

The Governor General's Gavel and Case

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A distinguished member of the Order, PGG THOMAS P. CURTIS queried me about the significance, if any, of the various sources of the wood used in the making of the Governor General's gavel and case which contains it. Since he has voiced an interest perhaps there are others who have a special interest in the Order. I'll dare to reveal my very own personal feelings. For me, this Order is more than a collection of men who have heredity and patriotic similitudes. This gavel and case was an attempt to put into tangible expression some of these feelings. I know that I am not alone in this; others harbor deep feelings as was borne out by an exchange of letters with a deeply patriotic member, Ted Little, of Connecticut for whom I have the warmest regards and great respect.

A Proud Ancestry

All members share a similar proud tracing of ancestry to the very earliest beginnings of this beloved country. Some of us are so situated that we live in close proximity to the very lands where our fore-fathers lived some 350 years ago. Perhaps you are so fortunate. It is not a rare thing for Virginians to hold such strong ties. A noble and chivalrous Robert E. Lee felt this so deeply that when offered command of the Federal forces he declined saying that he could not draw his sword against his native state. If you have such a place or lands where you can walk, where they walked, in silent contemplation of and with them it will do your soul good and give you insights that perhaps you never before experienced. Do this in the quiet of the early morning to set the mood as the mists rise over the fields. Try it, with sincerity; you will find it rewarding much beyond your expectations. If you have stayed with me this long you might well be wondering what all this has to do with the gavel. Really, quite a bit because it was the thought process of the foregoing that led me to the idea. Let's have a tangible manifestation of the requirement for membership in the Order. I believe so strongly in these qualifying requirements for membership that I think the address of John Quincy Adams should be required reading before membership is bestowed. This address was given in New York at the founding of the Order in 1896.

The Wood

Acquiring the various component representative woods for the project did not come easily. The distinguished director, Mr. Angus Murdock, of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities came to my rescue. He was intrigued with my purpose. He also knew of my interest in Bacon's Castle, because of John Barker's participation in that first revolt against the Crown. With the renovation and repair of the structure in progress at the time he was able to secure for

me a piece of the rotting sill being replaced. This sill measuring about 12 inches by 12 inches was quite enough but I still wanted to be sure of its age and that it was not from unknown repair in time past. To be sure I send a piece to the dendrologist of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, one of the leading authorities in his field. He assured me that it was not only old but was from an oak tree growing at the time of Columbus. He was happy to add this to his collection of rare woods. Rare in that it was from an ancient, historic structure.

The Gavel

Since my supply of wood for the gavel was limited, I could not afford to have the turning left to other than an expert. Good fortune was with me for I located a craftsman in old Richmond who restored antiques and undertook special projects. He, too, was interested in the project and did a fine, careful job in the turning.

The Case

Wood for the case and inlaid crosses was the next challenge. Having recently retired I had a home built on the lower Potomac river situation on historic ground. The land had been the site of the Glebe of Westmoreland where resided the Church of England Vicar who married George Washington's mother and father. A contractor engaged in building home there had a problem which fortunately solved my problem. There was a "swamp" walnut tree, very old having a gnarled trunk five feet in diameter by one measurement. Sometime in the past it had apparently been struck by lightening causing interior rot and making it susceptible to falling in a high wind. The contractor building a home nearby feared a falling tree could damage the home. He offered me the tree if I could have it removed. It was an expensive operation but it provided me the wood necessary. Counting the rings proved that it could have been growing in Washington's time. Half way home. Now for the crosses!

Wood from St. John's church was my next target. A visit to the Rector was less than satisfactory. He opined that any wood that was available was for the church. He couldn't spare a sliver for my historical project. What to do? A visit to a sympathetic craftsman turning the gavel solved the problem. He has been engaged to do some work for St. John's in his shop. He pointed to a small pile of scrap on the floor which was destined to be thrown out and told me to help myself. This wood was especially important. It was in this church that Patrick Henry gave his rousing call to action calling on those Virginians still feeling an allegiance to the Crown to "shape up." Some in the Old Dominion were reluctant to challenge England Henry's cry, "the next gale that sweeps down from the north will bring the clash of resounding arms. Our brothers are already in the field; why stand we here idle?" - as you know his clarion call carried the day. The St. John's cross was assured.

One item was left, wood for the second cross, from Christ Church in Alexandria. It was at this church that George Washington worshiped when he came in from Mount Vernon. It was here also that the gallant Lee worshiped in happier times. Fortunately a friend was a

communicant of Christ Church. There were some minor repairs being done in the housing for the bell. Since my needs were miniscule there was no problem in securing this important part closing the circle of needed woods.

As a hobbyist, amateur cabinetmaker, it was my pleasure to work these pieces of historical wood into the case and gavel in use by Governors General today. I think it is a worthy instrument to call my fellow associates to order, this group of patriots who share such a treasured heritage. Like the associates called to order, this gavel and case embodies all of the strict elements of "belonging." The gavel itself dates from the period when our forefathers were, as John Quincy Adams decreed, the real prisoners. The case containing the gavel came from the period of time of the shot heard 'round the world. The crosses inlaid in the top of the case are representative that period of time and places where great leaders came to unburden themselves of the travail. Hopefully, our associates are living embodiment of all things held dear by all true patriots. The sources of the wood are from those sites still alive and vibrant. May all who wield this gavel feel the summation of history that he holds in his hand.