

# THE UNWRITTEN LAWS OF WASHINGTON



**T**HE social customs of Washington are the result of tradition, and not of law, as in Europe. With the change of each administration, some of these customs vary to meet the new needs and pleasure of those high in officialdom, so that the novice in the intricacies of our unique Washington social life should set to work at once to familiarize herself with the methods of procedure necessary to her success.

*Social Usages Have Only the Authority of Custom and Vary with Each Change of Administration*

The President's wife is the First Lady of the Land; she alone, among women, does not pay or return calls, but all officials and their families, foreigners of distinction, and those in private life who care to be identified with the society of the capital, call first on the President's wife. So do all the visitors to the city who wish to pay their respects to the Chief Executive and his wife.

One does not expect to be admitted, nor does one ask, generally speaking, to see the chatelaine of the White House. If, however, one desires to pay one's respect in person, after having left a card (with that of one's husband, if one is a married woman), it is customary to write to the private secretary asking that a date be given, when, if agreeable, one may be received. If an engagement is made for such an audience, one must arrive promptly at the time appointed. One usually remains not longer than ten minutes.

After receiving an invitation to dine at the White House, the *visite de digestion* should be made not later than three days after the entertainment. A dinner invitation should be answered by hand the same day that it is received, the proper form of such an acceptance beginning,

Mr. and Mrs. John Jay Smith have the honour to accept", and continuing in the same formal manner. An invitation to the White House is considered a command, and other hostesses understand that any other engagement is broken to make it possible to accept this invitation.

Promptness, that courtesy of Kings" should always be observed, and for White House parties the guests should make a point of arriving in the drawing-room in advance of their hosts.

## THE ETIQUETTE OF CALLING

At all functions, the guests remain standing until the President and his wife are seated. These are but marks of respect due the chief executive in our great nation. The President is addressed as "Mr. President", and his wife, as are all other wives of American officials, simply as "Mrs. X".

The wife of the Vice-President receives on Wednesday. It is usual for her to make only certain official visits and to return calls of personal friends, should she so elect; but it is not incumbent upon her to pay calls generally, so that the newcomer who has paid her respects to "the second Lady of the Land" must not feel that she has been slighted, if the call is not returned.

She of unofficial life, often finds difficulty in discovering the social usages peculiar to Washington social life; yet if she does not observe them, she may subject herself to unkind criticism. If she wishes to identify herself with this social rule, she should call first, and as soon as possible, call the wives of the President, Vice-President, Cabinet Officers, Speaker of the House, and others in high positions. She will make her choice of

Diplomatic Corps, the judiciary, Senators, and Representatives, not failing to be prompt in paying her respect to the wives of the Senators and Representatives of her own state.

It is customary for this newcomer to pay, also,



particularly if her husband is an Army or Navy officer, the first call to the wives of the General of the Army; the Chief of Staff, the Admiral of the Navy, and also to the wives of the Commanding Officers at the Navy Yard, the Marine Barracks, the Washington Barracks, and Fort Myer. The wives of the Commanding Officers at Fort Myer and Washington Barracks, during the past administration, set aside Fridays as their formal reception day, but this question is usually decided to suit the convenience of the chatelaine of the Commanding Officer's house. This is also the case at the Soldier's Home. It is not always understood that although the Chief of Staff makes his home at Fort Myer, another officer is in command of the post.

#### RECEPTION DAYS IN WASHINGTON

In Washington, there is a great deal of formal calling on Sunday, hostesses feeling that they have a better opportunity of really "seeing" their friends on that day. Monday is the day set aside as the reception day of the wives of the Justices of the Supreme Court and the Commanding Officers of the Navy Yard and Marine Barracks. One addresses the Chief Justice as "Mr. Chief Justice"; all other Justices as "Mr. Justice".

Tuesday is Representatives' day. A representative in Congress is addressed as "Mr. X". Letters are addressed to "The Honorable X"; for instance, "The Honorable John Jay Smith", "The Honorable John Jay Smith and Mrs. Smith". Wednesday is the day when the wives of the Vice-President, the Cabinet Officers, and the Speaker of the House receive. The Vice-President is addressed as "Mr. Vice-President", and Cabinet Officers as "Mr. Secretary". The Speaker of the House is a very distinguished personage and is addressed as "Mr. Speaker".

