

Yukon Legislative Assembly



Information Sheet No. 2: The Mace



The Mace as a Parliamentary Symbol

The Mace was originally a weapon of war developed during the medieval period. Typically a mace was composed of an iron shaft with a flange or an iron ball on the end. The ball was often spiked. It was a potent weapon and could be used effectively against soldiers wearing chain mail or plate armour.

The Second Edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* describes how the Mace evolved from being a weapon, to a symbol of Royal Authority to a symbol of the House and the Speaker:

In the twelfth century, the Sergeants-at-Arms of the King's Bodyguard were equipped with maces. These maces, stamped with the Royal Arms and carried by the Sergeants in the exercise of their powers of arrest without warrant, became recognized symbols of the King's authority...Royal Sergeants-at-Arms began to be assigned to the Commons early in the fifteenth century. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Sergeant's mace had evolved from a weapon of war to an ornately embellished emblem of office. The Sergeant-at-Arms' power to arrest without warrant enabled the Commons to arrest or commit persons who offended them, without having to resort to the ordinary courts of law. This penal jurisdiction is the basis of the concept of parliamentary privilege and, since the exercise of this privilege depended on the powers vested in the Royal Sergeant-at-Arms, the Mace—his emblem of office—was identified with the growing privileges of the Commons and became recognized as the symbol of the authority of the House and of the Speaker through the House.¹

The Use of the Mace

Only when the Mace is in place is the Assembly duly authorized to sit and proceedings may begin. When the Speaker, or Deputy Speaker, is in the Chair, the Mace is placed in the upper brackets on the Clerk's Table. When the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole

¹ Audrey O'Brien and Marc Bosc (eds.), *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* (second edition), (Ottawa: House of Commons of Canada, and Montréal: Editions Yvon Blais, 2009), pp. 280-281.

the Mace rests on the lower brackets. The Mace's Crown always faces the government side of the House.

The Sergeant-at-Arms is the only person authorized to touch the Mace during proceedings. In 2002 a Canadian Member of Parliament (MP) grabbed the Mace in the House of Commons as a form of protest. The MP was found in contempt of Parliament and suspended from the House of Commons for a number of days. He was only allowed to return to his seat after standing at the Bar of the House and apologizing to the Speaker and all MPs.

Yukon's Mace

In the early 1960s the idea that Yukon should have its own Mace started to be discussed. In 1964 the Yukon Territorial Council (now called the Legislative Assembly) agreed that a competition be established for the design of the Mace. The winning design would be chosen by a selection committee, which included the Commissioner, two assistant commissioners and two members of the territorial council. The prize for the winning design was awarded in 1966 to Royal Canadian Mounted Police corporal Jim Ballantyne. The design having been approved, the Mace was crafted by Birks of Montreal in 1971-72 at a cost of approximately \$8300.

On February 11, 1972 Hon. Jean Chrétien, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, announced that Yukon would receive its own Mace. By that time the Senate, the House of Commons, all the provincial legislative assemblies and the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories all had their own Mace.

On March 6, 1972 Governor General Roland Michener presented the Mace to the Yukon Territorial Council as a gift from the people of Canada. The Honourable Ronald Rivett, Speaker of the Yukon Territorial Council, accepted the Mace on behalf of the Council.

The Yukon's Mace is made of gold-plated sterling silver. A crown tops the head of the Mace. The use of the Crown had been granted under Royal Authority by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Beneath the Crown is a topographical cross section of Yukon. Shields representing the coats of arms of Canada and Yukon are on the head of the Mace. The Mace also features fireweed, Yukon's floral emblem; the figures of a miner, a trapper and a First Nations person; as well as etchings of Yukon scenery and other armorial bearings. The Mace weighs eleven pounds (about 5 kilograms).

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