

## THE OLD PAST MASTER THE MASONIC FESTIVEBOARD

Quite the norm in the early 18th century, “Table” Lodges were restricted to Freemasons only. The tables were set up with one in the East, or at the head, and two parallel ones at right angles to the head table. It can also be set up in the form of a horseshoe, as the French Masons were wont to do. The Master would be in the East and both Wardens in the West, at the foot of the columns. The Senior Entered Apprentice was in the South – to welcome visiting Brethren, after making sure they were duly qualified – and the Junior Entered Apprentice was in the North – to prevent the intrusion of cowans and eavesdroppers. Dinner and the meeting would then ensue.

The implements of Masonry, and those for refreshment, were on the tables. The Lodge would be called to labor for business and degree work, and then to refreshment for toasts [called the “charge”], and perhaps an appropriate song pertaining to the degree or the person to whom the toast was dedicated. For samples of Masonic songs, see Anderson’s Constitution of 1722 [adopted by the Grand Lodge of England in 1723]. After which, the Lodge would be called back to labor for the next section of the degree, and so forth until the whole degree and/or work was completed. [Then they could send the designated decoy sober Mason out the front door, while all the rest went out the back to their respective places of abode.]

In recent years, our practice is to have a Festive Board outside the course of a meeting, in order that we may invite guests and family, but preserve the forms, language and ceremonies, including the mandatory seven toasts. These, the French Masons call “santés d’obligation” and they are always in the same order and form – especially when held in a tyled Lodge – and are to the sovereign of the state, the Supreme Power of the Order, the Master of the Lodge, the Wardens, the visiting Brethren, the other officers and new initiates, and all Masons whithersoever dispersed around the globe. We vary these at the Festive Board – but you will have to come to Lodge to see how!

As the horseshoe shape of the tables can be likened to half of a circle, it has been suggested that as a whole circle could be likened to a whole year, and the half circle [or horseshoe] corresponds to one-half a year [or six months], and therefore relates to the two principal Table Lodges of the year – at the summer and winter solstice – being June 24th, St. John the Baptist’s Day; and December 27th, St. John the Evangelist’s Day. In the early days of the Craft, these were the dates of the semi-annual Installation of Officers -- as the DeMolay does currently.

It has been several years since we had a real Table Lodge/Festive Board at San Mateo Lodge. I think it is time for another. What do you think?

**FRATERNALLY AND FONDLY,  
JOHN D. NELSON, P.M.**