

The Gavel

Orono Lodge – January 12, 2012

This gavel is merely a piece of wood beautifully carved on a lathe; however it commands respect when rapped on a podium. The gavel is a ceremonial mallet which signals leadership, achievement and authority. Gavels are used by Judges, Auctioneers, the Speaker in Parliament, the Chair of most meetings and of course by the Worshipful Master and the Wardens of a Masonic Lodge.

A gavel is a powerful instrument that should be used with great care. I've often wondered if the gavel has a history of descending from the scepter which has been used by royalty. The scepter symbolizes imperial authority while the gavel is a symbol of authority and the right to act. Both are powerful symbols.

This evening the gavel of the lodge will be presented to the Worshipful Master on his Installation. It will be handed to him handle first, a symbolic act that acknowledges publically that only he has the authority to use it. The gavel, being an emblem of power, will enable the Worshipful Master to preserve good order, and when used by him will be duly answered by his Wardens.

I found it interesting that when I visited the Masonic Lodge in Invercargill, New Zealand in February of 2009, the Wardens did in fact echo the Worshipful Master's use of the Gavel. For example when the Worshipful Master declared a motion carried or a certain order of business closed by rapping the gavel then immediately the Senior Warden and then the Junior Warden responded with their gavels. The sound in the room was like an echo. I found it strange at that time however, as I thought about it they were doing what it says you are to do in the Installation ritual. It signaled to me that the Wardens were saying as they used their gavel, "we agree with the Worshipful Master as part of the senior executive of this lodge."

Masonic training can have lasting effects. I was the Worshipful Master of Maple Leaf Lodge in Bath in 1971. Much later in 1991 I was elected Reeve of Cramahe Township.

At my first meeting as Reeve I declared the first motion carried and rapped the gavel. The 80 or so people in the audience seemed startled and it ran through my mind "now why did I do that?" Of course it came from my Masonic training as the right thing to do. As it was effective and since I had started that way I thought that it would be a good idea to continue. It worked, and proper observance of decorum, which hadn't been the norm soon was expected.

The gavel is really a token of the esteem and confidence that the lodge has placed in you as their Worshipful Master. As it is also the symbol of your authority, be careful how you use it. The gavel should never be used to drown out a speaker; it should never be played with as a toy nor should it ever be used to cut off debate in a threatening way. And of course a Mason would never try to "gavel through" his own will on a particular subject, tempting as it might be.

In a Masonic Lodge the gavel is used to open and close meetings, call the brethren to order and to seat the brethren; it is used to signal that motions have been carried and that certain orders of business have been completed.

A gavel is a powerful instrument that should be used with great care.

Use it sparingly but use it with great confidence when needed. To remind you of the power of the gavel I have as my 9th working tool for the Master Elect a small gavel. Congratulations and have a great year. If I can be of any assistance to you during the coming year please contact me at your convenience.

Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure

The Work

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