

SOCIAL FRENZY OF WASHINGTONIANS

Capital's Merry Whirl Starts With Myriad of Rigid Rules

Washington Society, long shackled, kicked the lid off last week, swung into the most dazzling season it has had since the depression spawned bread lines, knocked the wealthy back on their heels.

Money is spinning again; hostesses are plotting major campaigns; diamonds and pearls are coming out for renewed display; caviar and terrapin reign once more. Crowding the calendar are dinners, receptions, débuts, teas, breakfasts, musicals, luncheons. Back again are the splash and color and fire of the old-time Washington whirl, making a merry, if slightly mysterious, circus for the nation.

Officially, the season began last week with the Diplomatic Reception at the White House, a brilliant fete of gorgeous uniforms and gowns. It followed another scintillating affair—revival, at a cost of \$50,000, of her famous New Year's ball by Mrs. Evalyn W. McLean, owner of the \$300,000 Hope diamond.

Official List—This week came the Cabinet Dinner. Next week will be the Judicial Reception and Speaker's Dinner, to be followed by other official affairs. Meanwhile, hundreds of private fetes will be given.

To the neophyte, the whole elaborate social machine in the Nation's Capital may seem either hopelessly bewildering, or not unlike the caviar carousel of any other big American city. Probably it is more like the glittering capitals of Europe than anything in these States, but Idahoans, Kansans and Vermonters need only to learn the rules to feel at home. For rules rule Washington.

Rule No. 1: An invitation from the White House is a command; illness the only acceptable excuse for staying away.

As for the Minister from *Graustarkia's* tea or cocktails at the *Sosnovian* Legation—wives of Senators, Representatives and *Functionaires* are at perfect liberty to stay at home and darn their husbands' socks if they prefer.

Many official Washingtonians never attend a social function of any kind. Some just don't care for that sort of thing; others, strictly dry, are reluctant to go out where the bubbles fizz and breaths are heavy with grape. Hundreds find repaying obligations and keeping up stepper-outer wardrobes too expensive.

Awe—But many and many a woman is "just plain scared of" the razzle-dazzle.

Back home she may have been the proverbial big toad in a small puddle. Here, she risks going down as a nonentity. But one factor will guarantee her certain prestige if her husband is an official.

Rule No. 2: The rule of precedence. Many a home town cipher whose husband entered House or Senate has been jumped into unaccustomed prominence by good old Rule 2.



**Peggy O'Neal Eaton: "thumbs down,"
cried Washington's social snobs**

Wise is the woman who learns all about the trickiness and rigidity of precedence at the outset. She is doubly wise if she makes no leap into the Washington whirlpool until she has engaged, or at least consulted, a social secretary. For a secretary is as important to a social neophyte as a jockey is to a race-horse. Through her, and by conning the social "Bible" ("The Social List of Washington, D. C.," edited by Helen Ray Hagner), she will be saved many falls.

First, the social-minded daughter of Eve will probably set herself and husband up in an apartment or house a trifle larger and more expensive than they can afford. Next, it will be well for her to subscribe to theater opening nights and one good morning musical. Some social service or charity work is absolutely *de rigueur*.

When it comes to clothing, her taste and maybe pocketbook will be the guides. Her jewelry must be real; her finger-nails polished and pink, but not too pink. Her husband may or may not possess evening clothes. If he doesn't, he can rent an outfit for \$4 a night.

Rules—Many "dos" and "don'ts" must be learned by *Mrs. Novus Legis* if she is to escape raised eyebrows, deadly "regrets" when she sends invitations. Two "dos" are essential:

1. Repay calls promptly, according to the ritual.

2. Acknowledge invitations. Declining or accepting makes little difference. The important thing is to acknowledge them.

Among the "don'ts" are:

1. Never forget the rules of precedence.

2. Never leave an affair until the Guest of Honor has prepared to depart.

To these, Mrs. Hagner has added several suggestions to avoid the embarrassing snarls that may result when hostesses trip over precedence.

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1. "Do not ask the Chief Justice and an Ambassador to the same dinner."

