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WHO IS HENRY M. ROBERT AND
WHY IS HE THE AUTHORITY?

Imagine with me the following: You are very active in your community. You attend a meeting about a subject that is important to you. It is the first meeting of the group. For some reason you get nominated to chair the meeting. The next thing you know you are elected as chair of the meeting.

All you can think about is that you don't know how to chair a meeting! Sure, you have attended a lot of meetings, but you have never chaired one before. You know that you use a gavel, but beyond that, you are not sure. You proceed and do the very best you can do, feeling extremely embarrassed.

After the meeting, you decide that you will never again be in that situation! So, you go out and begin studying how to run an effective meeting.

Does this sound like something you have experienced? If so, you are in great company! The situation I just described is what happened to Henry Martyn Robert in the 1860's. Today, we are still reaping the benefit of that experience because it was that embarrassment that started him on the road of becoming America's #1 authority in parliamentary law.

> *Point of Information*
> *Henry Martyn Robert was born May 2, 1837 in Robertsville, South Carolina. He died May 11, 1923 in Hornell, New York. The years in between were dedicated to work using his many talents. We are lucky that one of those talents and interest was parliamentary law.*

Our Hero! Henry M. Robert
After the above incident, Robert's began researching the subject of parliamentary procedure. He soon became frustrated with the lack of information available. Unfortunately, in the 1860's the *Complete Idiot's Guid*e series had not yet been created, so he had to go to the standard technical books. The problem is that the few technical books that were available disagreed with each other.

His work in the army took him all over the country. In his travels and moves, he found that there was no consistent way of conducting meetings. With no standard way of running a meeting, each area of the country did things differently, mostly ineffectively. Not a very good system!

We need rules! Henry did not set out to be the leading authority in parliamentary procedure. He simply envisioned a need for a set of rules that were consistently followed

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everywhere. Therefore, when people moved to a new community, they would be able to use the same set of rules used in the previous community.

He wrote a pamphlet which he shared with his friends. The response was encouraging. He then proceeded to write a book of his rules. He had trouble getting a publisher to print them. There were 4,000 copies of the first book printed with the idea that they would last a couple of years and then he would have enough comments for a revision. Instead, the copies sold out in a few months. That was the beginning of what is today the most recognized authority on parliamentary procedure.

A General who is also an Engineer. Much of the incredible logic of *Robert's Rules* is explainable by his profession. He was a general in the US Army. He was an engineer. Now you understand his attention to detail and his ability to logically think through a problem. You also understand his desire for order at meetings.

Not only was Robert the hero to those who attend lots of meetings, he was also a hero to the city of Galveston, Texas. He led his fellow engineers to design and construct the Galveston Seawall which safeguarded Galveston from the danger of damage from tropical storms.

I personally view General Henry M. Robert as a hero because he has brought order to meetings, large and small. He dedicated much of his life to dissecting parliamentary law and putting it back together in a way that common people could use it.

Above all, I view Robert as a hero because in writing on parliamentary procedure and setting the rules that would be used for over a century he used three very important personal skills. He wrote rules in a way that used his intelligence and those rules are extremely logical and exceedingly fair.