract disease began in this period.

Coppridge returned in 1919 to Chapel Hill, where he was appointed assistant professor of pathology to Dr. James B. Bullitt and, according to Bullitt, was indispensable to the pathology department while Bullitt himself served in the medical corps with the Sixty-fifth General Hospital during [World War I](#) ^[7]. Coppridge also began the organization of a laboratory of clinical pathology in Watts Hospital in Durham. On 2 July 1919, he married the University of North Carolina Infirmary nurse, Ferrie Patterson Choate of Steele Creek, near [Charlotte](#) ^[8]. Early in their married life they lived on Ward K in Watts Hospital, and Mrs. Coppridge was operating room supervisor. Their marriage was without issue but was enriched by the custody of Coppridge's nephews: Dr. Alton James Coppridge, a urologist in Durham, and the Reverend James Wendell Ligon, a Presbyterian minister who was a missionary in Indonesia and afterward a resident of Charlotte.

Coppridge practiced general surgery with Dr. Foy Roberson until his department of urology was certified for residency training in 1935 by the American Board of Urology. Coppridge was a founding member of the North Carolina Urological Society in 1930 and its first president; founding member of the Southeastern Branch of the American Urological Association and president from 1944 to 1946; founding fellow of the [American Urological Association](#) ^[9]; member of the executive committee of the Southern Medical Association (1941–46); fellow of the American College of Surgeons; member of the Durham-Orange County Medical Society and president in 1925 and 1946; member of the [North Carolina Medical Society](#) ^[10] and president in 1946–47; founding member of the Medical Care Commission in North Carolina,

-serving under five governors (1945–59); and a member of the American Medical Association, the New York Academy of Science, the Tri-State Medical Society, the Durham County Board of Health (eight years), the [North Carolina Board of Medical Examiners](#) ^[11] (1938–44), the Governor's Committee on Physicians' Needs in North Carolina (1937–38, 1944–45), and the Société Internationale d'Urologie. In [World War I](#) ^[7] he served in the Medical Reserve Corps; in [World War II](#) ^[12] he was chief of medical services for the North Carolina Office of Civil Defense and a member of the state Committee for Procurement and Assignment of Medical Personnel. He was given The University of North Carolina Medical School's Distinguished Service Award in 1955, and in May 1959 he was elected to the presidency of the American Urological Association, the highest professional honor an American urologist can attain.

Coppridge, author of fifty-seven scientific publications, was for forty years a member of the Watts Hospital staff. His interest in improved medical training and better health for all the citizens of the state is reflected in his wise and courageous leadership in the creation of the state Good Health Plan and the development of a four-year medical school and teaching hospital at the university in Chapel Hill.

Coppridge belonged to the Durham Pistol Club, the [Democratic](#) ^[13] party, and the [Presbyterian](#) ^[14] church. He died after four weeks in the New England Baptist Hospital. Funeral services were conducted in the First Presbyterian Church in Durham, and he was buried in Maplewood Cemetery. Ferrie Patterson Choate Coppridge died on 27 Feb. 1974 in Durham.

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