Thursday is Senators' day. Senators are addressed as "Senator", and invitations and letters are addressed to "Senator", or to "Senator and Mrs. John Jay Smith". Friday is the day when the wives of the Diplomats receive. Ambassadors are addressed as "Your Excellency" and "Mr. Ambassador"; the wife as Madam, or by her title if she has one; for example, "Princess, Countess, or Baroness".

Ladies in unofficial life usually choose their reception days to suit their own convenience or take the day most universally adopted by the women of the locality in which they live. Very often hostesses have a notice of the days they will be "at home" inserted in the local newspapers, as a convenience to their acquaintances and friends. The hours for calling are generally from four to six o'clock, although many women with long visiting lists find it necessary to begin earlier.

Only those most "high in authority" have their cards engraved without their addresses. For others, it is not good form to do so, and in such a case it may be assumed that an acknowledgment to the visit is not expected. If one has a reception day, it is engraved on one's cards.

If one wishes to give an entertainment in honour of an acquaintance or friend, the would-be hostess should first ascertain if this courtesy will

be agreeable and, if so, ask that a date be set. During the season, invitations are sent out three, four, or even six weeks in advance, in order to secure the guests desired, particularly if they are "high in the affairs of the government"; for such desired great persons have so many invitations for a single evening that it is necessary to

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look long ahead in order to secure them. A cautious host is careful not to make the mistake of asking officialdom "to meet" any but persons who are "catalogued" above them, in the official world. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. Jones are asked to meet Senator and Mrs. X; not Senator and Mrs. X, to meet Mr. and Mrs. Jones. Judge and Mrs. Brown are asked to meet an Ambassador; not the Ambassador to meet Judge and Mrs. Brown; nor does one in Washington



place a personal friend before a more distinguished guest. When in doubt as to the relative rank of two officials, it is wise not to invite them to the same party, unless it be a large one, where precedence need not be so carefully considered.

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court is not invited to dine with an Ambassador, a foreign Minister, or the Secretary of State, because their relative rank has never been established. It has been the custom for other members of the Cabinet to be invited to meet the Chief Justice and foreign Ambassadors and Ministers.

The hostess takes in the guest of honour, whomsoever he may be. If she has a husband, he takes in the wife. Should the guest of honour be an unmarried man, the host takes in the next ranking lady, leading the way, of course, with her. Suppose a husband and wife are entertaining a Justice of the Supreme Court and his wife. When the guests have assembled, Mr. Smith, the host, offers his arm to the wife of the Justice and leads the way to the dining-room. The hostess brings up the rear of the procession with the Justice. If the hostess is unmarried or a widow and there is no man in the family to take the part of host, she leads the way to the dining-room with the guest of honour. At the close of a dinner or luncheon, the wife of the guest of honour takes her leave first, the other guests remaining until after her departure. This courtesy is strictly observed in Washington. The *invitée* is careful, having received an invitation to a dinner, luncheon, ball, or reception to call promptly and to return the courtesy as soon as possible.

#### THE HOURS OF ENTERTAINING

The usual hour for which guests are asked for a former dinner is eight o'clock, and one-thirty is usual for luncheon. The time set for guests to arrive at a private ball is generally ten o'clock. A dinner or luncheon invitation should be acknowledged at once, if possible, and any invitation bearing R.S.V.P. should be promptly accepted or declined.

One can not be too scrupulously careful to observe all of these courtesies of social life, if one wishes to stand well in the eyes of the community. In all social life, as well as in every other human endeavour, it is necessary to use commonsense, tact, and consideration for others. The hostess should always remember that in asking people to her home it is her intention not only to compliment them, but also to contribute to their pleasure. These little amenities serve to oil the wheels of human intercourse, and where official life is concerned, certain courtesies are due, not only to the individual, but to the office.

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