

The Story behind the Mayoral Chain of Halifax Regional Municipality

The tradition of a chain of office dates back more than 1,000 years, to the French Dukes of Normandy where each high-ranking civic official wore a gold chain from which hung an official seal of their authority.

These decorative chains have come down through the centuries virtually unchanged in terms of style and purpose. Today, they are worn throughout the world as a badge of office by civic dignitaries like our own mayor as well as by leaders of organizations and associations large and small. Many of the chains are actually sewn into a velvet collar, which not only adds to their impressiveness, it makes them more comfortable to wear.

For 152 years, the mayors of Halifax had managed to get along just fine without any trappings of high office, other than a special cloak. This all changed, however, in the summer of 1901 when the Duke and Duchess of York announced they were coming for a visit. The future King George V and Queen Mary were embarking on a fall tour of the then British Empire and would be visiting Halifax that October.

Mayor James T. Hamilton decided that this would be a good time for the chief magistrate of Halifax to acquire an official chain of office. After all, lots of other mayors across Canada had them and were preparing to wear them to welcome the duke and duchess.

The matter was referred to the special committee of Council which had been struck to organize the reception for the visiting royals. After some discussion, the committee agreed the chain should be bought.

Based on quotes obtained from England, the regalia would cost about 60 pounds sterling which, in today's dollars, (allowing for inflation), is roughly the equivalent of \$6,000. Or, put another way, back then, it was about as much as the average factory hand earned in a year.

That summer, Halifax Alderman Geldert went to England and visited noted silversmith Mappin Brothers of London, where he ordered the gold-plated chain of office for the mayor. The item was duly created and arrived in time for the royal visit and has been a treasured piece of municipal regalia ever since. It has been updated to reflect the amalgamation of Halifax, Dartmouth, Bedford and Halifax County in 1996 as the Halifax Regional Municipality.

The chain itself

The gold-plated mayoral chain is an ornate link with our past. It contains the enamelled arms of the Dominion of Canada, Nova Scotia and the-then City of Halifax. The centre link is composed of the royal coat of arms, on each side of which appears the mayflower, the city's floral emblem and also that of the province.

The chain's principal links show the monogram C.H. (City of Halifax) with the date of the founding of the city in 1749 while the shoulder broaches bear an artistic arrangement of the imperial emblems.

A relatively recent addition to the regalia is a large badge representing Halifax Regional Municipality. It was necessary following amalgamation in 1996.

There's also one oddity: the date 1479 appears in one part. Given that Halifax wouldn't be founded until 270 years after that, the only logical explanation is that Mappin Brothers of London must have been a little confused...

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