Education: Copestone, Headstone and Keystone

In our ritual it appears that the words, Copestone, Headstone and Keystone, are used interchangeably. In the Mark Master Mason degree, during the circuits, scripture readings are given; in the first we hear "the headstone of the corner" followed by two readings with 'head of the corner' e.g. "the same is become the head of the corner". Later in the degree the Keystone lecture is given. In the Most Excellent Master degree we are shown where the Keystone is placed, reminded of that correct use in the degree's Symbolical Lecture and in the Historical Lecture told "the placing of the copestone was celebrated by the fraternity with great joy". In some jurisdictions the wording used is "cape-stone"; which is an old English (Saxon) variation of copestone. Copestone is used again in the Holy Royal Arch degree when our labourers tell us that they "removed two of the copestones".

In architectural usage the Keystone is the central stone in an arch bearing the lateral and vertical stresses thus binding and holding the structure together. It is perhaps not a bad metaphor for the candidate; the candidate being what 'holds' our fraternity together given so much or our work is for their benefit. As a result of the Keystone's importance it was often marked by the craftsmen; a tradition we emulate in the MMM degree. The Keystone is often an elaborately designed stone which fits with the statement in the MMM degree that it is of "singular form and beauty". However in contrast to what we are taught in the MEM degree it is not the last stone placed in a structure rather the copestone is. Architectural usage equates the words headstone and copestone although headstone is rarely used now. This stone is the last stone placed in a building and is traditionally celebrated (as depicted in the MEM degree) with as much fanfare as the laying of the cornerstone. While the copestone is celebrated as the final stone placed; structurally its role is less critical than that of the Keystone because the structure can survive its removal as depicted in the HRA degree.