

GRAND LODGE OF VIRGINIA TABLE LODGE
Adopted February 12, 1985

THE TABLE LODGE - ITS HISTORY

From time immemorial, Freemasons have enjoyed meeting about a festive board loaded with the fruits of their labor. Special emphasis was placed on the Summer and Winter Solstice, late in June and December, which were, and are, called the Festival of St. John the Baptist (June 24) and St. John the Evangelist (December 27). The Twentieth Century has found Masonry ignoring both the festive board and the Festivals. This is not as it should be.

Man has been continually seeking some noble purpose to pursue and centuries ago, when life was perilous and severe, feasting became a major diversion, as much for social desires as to satisfy the needs of the inner-man.

The feasts which are probably the oldest of all fraternal repasts were those of the "Mysteries" of ancient Egypt, the so-called "Sons of Light". The oldest of Masonic origin, of which we have any record, were the feasts upon being entered and passed to the degree of Fellowcraft. These go back far beyond the records of organized Masonry.

The Masonic desirability of a social dinner is as old as the Freemasonry we know. In 1717, when the Mother Grand Lodge was formed to revitalize the Lodges in and around London, one of the reasons given was "To revive the quarterly Communication and hold the Annual Feast". Many historians claim this Annual Banquet was the most important move made by the new body. And a short time later, the Grand Master directed there be installed "the old, regular and peculiar Toasts and Healths of Freemasons".

Lawrence Dermott, the author of the first "Ahiman Rezon" (Constitutions of Masonry), remarked about the Table Lodge: "It was thought expedient to abolish the old custom of studying geometry in the Lodge, and some younger Brethren made it appear that a good knife and fork, in the hands of a dexterous Brother, over proper materials, would give great satisfaction and add more to the conviviality of the Lodge than the best scale and compasses in Europe".

From the idea of the feast, and the desire to promote a greater degree of fellowship and kinship in Masonry, was born the Table Lodge. Both the affection of friends and love for the Fraternity flourished within its walls. Its meetings were more like a reunion than a regular Lodge, and it became a center of relaxation, celebration and inspiration of Freemasonry.

The Table Lodge had a most unusual pattern, its entire meeting was conducted around the table, and the helpings of food and beverage were served in such a way they did not interfere with the other concerns of the Lodge. There were many toasts and the lusty voices of Masons rang out with Masonic songs.

The Table Lodge was traditionally a Tyled Entered Apprentice Lodge, followed by the peculiar Ritual used only in a Table Lodge, so all Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts could participate in the Fellowship of the Lodge. As all business is conducted in the Master Mason's Degree in Virginia, the Lodge will be opened in the dining room on the Master Mason's Degree, then called from Labor to Refreshment, at which time all below this degree will be admitted and the Table Lodge opened.

In our Colonial days, the Table Lodge was Freemasonry's greatest asset. It buoyed up the spirit of the colonists who were members of the Craft when they were at their lowest ebb. While the repast was undoubtedly limited, the fervor and zeal were there. Once the Table Lodge was opened, the objects in the room took on a "Military Flavor". The table became the Trestle Board; the cloth, the Standard; the food, the Materials; the glasses, the Cannons; the beverage, powder; the bottles, casks; the napkins, flags; forks, pikes; knives, swords; spoons, trowels. To fill the glass was to "Charge" it; to drink was to "Fire".

That the Table Lodge was an enjoyable experience, no one who has read the meager records can doubt. Dr. George Oliver, an early Masonic Historian, wrote of the Table Lodge in his memoirs: "Their song appears to have more zest than in private company, the toast thrilled more vividly upon recollection, and the small medium of punch with which it was honored, retained a higher flavor than the same potation if produced at a private board."

Although alcoholic beverages did contribute to the festivities of the Table Lodge in days of long ago, they were not a necessary adjunct. Wine was the libation, but that was changed when the 18th Amendment was adopted, so Mason's could conform to the law. Although prohibition was repealed, Freemasonry did not follow suit. It retained a substitution, mainly out of respect for the Brethren who practiced abstinence. Today, fruit juices, punches, and sweet ciders are usually used for the toasts, although wine is allowed. Actually, it is not what the glass contains, but the concept it offers. If wine is used for toasts, make punches or fruit juices available for those who desire it.

