



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

THE SPEAKER  
LE PRÉSIDENT

**Centenary of the Great Fire – Wooden Mace in the Chamber  
Statement from the Chair  
February 3, 2016**

Today, Parliament marks the 100th anniversary of the great fire of February 3, 1916, which ravaged most of the original Centre Block.

On that night, as the new Deputy Speaker, Edgar Nelson Rhodes of Nova Scotia, was in the Chair presiding over the House for the first time, a fire broke out in the Commons Reading Room. The fire grew to a raging blaze that would claim seven lives: Mr. Bowman Brown Law, M.P., representative of the County of Yarmouth, N.S.; Mr. J.B.R. Laplante, Assistant Clerk, House of Commons; Mrs. Mabel Morin and Mrs. Florence Bray, who were guests of Speaker of the House Albert Sévigny; Mr. Randolph Fanning, of the Post Office Department; Mr. Alphonse Desjardins, of the Public Works Department; and his nephew, also a Mr. Alphonse Desjardins, of the Dominion Police Force. We are honoured today by the presence in the gallery of descendants of some of those individuals.

By the morning following the fire, the entire building, except for the northwest wing and the Library had been reduced to still-smouldering ruins. Were it not for the quick thinking of librarian Michael Connolly MacCormac, credited for closing the Library's iron doors, this beautiful space and its thousands of irreplaceable books would also have been lost.

The House of Commons Mace was also destroyed in the blaze, and when the House met in the Victoria Memorial Museum (current home of the Canadian Museum of Nature) at 3pm on February 4, 1916, in the immediate aftermath of the fire, the Senate lent the House its own Mace as a replacement. For the next three weeks, the Mace belonging to the Ontario Legislature was used until a temporary Mace, made of wood, was fashioned. That wooden Mace was preserved, and is being used in the Chamber today, as it has been since 1977, each February 3.

After today, the wooden Mace will be displayed in the Foyer of the House of Commons, as a tangible reminder of the great fire of 1916, and an important tribute to the continuity of our parliamentary history.