



What Happened to the Head Table?

From our chapter's inception, the chapter meetings have always been the premier event of all chapter activities and, thereby, held in high regard and importance, with a strong sense of formality. However, today, and for the past decade or so, our chapter meetings have shortened in length and become quite casual. The differences in how the meetings are conducted today, versus how they were traditionally conducted can essentially be summed up by the things that are missing in today's meetings.

Looking back, I remember chapter meetings that ran like this: I would arrive and check in at the desk, paying with cash or sometimes a check (who remembers keeping a blank check in your wallet for when you were short on cash?), getting my badge and heading straight into the technical session. The tech session would last about 45 minutes, including Q&A, then I would head back out to the reception area where everyone was congregating and visiting. There were always many times more people out there than was in the tech session, and I remember thinking "Why didn't all these guys attend the tech session?" Anyway, the reception time was important for all the "social networking" that went on, before that term was even a term. When there were evening meetings, it was common for members to have a drink from the bar while they socialized. Next, on cue, the chapter president would indicate that it was time for the main program to begin and for everyone to be seated. The chapter meeting would have a formal agenda planned ahead of time. The items on typical chapter meeting agenda would include: Call to Order and Opening Remarks, Introduction of Guests, Invocation (prayer), Food Served, Announcements from Committee Chairs, Business Items (including formal motions made, seconds and voting), Speaker Introduction, Main Program, Closing Remarks and Reminders, and Motion to Adjourn.

Many of those agenda items would have a different person assigned to it, so it was not uncommon to have ten or more members come up to the microphone throughout the course of the meeting. If you were a committee chair, you had better be ready and know what's going on in case you were called up by the President. And where would you be called up to? Of course, to the microphone at the podium that was in the middle of the head table. What head table? The one that used to be set up at the front of every chapter meeting prior to 2011 when we moved from The Centre to 50 Penn Place. You know, the table that seated the chapter dignitaries and had the chapter banners hanging behind it. (What chapter banners? Never mind, that's a different Historian article)

The head table at the chapter meetings was the place that the president, officers, program speaker and any special guests would sit. It was up front, often elevated on a stage, and all the seats were on one side facing the audience. It was an honor to be up there, and maybe a little awkward, eating your meal looking out across the room. It was common for the chapter president to send out a head table seating list a few days prior to the meeting so that everyone he or she wanted up there knew they were supposed to sit up there, which seat they were supposed to sit in (closer to the microphone was normally of higher importance) and to ensure that there were no empty seats at the head table. If an officer wasn't going to be able to make the meeting, someone else would be invited to come sit up front.

For 75 years, we had a head table at our chapter meetings. Well, I personally wasn't there all those years to confirm that. I started attending meetings in the early 90's, but in looking at photographs, the head table tradition appears to go all the way back to chapter inception. But for the past 12 years, it's been absent, along with several other items that used to appear on the agenda. The concern is that the trend of making the chapter meetings more and more casual, and removing more and more aspects from them, we're inadvertently removing the sense of high regard and importance that the meetings once held.



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