

Lodge Education Program

Chandler Lodge #138

The Lodge for Table Instruction (table lodge) is in observance of the ancient Festivals such as the Feast of the Holy Saints John. It is one of masonry's most noble and oldest traditions that have fallen by the wayside in recent years. The tradition started as we say from time immemorial, with the recognition of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist as Christian patrons of freemasonry. Within religion the celebration of these saints corresponded with the winter (Dec 27th) and summer (Jun 24th) solstice and included great festivals, music, and large dining feasts. In tribute to these saints and their festivals, freemasonry adopted the practice of acknowledging these days with a special lodge of table instruction, known commonly as Table Lodge. The Table Lodge today is a tyed lodge conducted in the entered apprentice degree. This again comes from tradition, that upon the 'entering' or 'passing' of a new brother a meal and social time was had afterward to impart additional knowledge among the new mason.

The first known actual ritual for a table lodge originated with the French and was a very long and elaborate ceremony with banquets and entertainment. Since these were hosted as special events, more like a reunion than a Regular meeting, it became an avenue of relaxation, celebration and inspiration for Freemasonry. The French ritual also retained the stance that EA and FC would take part in this ritual and gain from mingling with the master masons of the lodge. Next as it traveled to the US with the colonist, the ceremony began another evolution into a more private smaller gathering. The colonists also began the tradition of naming the dining room items as those on a battlefield such as cannons were glasses, knives became swords, etc. this from the outside influences they were facing with starting a new country. The colonists also brought about the loud toast's and singing probably due to the fact that most lodges took place in taverns of the time. The alcohol went away with the 18th amendment, although when prohibition ended masons tended to stay 'dry' and moved back toward the instruction traditions and away from the boisterous behavior. The ceremonies of the seven toasts are said to date from the formation and reconciliation of the grand lodges of England, with most being attributed to the first few Grand Masters of organized masonry.

Today we use ritual ceremonies prepared by the Grand Lodge of Ohio, and although abbreviated they adhere to the lessons and impart the significance of the occasion with the utmost dignity. Although there typically is no entertainment except light dinner music, it should be inspirational, and reaffirm our devotions to god, country, each other and freemasonry. Typically there will be a Guest speaker for instruction and knowledge, a meal for nourishment, and the traditional toasts. Most masters will also pass the box of fraternal assistance to renew our Masonic charity. In all this is a great forgotten program that is deeply embedded with Masonic history and lessons. A table lodge is another insight into the lives of our forefathers and should be used to increase unity and fellowship in today's craft.