

NOTES ON THE SENATE

The Marshal's staff

The lack of continuity in the work of the Polish parliament over the past two hundred years has made it difficult to preserve the traditional parliamentary customs, so carefully upheld in some other countries. However, one very old custom has survived: the visible symbol of power, authority, dignity and the law is the Marshal's staff. Marshals of the Sejm and Senate now use it for one purpose only: to open and close sittings by knocking on the floor with it three times.

THE TRADITION OF USING THE STAFF IS VERY OLD. On an old woodcut of the Statute of Jan Łaski, proclaimed in 1506, we see it in the hand of the Deputy presiding over the meeting, although the office of "marshal of deputies" was not finally established until the middle of the 16th century. In the pre-Partition period, the staff was the symbol of authority of the Marshal of the House of Deputies and a sign that parliament was in session. Parliament could not meet unless the Marshal was present. The so-called rotation of the Marshal's staff was in force at the time: the three Provinces of the Republic – Great Poland (Wielkopolska), Little Poland (Małopolska) and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania took turns to appoint the Marshal.

The King presided over the Senate indirectly, through the Grand Marshal of the Crown in routine matters and through the Chancellor or his Deputy in matters of substance. In the Senate, the Grand Marshal of the Crown or, in his absence, the Court Marshal, gave the floor to speakers, reprimanded them, called for quiet and exercised general supervision over order, using his personal staff of office.

Before the end of the 18th century, the debates of the new House of Deputies were opened and conducted by the Marshal of the previous Term (i.e. the Marshal of the previous Sejm) until a new Marshal was elected. During the decline of the Sejm in Saxonian times, debates sometimes went on for several weeks without a new Marshal being elected. After a new Marshal was successfully elected, he took the oath before the Marshal of the previous Term and the staff was ceremonially handed over to him. During the historic Sejm of 1773, which was under pressure to ratify the partition of Poland by the 3 superpowers: Russia, Prussia and Austria, Deputy Tadeusz Rejtan, who wanted to demonstrate that the staff held by Poniński, Liw Deputy, did not represent any legitimate authority (thus disputing the legality of his election as Marshal by the previously-formed Confederation), seized the staff himself and sat down on the Marshal chair, declaring that he too could usurp the Marshal's office.

IN THE MARSHAL'S HANDS, THE STAFF was no mere symbol: it was an extremely practical means of keeping order during debates. The Marshal tried to quieten unruly deputies by tapping, knocking and often banging violently on the floor. Diaries of debates contain numerous accounts of this, for example, a record



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The Marshal's staff



(photo by Z. Dubiel, archives of the Sejm Publishing House)



(photo by A. Welnicki, archives of the Sejm Publishing House)



(photo by M. Marlikowski, Archives of the Senate)



Contemporary Senate Marshal's Staff

from 4th February 1702 says that “the whole day was very unfortunate, as three Marshal’s staffs were broken, when he rapped on the floor to call for quiet”. The staff was used for this same purpose during the Sejms of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Kingdom of Poland. On 11th June 1830, during a violent dispute, the Marshal tried to restore order in the House by “clamorous battering with the staff”.

The staff was used to keep order not only among Deputies, but also among the constant throng of people milling about in the debating chamber, causing disruption. In his treaty on effective counsel, Stanisław Konarski describes the chaos and disorder existing in the House of Deputies in the second half of the 18th century. It begins with the following description of the Marshal’s efforts: “It is a sorry sight indeed to see how the Marshal in his dignity, the leader of the House, who bears the weight of the Republic on his shoulders, at the beginning of each session, always for nearly an hour and continuing throughout, as if he had no better business than to wrestle and contend with the commonality, who persistently force entry to the House, is constrained to use his own shoulders and his revered staff to push them back”. Perhaps this pragmatic use of the symbol of authority is the reason why so few Marshal’s staffs have survived to this day.

The best known one is in the collection of the Czartoryski Museum in Cracow: it is the staff belonging to the **MARSHAL OF THE FOUR-YEAR SEJM, STANISŁAW MAŁACHOWSKI**. It is made of oak and is 1.65 metres long. Like most staffs at that time, it is very simple and completely plain, in contrast to other symbols of authority held in the hand: sceptres, maces and crosiers. It bears the inscription: the staff held by Stanisław Małachowski in the Sejm of the memorable Constitution of May 3, from the year 1788 to 1792.

THE STAFF OF WŁADYSŁAW OSTROWSKI, Marshal of the Chamber of Deputies during the November Uprising (1830–1831), is topped with a gilt ball, on which is perched a silver Napoleonic eagle. After the collapse of the Uprising, the shaft was cut into segments, to which wax impressions of the Sejm seal and the Marshal’s signature were affixed and the segments distributed as mementos of the Uprising.

THE STAFF GIVEN TO THE MARSHAL OF THE LEGISLATIVE SEJM (afterwards Marshal of the Senate) **WOJCIECH TRĄPCZYŃSKI ON HIS NAME-DAY, 23 APRIL 1920**, is in the collection of the Museum Exhibits Department of the Sejm Library in Warsaw. Its rather baroque ornamental knob looks like a ship carried by the waves, with an eagle sitting on a wreath of oak-leaves in place of a mast. The staff was cast in bronze by the well-known Warsaw firm of Łopieńscy Brothers.

Even though only a few Marshall's staffs have survived to the present day, we can admire them in numerous iconographies, because Marshals loved to be portrayed with symbols of their power. The numerous examples include the staff in the well-known portrait of Stanisław Małachowski, painted by Józef Peszka, or the staff in the portrait of the Marshal of the National Sejm in Lviv, Mikołaj Zyblikiewicz (who presided over the sittings in the years 1882-1886), painted by Jan Matejko.

TODAY, THE MARSHAL OF THE SEJM OPENS THE SITTINGS with a staff designed in 1993 by the sculptor Anzelma Klimkowska. It was mostly produced by Zakład Mebli Artystycznych (Artistic Furniture Factory) in Henryków. The mahogany shafts with two ornamented bronze rings are topped with a simple head with a crowned eagle.

The Marshal of the Senate brought back in 1989 used the post-war staff of Władysław Kowalski, who was the Marshal of the Legislative Sejm. The mahogany shaft had the year 1947 inscribed on it, and the staff was topped with decorative leaves sculpted in wood. **ON 12 APRIL 1991, THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE POLISH GUILD OF ARTISANS OFFICIALLY HANDED A NEW STAFF** and the emblem of the republic of Poland to **MARSHALL ANDRZEJ STELMACHOWSKI**. The staff and the emblem were designed by architects: Andrzej Kaliszewski, Barbara Kaliszewska and Bohdan Napieralski, who also designed the new plenary room of the Senate. The staff was crafted by Lech Kalinowski and Zygmunt Dzierła. Its mahogany shaft is ornamented with the ribs made of silvered metal rods. The staff has the following dates inscribed on it: 3 V 1791, 11 XI 1918 and 4 VI 1989 – to commemorate the first Polish constitution, the independence day, and the first post-war democratic elections to the Senate. The top of the staff is formed with a decorative crown that resembles the crown of Kazimierz Wielki of the Piast dynasty, clad with gold and four light amber stones.