The Table Lodge is a heritage out of the past, which should be revived. It has been stated that "the Table Lodge is the summary of Masonic doctrine". It prescribed reverence for Divinity and moral law. It strengthened the devotion that Masons held for Lodge and Country. It increased the unity and fellowship of the Craft.

THE TABLE LODGE - ITS MECHANICS

The Table Lodge is no mere banquet or dinner - it is a special ceremony. It is complete with a Ritual, which incorporates terminology of centuries ago. It includes toasts, Masonic songs, and a good **Masonic Speaker**. We emphasize "good Masonic speaker," because no other will do. There is no room for off color jokes, political or religious propaganda, magicians, or vaudeville artists. The Table Lodge should be a completely separate meeting of the Lodge and not combined with anything, such as Installation of Officers or Degree Work.

A Table Lodge must be tiled. All invited guests must be Masons and the membership or visitors must be verified in the same manner as they would if they attended a regular communication of the Lodge. All those in attendance must be clothed as Masons and none should wear the uniforms or regalia of any other organizations.

The entire ceremony for a Table Lodge, from the opening of the Master Mason's Lodge to its closing, must take place in the dining room. It must be kept simple, personal, and unsophisticated. It should not be an "Extravaganza". Masonic fellowship at its best should be the only goal. As only Masons can be in attendance, it is recommended that the meal be prepared and served by Masons.

The tables should be arranged in a square, with openings at the head and foot for serving purposes. The Altar and lights should be placed in the center of the square, unless it is necessary to add more tables, in which case the altar may be closer to the Master. The Master should sit at the center of the head table with the guest of honor at his right. The Senior Warden should sit in the center of the table opposite the Master; the Junior Warden in the center of the table to the Master's left. The Senior Deacon should sit at the end of the Master's table and to his right; the Junior Deacon at the end of the Senior Warden's table and to his right. The Chaplain, Treasurer, and Secretary may sit at the Master's table, if there is room after the Masonic dignitaries have been seated. The Tiler should sit at the Junior Warden's table.

Alcoholic beverages may be used for toasts, but a simple punch, fruit juice or sweet cider should be prepared and used for the toasts, for those who do not wish to use the wine.

A toast should be given in this manner: The Master (giving the first toast) rises, gives three raps of his gavel and says: "Brethren, I have the honor to propose a toast to our Country: Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light; Protect us by thy might, Great God our King! - With me Brethren." He raises his glass breast high and at arms length and continues in unison with all, "To our country!" All sip briefly, return glasses to arms length, breast high, then lower them as one to the table. The same procedure is followed for all of the toasts.

Prior to opening a Table Lodge, a Master Mason's Lodge is first opened in due and ancient form. When this formality is completed, the Craft is then called from Labor to Refreshment. At this time Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts, properly avouched for, are admitted.

OPENING A TABLE LODGE

Worshipful Master:

(Raps up the Lodge.) Brethren, let us pray.

Chaplain:

Supreme Ruler of the Universe, we would reverently invoke Thy blessing at this time. Wilt thou be pleased to grant that this meeting, thus begun in order, may be conducted in peace and closed in harmony. Amen.

All:

So Mote it be.

Worshipful Master:

(Seats the Lodge, then raps once and both Wardens rise.)

Worshipful Master:

Brothers Senior and Junior Wardens, invite our Brethren in the columns of the West and South to assist us in opening a Table Lodge.

Senior Warden:

Brethren in the West, assist us in opening a Table Lodge.

Junior Warden:

Brethren in the South, assist us in opening a Table Lodge.

Worshipful Master:

Brethren, assist us in opening a Table Lodge. (Pauses) Brother Senior Warden, are you a Mason?

Senior Warden:

All my Brethren know me as such.

Worshipful Master:

What is the first care of a Mason?

Senior Warden:

To see that the Lodge is tiled.

Worshipful Master:

Satisfy yourself that such is the case.

Senior Warden:

It is, Worshipful.

Worshipful Master:

What is the second care of a Mason?

Senior Warden:

To see that the Brethren are in order. (Looks about.) They are, Worshipful.

Worshipful Master:

Why are we met together?

Senior Warden:

To erect Temples to virtue and dig dungeons for vices.

Worshipful Master:
How long must we work?

Senior Warden:
From midnight to midnight.

Worshipful Master:
How long a time is required to make an Entered Apprentice?

Senior Warden:
Three years, Worshipful.

Worshipful Master:
How long were you an Entered Apprentice?

