

CONDUCTING A TABLE LODGE

The ancient craft tradition of refreshment and feasting was handed down to us by the Mediaeval guilds. At table lodges the brethren sat around tables arranged in an elongated horseshoe shape and enjoyed a drink and a smoke while they worked the old lectures or catechisms. Labour and refreshment were so closely intermixed that the Junior Warden's injunction to: "Cease from refreshment and go to labour" and vice versa, was a perfectly normal and real order.

There is nothing to stop us conducting our own table lodges at the present time, based on the principles founded all those years ago. It would have its own special ceremony for opening and closing, tyled in the normal manner; a banquet with wine and toasting and a lecture or masonic address by an eloquent brother. All that is needed is a few directions.

The following is a very loose interpretation of the table lodge as used by the Arizona Research Lodge in Phoenix.

As originally indicated, tables should be placed in a long horseshoe position. All brethren should be seated so far as possible on the outside of the horseshoe facing in with the Worshipful Master at the head, the Senior Warden at the foot to the right of the Master and the Junior Warden at the foot to the Master's left. Both Master and Junior Warden should possess gavels. Any special guests should be with the Master at the head of the horseshoe.

W.M. [strikes three times with his gavel. All rise.] Brethren, assist me to open this table lodge. Bro. Junior Warden, what is our first care?

J.W. To see the lodge is properly tyled, W.M.

W.M. So satisfy yourself.

J.W. [Checks door and replies.] The lodge is properly tyled, W.M.

W.M. Bro. Senior Warden, are you a mason?

S.W. All my brethren know me as such, W.M.

W.M. Bro S.W., Are all the brethren present in order as masons?

S.W. They are W.M.

W.M. Bro. S.W., Why are we met together?

S.W. To erect temples to virtue and dungeons to vice, W.M.

W.M. Before I declare this table lodge open let us invoke a blessing on all our undertakings.

Chaplain: Supreme Ruler of the Universe, we reverently invoke thy blessing at this time, may we give thanks for the food before us and may our meeting thus begun in order be conducted in peace and closed in harmony.

All So mote it be.

W.M. Bro. J.W., You have my command to call the brethren from labour to refreshment.

J.W. [Strikes once with his gavel] This meeting is at refreshment. [All sit.]

Glasses should be charged and the dinner commences. During the dinner a set number of toasts will be pronounced and after the meal is complete the guest speaker will present his lecture or masonic address.

With reference to the toasts, At a table lodge there is a set procedure for these. After each toast has been given, the person giving the toast says: "With me brethren". The Brethren then stand and each reaches for his glass, holds it breast high at arm's length and repeats the toast in unison i.e. "To absent Brethren", he then brings the glass to his lips, drinks briefly and returns the glass to arm's length and sets it down on the table, all at the same instant and then each regains his seat.

There is normally no reply to the toasts. The order of toasts would be as follows:

1. The Queen and the Masons' Craft,
2. Our Visitors
3. To the Lodge. [after which the brethren could join in a rousing song such as the "And here's to his health in a song".]
4. Absent Brethren. [This should be at 9:00 p.m. precisely.]
5. To the M.W. Grand Master and the Grand Lodge of B.C.

W.M. Bro. J.W., call the brethren from refreshment to labour.

J.W. [Rap once.] Brethren and guests, you are called from refreshment to labour.

The W.M. will now introduce the guest speaker and the lecture or address will be presented with the speaker at the foot of the horseshoe.

The S.W. will thank the speak on behalf of all and the J.W. will then rap once with his gavel and call the meeting to refreshment in order to open the floor for discussion.

On completion of discussion and having ascertained that it is time to close the evening the W.M. will rise, knock twice with his gavel and say:

W.M. Are your glasses all charged in the West and the South?"

S.W. All charged in the West.

J.W. All charged in the South.

W.M. [Rise and give three knocks. All rise.] Bro. Tyler, please propose the Tyler's toast.

Tyler Tyler's toast. [All sit.]

W.M. Bro. J.W. You will call the brethren from refreshment to labour.

J.W. [Gives three knocks with gavel.] By command of the W.M. you are called from refreshment to labour. [All rise.]

W.M. I am about to close this table lodge. Bro. S.W. are all the brethren in order?

J.W. They are, W.M.

W.M. Bro. J.W., What is the hour?

J.W. Past midnight, W.M.

W.M. Then brethren, our work is done, the hour is late. I close this table lodge. [One knock with gavel.]

Chaplain: As this lodge is closed, let us express our gratitude to the Supreme Being for favours already received.

All. So mote it be.

Much of this information is gleaned from a formula put out by the Arizona Research Lodge but there are B.C. lodges such as Mount Garibaldi that hold a Table Lodge with wine and a banquet, using this as a fund raiser. There is really no set over-all ritual just as in the earliest days, but it does add to the enjoyment of the occasion if a dignified and fitting ritual can be devised for your lodge.

It does not have to be a big affair or even a fund raiser, just a bit of education and fun for an emergent night or after a short business meeting. In the original table lodges the brethren would be wearing their aprons throughout, but for our purposes I would suggest that we not risk the lambskin being spotted or stained.

Prior to holding the lodge, have a run through with your principle participants and, on the commencement of proceedings demonstrate the way toast are to be made so that your members and guests know the procedure.