2. "Do not ask a Justice of the Supreme Court and the Minister of a foreign country to the same dinner."

3. "Do not ask the Speaker of the House and the President *pro tem.* of the Senate to the same dinner."

Mix-Ups—Jealousy over precedence has caused many a row in dignified officialdom. Back in Theodore Roosevelt's Administration, Speaker "Joe" Cannon was miffed because he was not given the guest rating he thought he deserved. Out of it grew the Speaker's Dinner, at which "Uncle Joe" held the spotlight.

A more recent upheaval was the fight between Mrs. Dolly Gann, sister and official hostess for the late Vice President, Charles Curtis, and Alice Roosevelt Longworth, wife of the late Speaker, Nicholas Longworth. Mrs. Longworth contended that as the wife of the Speaker, she outranked the sister of the Vice President. Mr. Curtis appealed to the State Department, but no official decision was given. At a Diplomatic Dinner, Mrs. Gann was seated ahead of Mrs. Longworth. After that, the Speaker's wife refused to attend any parties at which Mrs. Gann was present.

Solution—Out of it all came another official dinner—one for the Vice President, so that President Hoover would not be accused of showing partiality through the Speaker's Dinner. This year, the Vice President's dinner has been abandoned through a telephone deal made by Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Garner, canceling the affairs they usually give each other. Garner likes to take his shoes off in the evening, to go to bed at 9 o'clock, except on Poker Evenings.

Another quirk over precedence came with the first Congresswomen. At first, it was decided that the wives of Representatives and Senators should hold the rank of their husbands and Congresswomen should be seated accordingly in relation to them. But in the end, after a flare-up, the Hoover Administration decided to give Congresswomen precedence over the wives of all Representatives and Senators.

Custom Decrees—As for the ratings of others: An Ambassador is traditionally a representative of a ruler and, therefore, a Senator, for instance, must call on *him*. A Minister, however, is a representative of a people; therefore, he calls on a Senator. But he takes reception precedence over a Senator, and a Senator over a Representative. Senators rate according to years of service. Cabinet members call first on Senators and Foreign Ministers, but precede them at social functions. Wives of Cabinet members rank ahead of Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins. All very simple.

At a White House dinner, the woman guest of honor sits at the President's right, the woman second in rank at his left. At Mrs. Roosevelt's left is the ranking man, the second at her right. The system plays

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both ends against the middle, where the least in official rank are seated.

The White House dining-room is not as large as it might be; ninety guests will crowd it. As a result, Chief Usher Raymond Muir, who has charge of the seating arrangements, often finds himself facing a ticklish task.

Only Once—Muir's predecessor, the late "Ike" Hoover, recalled in his book, "Forty-two Years in the White House", how the Theodore Roosevelts tried to crack the problem by giving the Diplomatic Dinner in the more spacious East Room. It was disastrous. The food had to be brought so far from the kitchen that it was cold when served.

It is all according to a fixed pattern that has grown adamant with time. Andrew Jackson tried to alter the unwritten system. But "Old Hickory", soldier and duelist, took the beating of his life from the ladies of Washington.

He tried to force them to accept Peggy O'Neal Eaton, daughter of a tavern-keeper, widow of a Naval Purser who committed suicide, then wife of Major Eaton, Jackson's Secretary of War. Washington "talked" about Peggy Eaton. The President sponsored her, entertained in her honor, fought for her in and out of the White House. But thumbs were down on Peggy Eaton; Washington society would have none of her.

Jackson's inauguration, however, did set a precedent, the like of which has not been seen since. The doors of the White House were flung open and the rabble rushed in to drink orange-punch and make merry. Their muddy boots stained the carpets, they stood on chairs and upholstered furniture, shattered a costly chandelier. Jackson only said:

"Let the boys have a good time once in four years."



House telephones are busy as the White House social season begins; (left) Raymond Muir, chief usher (right) Mrs. Nesbit, housekeeper

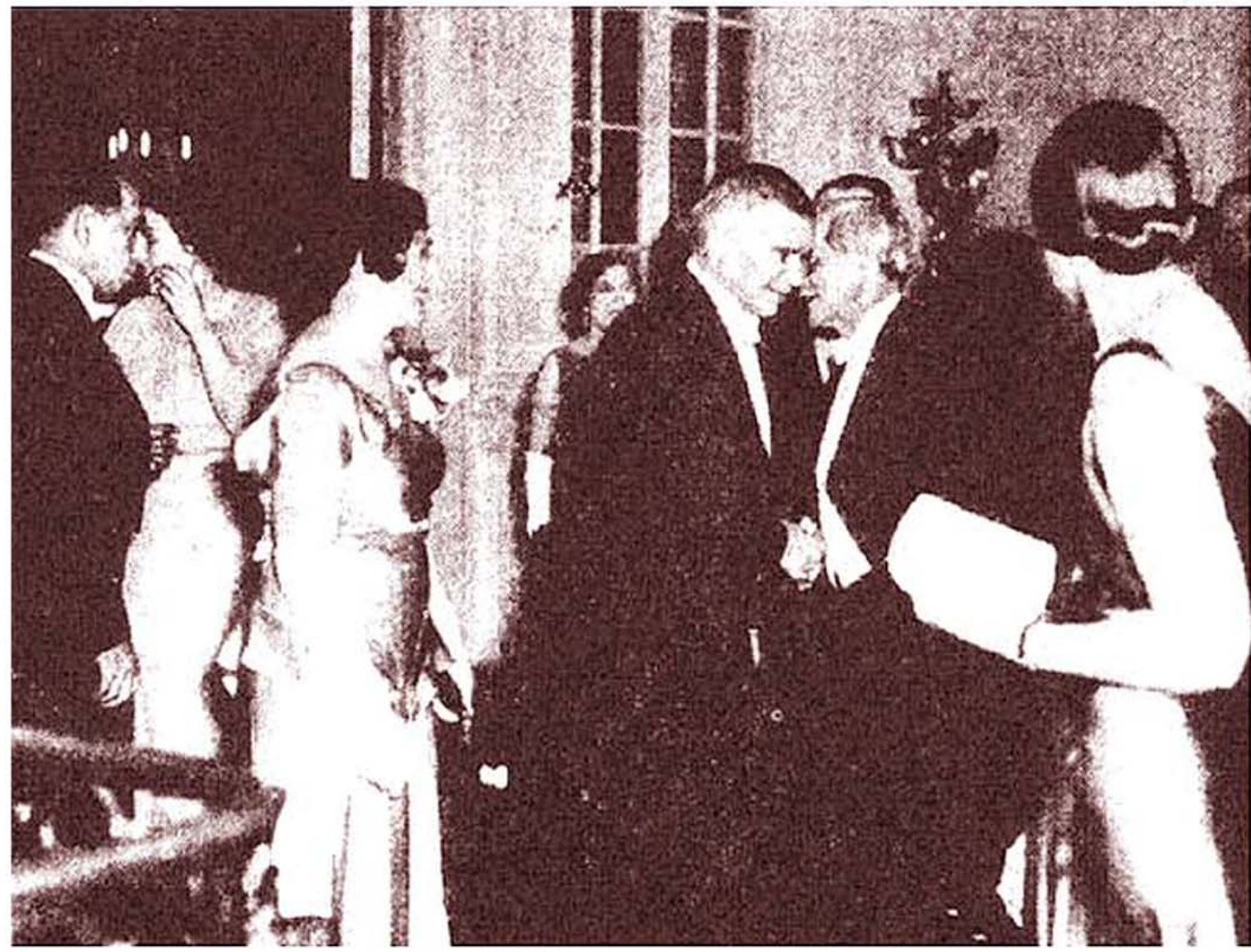


Officialdom once again dons evening clothes; central figures: Chief Justice and Mrs. Hughes



Associate Justice Roberts and Mrs. Roberts

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On parade: leading, Attorney-General Cummings and Mrs. Morgenthau, then Secretary of Interior Ickes and Mrs. Daniel Roper (left) Informal moment in Washington's social whirl