

# Table Lodge

Richard V. Bergen

Master, William O. Ware Lodge of Research

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**I**nterest of this Lodge of Research has recently been expressed in what is termed a “Table Lodge.” Rather than going into an exhaustive research on this matter, I bring you on this occasion, the verbatim explanation of this term as taken from Mackey’s Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry as revised and enlarged under copyright date of 1946.

After the labors of the Lodge have been completed, Freemasons frequently meet at tables to enjoy a repast in common. In England and America, this repast is generally called a “banquet,” and the Lodge is said to be, during its continuance, at “refreshment.” The Master, of course, presides, assisted by the Wardens, and it is considered most proper that no profanes should be present. But with these exceptions, there are no rules specifically laid down for the government of Masonic banquets. It will be seen, by an inspection of the article “Refreshment” in this work, that during the eighteenth century, and even at the commencement of the nineteenth, refreshments in English Lodges were taken during the sessions of the Lodge and in the Lodge-room, and then, of course, rigid rules were in existence for the government of the Fraternity, and for the regulation of the forms in which the refreshments should be partaken. But this system had long grown obsolete, and the Masonic banquets of the present day differ very little from those of other societies, except, perhaps, in a more strict observance of the rules of order, and the in the exclusion of all non-Masonic visitors.

But French Freemasons have prescribed a very formal system of rules for what they call a “Loge de Table,” or “Table Lodge.” The room in which the banquet takes place is as much protected by its isolation for observation as the Lodge-room itself. Table Lodges are always held in the Apprentice’s Degree and none, but Freemasons are permitted to be present. Even the attendants are taken from the class known as “Serving Brethren” — that is to say, waiters who have received the First Degree for the special purpose of entitling them to be present on such occasions.

The table is in the form of a horseshoe or elongated semicircle. The Master sits at the head, the Senior Warden at the Northeast extremity, and the Junior Warden at the Southwest. The Deacons, or equivalent officers, sit between the two Wardens. The Brethren are placed around the exterior margin of the table, facing each other; and the void space between the sides is occupied by the serving Brethren or attendants. It is probable that the form of the table was

really adopted at first from motives of convenience. But M. Hermitte (Bulletin, Grand Orient, 1869, page 83) assigns for it a symbolism. He says that as the entire circle represents the year, or the complete revolution of the earth about the sun, the semi-circle represents the half of that revolution, or a period of six months, and therefore refers to each of the two solstitial points of summer and winter, or the two great festivals of the Order in June and December, when the most important Table Lodges are held.

The Table Lodge is formally opened with an invocation to the Grand Architect. During the banquet, seven toasts are given. These are called “Santes d’obligation” or “obligatory toasts.” They are drunk with certain ceremonies which are prescribed in the ritual, and from which no departure is permitted. These toasts are to:

1. The health of the Sovereign or Chief Magistrate of the State;
2. The Grand Master and the supreme power of the Order, that is, the Grand Orient or Grand Lodge;
3. The Master of the Lodge (this is offered by the Senior Warden);
4. The two Wardens;
5. Visiting Brethren;
6. The other officers of the Lodge and the new initiates and affiliates, if there be any;  
and
7. All Freemasons wheresoever spread over the face of the globe.

Ragon (Tuileur General, P. 17) refers these seven toasts of obligation to the seven libations made by the ancients in their banquets in honor of the seven planets, the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn, and the seven days of the week which are named after them; and he assigns some striking reasons for the reference. But this symbolism, although very beautiful, is evidently very modern.

The Table Lodge is then closed with the fraternal kiss, which is passed from the Master around the table, and with the usual forms.

One of the most curious things about these Table Lodges is the vocabulary used. The instant that the Lodge is opened, a change takes place in the names of things, and no person is permitted to call a plate a “plate” or a knife a “knife,” or anything else by the appellation by which it is known in ordinary conversation. Such a custom formerly prevailed in England, if we may judge from a passage in Dr. Oliver’s “Revelations of a Square” (pare 215), where an instance is given of its use in 1780, when the French vocabulary was employed. It would seem from the same authority that the custom was introduced into England from France by Captain George Smith, the author of the “Use and Abuse of Freemasonry,” who was initiated in a Continental Lodge.

The vocabulary of the Table Lodge as used at French Masonic banquets is as follows:

Table Cloth	-	Standard	Lights	-	Stars
Napkins	-	Flags	Snuffers	-	Pincers
Table	-	Tracing Board	Chairs	-	Stalls
Dishes	-	Great Plates	Meals	-	Materials
Plates	-	Tiles	Bread	-	Rough Ashlar
Spoons	-	Trowels	Red Wine	-	Strong Red Powder
Knives	-	Swords	White Wine	-	Strong White Powder
Forks	-	Pickaxes	Water	-	Weak Powder
Bottles	-	Casks	Beer	-	Yellow Powder
Glasses	-	Cannons	Brandy	-	Fulminating Powder
Coffee	-	Black Powder	Salt	-	White Sand
Pepper	-	Cement	To Eat	-	To Masticate
To Drink	-	To Fire	To Carve	-	To Hew

Thus, concludes the explanation of “The Table Lodge,” as explained by our late distinguished Brother, Albert Gallatin Mackey (1807-1881). Brother Mackey having passed to his eternal reward more than 100 years ago, it is quite likely that significant changes may have been made in the conduct of “Table Lodges” since the foregoing was written and it would appear highly appropriate for a “Lodge of Research” to delve into the matter further, to ascertain what, if any, these changes might be, as well as determining the position of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky relative to the “Table Lodge.” Accordingly, as Master of William O. Ware Lodge of Research, I hereby offer a challenge to whomsoever of this Lodge might be interested, to pursue this subject and present a supplementary paper to the Lodge at some future date.