

# Town Office Tales

Curiosities and observations  
on the history, people, and  
objects inside and outside  
Town Hall.

## The Gavel

You may have paid attention to the Moderator  
at Town Meeting... but maybe not to the  
Moderator's gavel!

The story of the West Newbury gavel begins  
not in Massachusetts, but in Port Hudson,  
Louisiana, in 1863. Soldiers of the  
Confederacy felled many trees to construct  
fortifications around Port Hudson for its  
defense, which endured a 48-day siege by  
Union forces.

The wood in particular that makes up the gavel was used to construct  
the citadel, the stronghold of the defenses. 30 years later, in 1894, the  
West Newbury Town Clerk wished to have a "token of authority" for he  
and the Town Moderator (and those in future) to use managing  
meetings. The Clerk arranged to have wood from the citadel procured  
by a freedman in Port Hudson and Lt. Col. Eben Stanwood of the  
Massachusetts 48th Regiment (one of the units that fought at Port  
Hudson). It was then fashioned into the gavel as a historical souvenir  
and icon of democracy. A full account of the acquisition and the battle  
are found in the Town Report of 1894.

