

# Getting A Handle On League History

## The CLLA's gavel is as old as the League itself.

By **Erin Brereton**,  
Contributing Editor

The CLLA's historic gavel was donated to the League at its first convention in Detroit in August 1895 from the San Francisco-based firm Fox, Kellogg and Gray.

E.M. Bartlett, of Omaha, the League's second president, presented the gavel to CLLA founder William C. Sprague, who had been instrumental in planning the convention, remarking:

"In far off California, there is the firm of Fox, Kellogg and Gray, commercial lawyers, men who are intensely interested in the business of this meeting, men who would gladly be here, but not being here, they have sent in their stead something as a memento; something that may be thought of hereafter. It is my pleasure to exhibit a token of their regard in the shape of a beautiful gavel."

The wood used to create the gavel — rosewood — came from Mexico; the ivory on the gavel's handle was from Alaska. Silver used on the gavel came courtesy of Colorado, and its band of gold, which Bartlett said was made

to cement the handle to the hammer, contained a message: "Our field, the world."

Technically, the gavel was determined to be Sprague's personal property by a vote at the convention. However, Sprague presented it to League presidents from year to year.

In 1913, he said, "I return this gavel into your keeping. I do not expect to leave very much to my children when I die but I am going to leave this memento of 1895 as the most precious possession that I have. I trust that they will be as generous with it as I have been and allow it to remain in the hands of the presidents of the League from year to year as its guardian and trustee."

The surviving member of Fox, Kellogg and Gray, R.S. Gray, rededicated the gavel in 1915 in Pasadena.

Sprague handed then-president Edward H. Brink the gavel and said he had been able to "almost feel the throbs of enthusiasm and hopefulness and determination" each year as he had placed the gavel in the hands of the new CLLA president for safekeeping during the year.

The gavel has since passed from president to president — "testifying that whatever differences of opinion the members may have had, however they may have failed to appreciate what others may have believed in, one sentiment all have wholeheartedly accepted, namely, the tie that binds them all in the existence and continuity of the Commercial Law League of America." 

