
Fact Sheet No. 11 THE MACE

The Mace is a large, heavy, richly ornamental piece used in the Legislative Assembly.



THE PURPOSE OF THE MACE

The symbol of authority of the House, the Mace is carried each day into the Chamber by the Sergeant-at-Arms.

When the Speaker takes the Chair at the beginning of each session, the Sergeant-at-Arms places the Mace on the Table. This signals that the House is in session. When the Mace is placed on two large supports at the foot of the Table, the House is in Committee of Supply or Committee of the Whole House.

At the end of each day, the Sergeant-at-Arms carries the Mace out of the Chamber. This signifies the end of the day's business.

WESTMINSTER ORIGINS

Roots of the word 'mace' date back to medieval times in England, when by canonical law, Bishops going to war were not allowed to carry swords. Instead, as a weapon, they carried a massue or masse. These terms originating in France, describe a type of wooden club with iron tips or spikes.

Use of the Mace in English parliament began in the mid 14th century. At that time, Members of the House disliked its presence. They felt that the Mace trespassed on their rights, since the Sergeant-at-Arms originally acting under the authority of the Sovereign, used it to maintain order in the Chamber. Its connection to royal authority gone, the Mace of modern times represents the Speaker's authority in the House.

A RACE...FOR THE MACE

*Returning to London after a junket, a nineteenth century Commons took two special trains. The Mace traveled on one train, while the official with the key to the Mace cupboard rode the other. The official's train arrived an hour later than the one holding the Mace.

Already at the House, MPs were forced to wait for the tardy official to unlock the Mace before talks could begin.

*On another occasion, during a particularly furious debate in 1626, the Sergeant-at-Arms tried to end the argument by walking off with the Mace. A fast moving Member however, grabbed the Mace, locked the Commons door and pocketed the key.

THE FIRST LEGISLATURE AND ITS MACE

A soldier of the Wolseley Expedition to the new province of Manitoba in 1870 carved the first Mace from the hub of a Red River cart wheel.

The Mace made its first formal appearance on March 15, 1871, at the first sitting of the Manitoba Legislature in the Home of A.G.B. Bannatyne. Fire destroyed this temporary home of the Legislature in December of 1873, but the Mace was saved.

This original Mace, retired after 13 years of service, is now on display in the Speaker's Hall in the Legislative Building. In 2017 we initiated a new tradition whereby the original Mace is carried into the House by the Sergeant-at-Arms on a sitting day on or around May 12 to honour Manitoba Day. In addition, a beautiful Star Blanket Mace cushion and a beaded Mace runner, gifted to the Assembly by the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba, are also displayed in the Chamber to honour Manitoba Day.

TODAY'S MACE

The current Mace first appeared in 1884. It is about five feet in length, weighs more than 20 pounds and is made of gold-plated metals. In addition to the fleur-de-lys, a rose, thistle, and harp adorn the current Mace along with a crown: symbolizing the Monarch as head of state, four beavers: acknowledging the province's place as part of Canada, and an orb and cross: symbolizing the spiritual and religious aspects of Manitoba life.