Senior Warden:
Three years.

Worshipful Master:
What is the hour?

Senior Warden:
Midday, Worshipful.

Worshipful Master:
In consideration of the hour and age, inform our Brethren that a Table Lodge is now open, and that we are about to begin our work in the usual manner.

Senior Warden:
(Raps up the Lodge) Brethren in the West, in consideration of your age and the hour, the Worshipful Master has ordered a Table Lodge to be opened, and we are about to begin our work in the usual manner.

Junior Warden:
Brethren in the South, you have heard the Senior Warden. Let it be so done.

Worshipful Master:
Brethren, join me in giving Grand Honors. (All join in Lodge Grand Honors.)

Worshipful Master:
Brethren, we will all join in singing the ode "Great Source of Light and Love." (See song sheet)

Worshipful Master:
I now declare this Table Lodge at Refreshment. Brother Chaplain, you will give thanks for the food of which we are about to partake.

Chaplain:
(Offers a suitable blessing in his own manner.)

Worshipful Master:
(Seats the Lodge.)

Dinner is then served and the Box of Fraternal assistance is passed by the Stewards to assist in defraying the cost of the meal.

Worshipful Master:

Brethren, the period of refreshment is now over and I declare the Table Lodge again at work.

Worshipful Master:

For the benefit of those who have not attended a Table Lodge in the past, I will request Brother _____ to come to the East and give us a brief history of the Table Lodge and the mechanics of participating in one.

(Designated Brother explains the history and mechanics of a Table Lodge.)

Worshipful Master:

Brethren, in this solemn hour I charge each of you to rededicate yourself as a Freemason to the noble and glorious purpose of bringing light to dispel darkness . . . to the service of Him in whom you put your Trust . . . to the precepts set forth in the Great Light in Masonry, the rule and guide of our faith.

I charge you to keep your apron an emblem of innocence, unspotted by the world, to practice that most excellent gift of charity, to make constant and proper use of the Square of Virtue, the Level of Equality and the Plumb of Rectitude.

Craftsmen in the quarries, I summon you to greater loyalty to your Lodge and to your Fraternity, to integrity in all your dealings with your fellow men, to study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed.

Guard against innovations, my Brethren. Preserve the Landmarks. Maintain the reputation of our Fraternity. Aid and succor the needy. Remember your brother's welfare. Be circumspect always in speech. Assist and support him who is falling. Whisper good counsel in the ear of him who needs encouragement.

Let each of us make use of the Trowel to spread the cement of Brotherhood. Let us labor with the common gavel that these Rough Ashlars may be Perfect Ashlars. And finally, my Brethren, remember how once you stood in the Northeast corner a just and upright Mason. I give it you strictly in charge ever to walk and act as such.

All:

So Mote it be.

Worshipful Master:

Brethren, you will all join in singing "Let Masonry From Pole to Pole." (See Song Sheet)

Worshipful Master:

Brother Marshal, under the escort of the Senior and Junior Deacons, present the flag of our country at the Altar. (Raps up the Lodge) (Note: If the Lodge does not normally have an Officer appointed as Marshal, the Worshipful Master designates someone to present the flag.)

Worshipful Master:

Brethren, all citizens of the United States will join me in pledging allegiance to the flag of our country.

All Citizens:

(Pledge Allegiance.)

Worshipful Master:

Brother Marshal, post the colors in the East. (When the flag is seated in the staff holder, the Worshipful Master seats the Lodge.)

Worshipful Master:

We will now begin the ceremony of the Eight Toasts, be sure that your "Cannon is Loaded." (Toast glass is filled.)

Worshipful Master:

(Raps up the Lodge) Brethren, I have the honor to propose a Toast to "OUR COUNTRY": Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light; Protect us by Thy might, Great God our King! With me Brethren, "TO OUR COUNTRY!"

All:

"TO OUR COUNTRY" (Worshipful Master seats the Lodge.)

Worshipful Master:

Brother _____ will respond to the Toast to our Country.

Designated Brother:

(Responds to the Toast in his own manner)

Worshipful Master:

(Raps up the Lodge) At this time I will ask Brother _____ to propose the second Toast.

Designated Brother:

I have the honor of proposing a Toast to Worshipful Brother GEORGE WASHINGTON, one of Virginia's most Illustrious Masons, the Savior and Father of our Country, a man who truly lived the Tenets of Freemasonry! With me Brethren, . . . "TO GEORGE WASHINGTON."

