

## STANDARDIZING THE STANDARD CODE

Edwin C. Bliss, CPP

The January issue of *PJ* had an article (by me, unfortunately) which referred to the **Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure**. When I saw that in print I was aghast -- that isn't the title of the book. The correct title is, of course, **The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure**.

I think the distinction is quite important, and I hope that as time goes on the book will become better known as the "**Standard Code**" instead of "**Sturgis**." Of course, we parliamentarians will always refer to it as "Sturgis" for the rest of our lives, just as we refer to "**Robert**" when we speak of **Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised**. And that's OK. It's convenient verbal shorthand. But in print, at least, I hope that we can more frequently refer to the book by its correct name -- or by the shortened form: "**The Standard Code**."

Alice Sturgis performed a great service back in 1950 when she wrote the original version of this important book. At that time, the standard authority in most organizations was the stodgy 1915 edition of **Robert's Rules of Order Revised**, and it was generally recognized that there was a need for a simpler, more "user-friendly" authority. **The Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure** (as it was then called) filled that need. and by the time the Second Edition came out in 1966 it had earned the endorsement of an impressive array of legislators, civic leaders, editors, university presidents, professional parliamentarians, law school deans and even U.S. Supreme Court justices, who recognized it as a major step forward in parliamentary procedure.

The warm acceptance of Alice Sturgis's book demonstrated a hunger for a more modern authority -- and no doubt was a factor in Sarah Corbin Robert's decision to write **Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised**, published in 1970. Unfortunately, instead of simplifying procedures and using more modern language, the new Robert retained all of the procedures and terminology of the old one, so the Sturgis book continued to provide a welcome alternative.

At the time of her death, Alice Sturgis had begun planning a third edition of the book, hoping to further simplify the procedures, and to clarify some points that were not explained adequately in the Second Edition. The publisher, McGraw Hill, decided that instead of having an individual complete the revision, it would be better to put the editorial control in the hands of a national organization of parliamentarians, so that the resulting effort would consist of not just one person's opinion, but the collective judgment of a representative group, thus reflecting the "standard code" concept. They chose the American Institute of Parliamentarians, an organization with which Alice Sturgis had enjoyed a friendly relationship. And since the new edition would include a number of changes made by AIP after Sturgis's death, they renamed it, calling it simply **The**

**Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure.** Alice Sturgis continued to be listed as the author, but prominently noted was the fact that it was a revision by AIP.

Since publication of the 1988 Standard Code there have been many references to it in various publications (nearly all of them laudatory, which is gratifying), but many of them continue to refer to the book by its now outdated title. Since the current edition -- which might be referred to as the AIP edition -- reflects many changes made after Alice Sturgis's death, changes she might or might not have approved of, it is misleading to give her the credit (or blame) for them.

But there is an even more important reason for referring to the book by its correct name. Most parliamentarians, I'm sure, don't stop to think about the impression the name "Sturgis" has on the average person who is browsing in a bookstore, looking for a book on parliamentary procedure. He has the same reaction that he would have if he saw a book entitled McGillicuddy's Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure. He would say to himself, "Who in the world is McGillicuddy, and why would I want his book? I'm looking for something authoritative." So he would pick up Robert's Rules of Order. For that reason, I have urged the publisher to give greater emphasis to AIP's imprimatur on the cover of future printings. After all, that is what establishes the book's authoritativeness.

I believe AIP has a real stake in promoting the term "Standard Code." This book represents AIP. It is the only parliamentary manual whose content reflects the thinking of a national organization of parliamentarians, instead of a self-appointed group of authorities, as is the case with the Robert's Rules Association, or the opinion of an individual, as is the case with Demeter, Davis Keesey, Deschler, DeVries, McCarty, Rozakis, Longan, Pollock, Jones, Cannon, Frances, Patnode, Utter, and the many other authors whose ideas may be valid and worthwhile and interesting, but nevertheless reflect the opinion of just one person.

The Standard Code. It has a nice ring to it. Let's see if we can't make it standard!

---

*Ed Bliss, a resident of Kingsburg, California, is chairman of the committee recently appointed to explore with McGraw-Hill the possibility of a new edition of **The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure.***