

Ladies At The Table

William Richards, P.M.

William Richards is a Past Master of Webster Lodge #61 Winooski, VT. Bill was instrumental in preparing the ceremony of "Ladies At The Table." He is a very active Vermont Mason and we thank him for preparing this STB

Bill Richards (the author of this STB) states that "some Lodges are slowly beginning to provide functions for their "Masonic Families." He certainly has made a point borne out by the large number of requests MSA has been receiving concerning "Ladies Events".

As noted in the text "Ladies At The Table" may have begun under the "Adoptive Rite" a form of Freemasonry which permitted both men and women to belong to the order The present use of "Ladies At The Table" has nothing to do with Masonic membership. It is, however, one way of honoring ladies who are not members but rather are widows of Masons or Ladies who have made an outstanding contribution to their communities state or nation.

It is also important to emphasize Bill Richards note of caution that Grand Lodge approval must be obtained prior to hosting a "Ladies At The Table." The Grand Lodge of Vermont has approved the ceremony to be followed by any of its constituent lodges.

MSA has recently published excerpts from two letters from Mason's wives (they are both printed in full in this Short Talk) and we have had a very large response requesting the full text of both letters.

MSA thanks Bill Richards for preparing this STB and Juana Weatherall and Donita Papas for allowing us to reprint their letters.

The average Mason spends a great deal of time away from his wife and family for Masonic functions and dinners. On many occasions the Mason's wife is left at home while he attends Masonic meetings. Some Masonic Lodges have begun to realize that Masonic Ladies play a very important role in the Masonic way of life. These Lodges are slowly beginning to provide functions for their Masonic families, more especially the Mason's Lady. One such event is the "Ladies At The Table."

Please understand, this is a public event. It is not ritual of any type, nor is it intended to be, but it does come under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge. "Ladies At The Table" is a method for a Lodge to Honor and give Respect to the Mason's Widow, Lady, Daughter, Mother, Sister and to other Women who have also helped build this great nation of ours!

Ladies At The Table is a special dinner of five courses and seven toasts. The primary function of this dinner is to honor Lodge Widows, and they are the guests of the Lodge. This provides the Lodge an opportunity to establish a caring relationship with the Widow and let her know the Lodge has not forgotten her or their Brother who is no longer here.

The objective of the Ladies At The Table dinner is to provide the best possible entertainment and dinner a Mason's Lady could desire. There is a script to follow, as well as rules and regulations established by the Grand Lodge, but the toasts are made to those ladies selected by the Lodge itself!

The selection of the ladies to be toasted is taken very seriously. Although there are only six names to be considered, they do reflect on the womanhood of our nation. Therefore we must be careful in whom we select. Religion and politics should not be considered as reasons for a toast. Every community, State, or nation has a large group of women who have taken part in the betterment of humanity. Once you have determined each woman to be toasted, a short history is written to show the reasons as to why she has been selected by the Lodge. It requires a great deal of research, but it is well worth it in more ways than you can count.

Ladies At The Table is nothing new, just revised. "The Encyclopedia of Freemasonry," by Albert G. Mackey and Charles T. McClenachan and revised by Edward L. Hawkins and William J. Hughan, published by The Masonic History Company of Chicago, New York, and London, copyrighted 1927 provides us with the following history of a Ladies At The Table in France. "In France, about the middle of the 18th century, a group (in the French Rite,) was established, functioning parallel to Masonry, known as "Adoptive Masonry." The first of these Lodges, of which we have any notice, was established in Paris, in the year 1760, by Count de Bernouville. Another was instituted at Niemegeen, in Holland, in 1774, over which the Prince of Waldeck and the Princess of Orange presided. There were basically four degrees in Adoptive Masonry, the first being: Apprentice (or Female Apprentice); Compagnone (or Craftswoman); Maitresse (or Mistress); and Parfaite Maçonne (or Perfect Mason.)

The fourth degree, being the summit of the Rite of Adoption, is furnished with a "Table Lodge," or ceremony of the banquet, which immediately followed the closing of the Lodge and which of course, adds much to the social pleasure and nothing to the character of the Rite.

As in regular Lodges of the French Rite, the members always use symbolic language by which they designate the various implements of the table and the different articles of food and drink, calling for instance, the knife "Swords," the forks "Pickaxes," the dishes "materials," and bread "Rough Ashlar;" the Lodge room was called "Eden," the doors "Barriers," the minutes a "Ladder," a wine glass was styled a "Lamp," and its contents "Oil" ... water being "White Oil" and wine being "Red Oil." To fill your glass is "To trim your Lamp," to drink is "To extinguish your Lamp," and many other eccentric expressions.

Much taste, and in some instances, magnificence, were displayed in the decorations of the Lodge rooms of the Adoptive Rite. The apartment was separated by curtains into different divisions. Each division represented a continent, the entrance being called Europe, the left side America, the right side Africa, and the Head Table was known as Asia. As all things come to pass, this special dinner and evening was set aside, no longer to be. (The French Revolution played a big part in its ending.) We do know that Ben Franklin did attend at least one of these dinners during his time in France."

