

Part 2

MANAGEMENT AND MEETINGS

11. The Gavel

... a memorial to Doctor Adolph Alt, cofounder and first presiding officer.

LEE MASTEN FRANCIS, 1921

ADOLPH ALT, the Academy's first president, died June 28, 1920, after a long illness described as myocarditis. Hal Foster was serving as first vice-president at the time. He told members at the 1920 meeting that Dr Alt was one of the first men he had written concerning the advisability of organizing a society of ophthalmologists and otolaryngologists. Dr Alt had responded he thought it a "splendid idea," and for 20 years he had rarely missed an Academy meeting.¹

As a commemorative, President Lee Masten Francis had a gavel fashioned from the wood of the operating room chair long used by Adolph Alt. How he acquired the chair is not known. Hal Foster was a friend of the Alt family, and it is possible that Mrs Alt consulted him as to whether the Academy would wish any memorabilia among her husband's belongings.

Dr Francis presented the gavel to the Academy's 25th president, Emil Mayer, in 1921. Inscribed on the handle were the names of Adolph Alt and his successors. President Mayer was moved. "This gavel with its inscription will last for many years. May it witness a striving for the best and highest scientific ideals, as well as a continued close union of that fraternity that already exists."^{2(p438)} He asked members to rise after Dr Francis gave three raps

of the gavel "in honor of our deep appreciation of your gift, as well as in memory of our beloved first President."^{2(p438)}

For the next 45 years the raps of this gavel called to order Academy meetings, and each president turned it over to his successor, in a symbolic transfer of authority, at the end of each business meeting (Fig 26). The gavel, but not the attendant tradition, was retired after the 1966 meeting. President Francis E. LeJeune requested permission to take the gavel home to New Orleans with him and have the inscription of presidents' names brought up to date, if space would permit.^{3(p154)}

Dr LeJeune had the original gavel engraved with the names of presidents through 1967 President Wendell L. Hughes, and he had an exact replica made, with room for inscribing presidents' names through the year 2020. These he presented to the Council in 1967, along with an exhibition case for the old gavel (Fig 27).^{4(p275)}

As a token of appreciation, a replica of the gavel was awarded at the 1974 meeting to each of the Academy's 16 living past presidents. A fitting memento and a tangible expression of esteem, a duplicate of the gavel was thereafter given each president at the conclusion of his term (Fig 28).



Fig 26.—Old tradition. Nineteen seventy-two President Howard P. House (left) handing gavel to 1973 President Kenneth L. Roper.

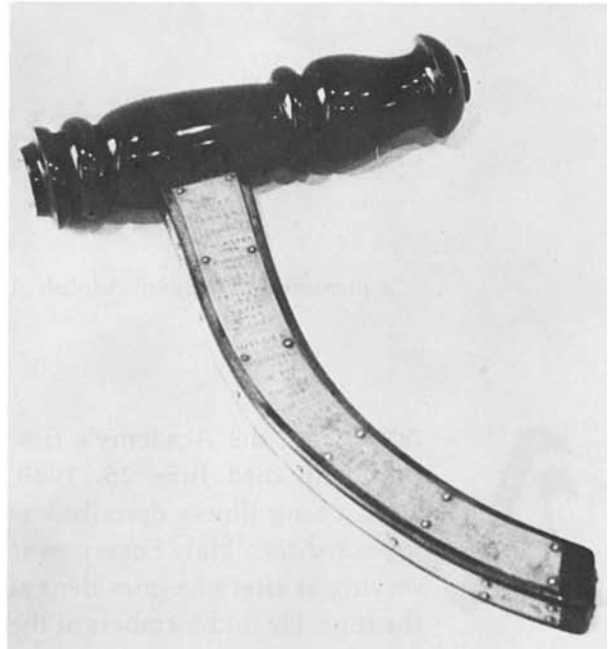


Fig 27.—Original Academy gavel.

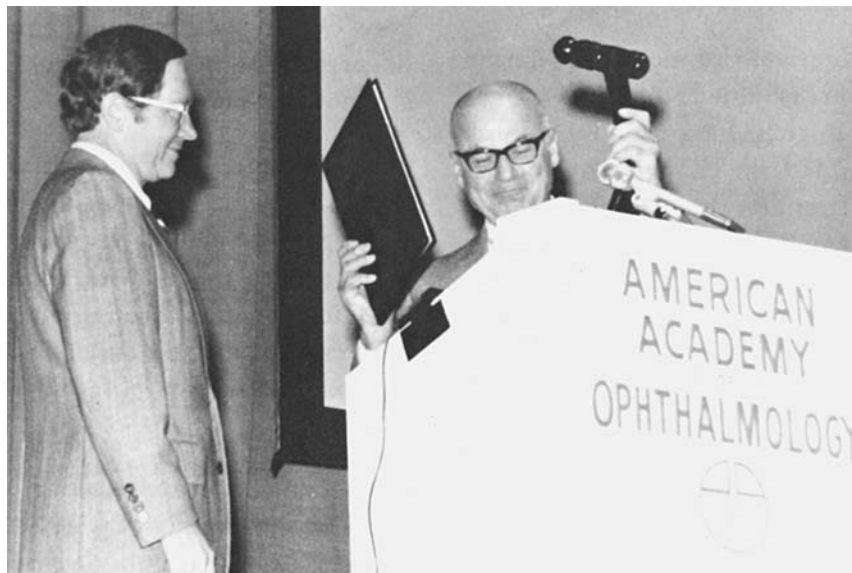


Fig 28.—New custom. Nineteen seventy-eight President Eugene L. Derlacki (right) presenting replica of gavel to immediate Past President Bradley R. Straatsma.