All:

"TO GEORGE WASHINGTON!" (Worshipful Master seats the Lodge.)

Worshipful Master:

Brother _____ will respond to the Toast to Worshipful Brother George Washington.

Designated Brother:

(Responds to the Toast in his own manner)

Worshipful Master:

(Raps up the Lodge) At this time I will ask Brother _____ to propose the third Toast.

Designated Brother:

Let us now drink a Toast to the memory of the HOLY SAINTS JOHN, our Patron Saints: May their Saintly qualities inspire each of us to live a life of more exalted usefulness. With me, Brethren . . . "TO THE HOLY SAINTS JOHN!"

All:

"TO THE HOLY SAINTS JOHN!" (Worshipful Master seats the Lodge)

Worshipful Master:

I will ask Brother _____ to respond to the Toast to the Holy Saints John.

Designated Brother:

(Responds to the Toast in his own manner)

Worshipful Master:

(Raps up the Lodge) At this time I will ask Brother _____ to propose the fourth Toast.

Designated Brother:

May I propose a toast now to the "MEMORY OF OUR DEPARTED BRETHREN:" May their contribution to our Brotherhood inspire us more earnestly to dedicate our lives to the service of our fellow man. With me, Brethren . . . "TO THE MEMORY OF OUR DEPARTED BRETHREN."

All:

"TO THE MEMORY OF OUR DEPARTED BRETHREN!" (Worshipful Master seats the Lodge.)

Worshipful Master:

Brother _____ will respond to the Toast to the Memory of our Departed Brethren.

Designated Brother:

(Responds to the Toast in his own manner)

Worshipful Master:

(Raps up the Lodge) At this time I will ask Brother _____ to propose the Fifth Toast.

Designated Brother:

Brethren, I have the honor to propose a Toast to Most Worshipful _____, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia. Symbol of our continuing relationship to an Ancient Craft; to the Grand Lodge over which he has been called to preside. May he direct with wisdom, decide with justice and plan with a vision worthy of the Fraternity he serves. With me Brethren . . . "TO OUR MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER!"

All:

"TO OUR MOST WORSHIPFUL GRAND MASTER!" (Worshipful Master seats the Lodge.)

Worshipful Master:

Right Worshipful _____, District Deputy Grand Master for Masonic District No. ____ will respond to the Toast to our Most Worshipful Grand Master. (Note: The Grand Master, if present, would respond and if the District Deputy Grand Master is not present, a brother is designated to do so.)

Designated Brother:

(Responds to the Toast in his own manner)

Worshipful Master:

(Raps up the Lodge) Brethren, our Junior Warden will propose the Sixth Toast.

Junior Warden:

Brethren, it gives me a special pleasure to call for a Toast to _____ Lodge No. ____: The Lodge so close to the hearts of its members, commanding through long years an interest and loyalty unshaken by adversity and unspoiled by prosperity. So may we reflect its integrity and stability in our daily lives. With me Brethren . . . "TO _____ LODGE NO. ____!"

All:

"TO _____ LODGE NO. ____!" (Worshipful Master seats the Lodge)

Worshipful Master:

Worshipful Brother _____, Past Master, will respond to the Toast to _____ Lodge.

Designated Past Master:

(Responds to the Toast in his own manner)

Worshipful Master:

Brethren, as the next Toast is to our visiting Brethren, I will ask them to remain seated and all members of this Lodge to rise for our Seventh Toast, which will be given by our Senior Warden.

Senior Warden:

Brethren, a Toast to our visiting Brethren: Our guests of the evening who will not doubt the cordial hospitality of our welcome. May this occasion persuade them to share our hospitality whenever their circumstances permit. With me Brethren . . . "TO OUR VISITING BRETHREN!"

All Standing:

"TO OUR VISITING BRETHREN!" (Master seats the Lodge)

Worshipful Master:

I will ask Brother _____, who is visiting with us this evening, to respond to the Toast to our Visiting Brethren.

Designated Brother:

(Responds to the Toast in his own manner)

Worshipful Master:

(Raps up the Lodge) I will ask our Tiler, Brother _____ to propose the Eight Toast.