There is a strong possibility this special Rite of Adoption dinner was attended by many young Englishmen soon to be sent to Ireland, to be trained, for two years, as British Officers and hence the birth of the Masonic Table Lodge. (As with many early customs, this one too, does not have a clear historical record.)

In our present day, "Ladies At The Table," is not Adoptive Masonry in any form or intent. The dinner is supported by a Lodge of Masons to show Honor and Respect to the Ladies. It also provides a setting to invite non-Masonic guests and community leaders to see what Masonry is all about .

Should your Lodge be under the jurisdiction of a Grand Lodge having very strict alcoholic rules and regulations, then you have the option of having all the toasts with a non-alcoholic beverage. However, regardless of which jurisdiction your Lodge falls under, obtain your Grand Lodges permission before hosting a "Ladies At The Table" dinner.

As stated in the ceremony "toasts are given to those Ladies who have given of themselves to the improvement and need of others."

MSA has a copy of the ceremony used in the jurisdiction of Vermont. If you would like a copy please write requesting ceremony of "Ladies At The Table."

Reflections of a Mason's Wife Juana Weatherall (wife of Bro. James Weatherall, P.G.M. Arkansas)

I AM NOT A MASON. I'm not even a man. Better than both of these, perhaps, I am the wife of a Mason. Many times I have wanted to stand up at a Masonic function and tell those present just how much the Masonic Fraternity has positively affected my life, but I never quite gathered the confidence.

Perhaps I was afraid you would think me silly, or out of place, or worse yet, insincere. Knowing that I probably will never stand before any of you and verbally express my feelings, I hope you will not be offended that I take this means to communicate my long-silent thoughts.

I married a young man when we were both nineteen years old. We were sure that we were mature adults ready to take on the responsibilities of adult life, not realizing at the time that we

were such novices. As soon as he was old enough, my young husband petitioned the local Lodge and was accepted.

He worked at the memorization of the Degrees with a dedication I had not before seen in him. He attended Lodge regularly and was soon working his way through the chairs of his Lodge. With each new step, his confidence in himself grew, his maturity increased, his moral values became more firmly entrenched. Although I was vaguely aware of these changes, it was several years before I fully realized to what extent Masonry was affecting our lives. I can't recall where we were, or the words my Mason spoke, but suddenly the light bulb came on, and without doubt I understood, and feel even more strongly today, that everything my husband is, and everything my children and I are, is so intricately interwoven with his Masonic beliefs, values, and responsibilities that our personal lives and our Masonic lives are one.

At nineteen I would not have thought of having a network of friends and support as exists in the Masonic Fraternity. Just to mention a few, there's the Masonic wife (a nurse) who worries about my husband's dietary habits; the Mason who offers to take my younger son for a weekend when he knows I'll be temporarily a single parent; the Mason who has spent hours arranging activities for the ladies for Grand Lodge session, and the one who volunteered his wife to drive me around town if I needed her. I know that if ever I am in physical, emotional, or financial need, help is near, and that a Mason is only a phone call away.

Simple words written on a cold piece of paper can't express the warmth I have in my heart. My life has been enriched by the experiences I have had and by the people I have met through my husband's affiliation with the Masons. I love the man my husband has become even more than I loved that naive nineteen-year-old boy I married twenty-three years ago. I love the Masonic Fraternity and its principles of living, for making him the man he is. And, so, I finally get around to what I've wanted to state for so long, but lacked the nerve to say: thank you, Masons everywhere. I love you all!

Letter written to all newly raised Master Masons by Donita Papas, wife of Bro. Robert Papas P.G.M. of Minnesota.

Dear Mrs.

I have been advised that your husband has recently become a member of the Masonic Fraternity. As the wife of the current Grand Master of Masons in Minnesota, please allow me to speak to you "Woman to Woman."

With the ever-changing roles of women in today's society, with our newly-found freedoms and opportunities, the place of Masonry can often be misunderstood by many. Male-only organizations are often viewed with suspicion. Let me assure you that in the 26 years my husband has been a Mason, I have never had cause to doubt its good effects upon his character. The men with whom he has associated in his Lodge work " have been consistently men of

honor and good reputation. The organization attracts men of genuine quality. As such, you should feel great personal pride that your husband is now counted among such an association.

Masonry is founded on the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Masons move quietly to remove human suffering. This is evident in their many benevolent and charitable activities. I might also assure you that no organization has ever stood so strongly in support of the family unit and all that it stands for.

Masons often state that their purpose is to take good men and make them better. As such, each individual member's goal is one of self improvement. As a result, the man who gauges his life in accordance with Masonic moral law will be a happier man, a better citizen and a more loving and understanding husband and father.

The Masonic organization also offers many opportunities for you and the family to participate: in events of the Blue Lodge, in their sponsorship of outstanding youth organizations and in the many appendant organizations for both men and women. Indeed, the Masonic organization is a family in itself.

In the reality of today's world, there are too many things which can lead an individual astray. During my marriage, I have observed that Masonry is one element which has done only good for my husband, myself and my children. As such, my advice to you would be to not only support your husband in his membership, but also to strongly encourage his active participation so that he may well learn the lessons which are taught.

My best wishes and congratulations to you and your husband. May you both find the joy and happiness that has been ours.

Sincerely, Donita Papas

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