



SENAT RP

NOTES ON THE SENATE

SENATE
OF THE REPUBLIC
OF POLAND

CHANCELLERY OF THE SENATE
OFFICE FOR CITIZEN RELATIONS
ul. Wiejska 6, 00-902 Warszawa
tel. (48-22) 694-92-84
fax (48-22) 694-95-70
www.senat.gov.pl

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. Only 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: knocking on the floor with it three times, they open and close sittings.

The tradition of using the Staff is an ancient one. 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 *Deputies Marshal* was not finally established until half-way through 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: Marshal was elected successively from the three Provinces of the Republic – Great Poland (Wielkopolska), Little Poland (Małopolska) and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The King presided over the Senate indirectly, through the Grand Chamberlain in routine matters and through the Chancellor or his Deputy in matters of substance. In the Senate, the Grand Chamberlain called Marshals, reprimanded them, called for quiet and generally kept order, using his personal staff of office.

Up to the end of the 18th century, the debates of the new House of Deputies were opened and conducted, until the election of a new Marshal, by the so-called Marshal of the Old Staff (i.e. the Marshal of the previous Sejm). During the decline of the Sejm in Saxonian times, debates sometimes went on under the Old Staff for several weeks and on occasions the Deputies dispersed without having elected a new Marshal. After a new Marshal was successfully elected, he took the oath before the Marshal of the Old Staff and the Staff was ceremonially handed over to him. During the historic Sejm of 1773, which was to affirm, under pressure from the three Great Powers, Russia, Prussia and Austria the already effected Partition of the Republic, Deputy Tadeusz Rejtan, wanting to *demonstrate how null and void was the authority of the Staff held by Poniński, Liw Deputy* (and thereby negate the legality of his election as Marshal by the previously-formed Confederation), seized the Staff himself and sat down on the Marshal stool, 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. We read, for instance, in the minutes of the debate on 4th February 1702, that *this day was truly one of great mishap, for 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 (1807–1815) and the congress Kingdom of Poland (1815–1831). 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. Stanisław Konarski, writing half-way through the 18th century, begins his treatise on how effectively to counter the chaos and disorder reigning in the House of Deputies at the time with a 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 near on 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 august Staff to push them back.



Fot. A. Wełnicki. Archives of the Sejm Publishing Office

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. Made of oak and 1.65 metres long, it is – as Marshal's Staffs used to be, in contrast to other symbols of authority held in the hand, like the sceptre, the mace and the crozier – very simple and completely plain. It bears the inscription: *The Staff held by Stanisław Małachowski in the Sejm of the memorable Third of May Constitution, from the year 1788 to 1792.*



Fot. A. Wełnicki. Archives of the Sejm Publishing Office

The Staff of Władysław Ostrowski, Marshal of the House 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, 23rd April 1920, is in the collection of the Polish Sejm Museum in Warsaw.

Its rather baroque ornamental knob represents ship on the waves, with an eagle sitting on a wreath of oak-leaves in place of a mast. It was cast in bronze by the well-known Warsaw firm of Łopieński Brothers.



Fot . Senate Archives

On 12 April 1991 representatives of the Guild of Artistic Crafts ceremonially handed the Marshal's stick and the emblem of Poland to Marshal Andrzej Stelmachowski, both executed for the new Senate hall. The mahogany staff of the stick is decorated with longwise flange of silver-plated metal wires, headed by an adopted golden crown of the king Kazimierz Wielki with four ambers. On the staff are placed the following dates: 3 V 1791, 11 XI 1918 and 4 VI 1989, commemorating the first democratic election to the Senate held after the War World II.

*Dorota Mycielska, September 1993
with later amendments, November 2007*