Tiler:

And now let us drink the age-old traditional Toast of the Craft: To all Freemasons wheresoever dispersed over the face of the earth; May our Brethren of all nations be united under the mantle of universal friendship and brotherhood for the benefit of all mankind. With me Brethren, "TO ALL FREEMASONS WHERESOEVER DISPERSED!"

All:

"TO ALL FREEMASONS WHERESOEVER DISPERSED!" (Worshipful Master seats the Lodge.)

Worshipful Master:

Brother _____ will respond to the Toast to all Freemasons wheresoever dispersed.

Designated Brother:

(Responds to the Toast in his own manner)

Worshipful Master:

Brother _____, you will come to the East and introduce our Speaker of the evening to the Brethren.

Designated Brother:

(Introduces Speaker)

Speaker:

(Addresses the Lodge on subject matter agreed upon, but limited to fifteen minutes maximum if possible)

Worshipful Master:

(Thanks Speaker and presents suitable token in remembrance of the occasion.)

CLOSING OF THE TABLE LODGE

Worshipful Master:

(Gives one rap of his gavel and Wardens rise) Brothers Senior and Junior Warden, are the Brethren in order?

Senior Warden:

They are, Worshipful.

Junior Warden:

They are, Worshipful.

Worshipful Master:

Brother Senior Warden, what is the hour?

Senior Warden:

Midnight, Worshipful.

Worshipful Master:

What is your age?

Senior Warden:

Three years, Worshipful.

Worshipful Master:

In consideration of the hour and age, inform all our Brethren that we are about to close this Table Lodge, ending our work in the usual manner . . . but forcibly impress on them the necessity to continue every twenty-four hours of the day and night to erect Temples to virtue and to dig dungeons for vices.

Senior Warden:

(Raps up the Lodge) Brethren, I inform you, by order of the Worshipful Master, that we are about to close this Table Lodge, ending our work in the usual manner. . . but . . . I forcibly impress upon you the necessity to continue to erect Temples to Virtue and to dig dungeons for vices from midnight to midnight.

Junior Warden:

Brethren, you have heard the Senior Warden. Take due notice thereof and let none of us be guilty of violating the trust of the Worshipful Master.

Worshipful Master:

Brethren, join me in giving Grand Honors (All join in Lodge Grand Honors.)

Brethren, join with me in singing "America". (See song sheet)

Brethren, let us pray.

Chaplain:

Supreme Architect of the Universe, we are thankful to Thee for this opportunity of carrying on Thy Work on Earth; we are grateful to Thee for the one who brought us so inspiring a message; and now may the blessing of Heaven rest upon us and all regular Masons; may Brotherly Love prevail, and every moral and social virtue unite and cement us. Amen.

All: So Mote it Be.

Worshipful Master:

Brethren, join with me in singing our traditional ode, "Auld Lang Syne." (See song sheet)

Worshipful Master:

This Table Lodge is now closed in Peace and Harmony. All who are not Master Masons will please retire. (The Craft is then called from Refreshment back to Labor and the Master Mason's Lodge is closed in the regular manner.)

TABLE LODGE SONG SHEET
(Provide copies for all in attendance)

**** GREAT SOURCE OF LIGHT AND LOVE ****

Tune: "I Love Thy Kingdom Lord"

Great Source of Light and Love,
To Thee our songs we raise!
O, in Thy Temple, Lord, above,
Hear and accept our praise!

Shine on this festive day,
Succeed its hoped design,
And may our Charity display
A Love resembling Thine.

May this fraternal band,
Now consecrated, blest,
In union all distinguished stand,
In purity be dressed.

**** LET MASONRY FROM POLE TO POLE ****

Tune: "Coronation"

Let Masonry from Pole to Pole
Her sacred laws expand;
Far as the mighty waters roll
To wash remotest land,
Far as the mighty waters roll
To wash remotest land.

That virtue hath not left behind
Her sacred tenets prove,
For stamped upon a Mason's mind
Are unity and love,
For stamped upon a Mason's mind
Are unity and love.

**** AMERICA ****

My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of Thee I sing:
Land where my Fathers died,
Land of the pilgrim's pride,
From every mountain side,
Let freedom ring!

Our Father's God, to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To thee we sing:
Long may our land be bright,
With freedom's holy light,
Protect us by thy might,
Great God, our King!

**** AULD LANG SYNE ****

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!

Then here's a hand, my trusty frien'
And gie's a han' o' thine;
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne.

(chorus)

For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne!