

THE ESOTERIC AND TERRIBLE ORDER OF

Pie Eater Reappearance Reports Half-baked?

OTTAWA—It has been reported that meetings of the Original Esoteric Omnipotent Onomatopoeic Order of Pie Eaters have been held in open secret in recent years. The resurgence of the infamous and oft-feared organization has led us to investigate this phenomenon, sure to affect our community: Will Grange members tremble, will women be left out (again!) and will our youth be pulled into the seductive calling of a secret “fraternal” organization with pie (albeit one with no gang colors, weapons or pants hanging below their underwear?) It would behoove us to study what has gone before to determine if the Pie Eaters were a revolutionary organization endeavoring to bring radical change to Ottawa, or merely, as some would have us believe, young men amusing themselves when the last slice of pie had been eaten.

Pie Eaters Hoped to Devour More Than Pastry

For while the Pie Eaters were organized in the late 1860s with the purpose of “relieving mankind from oppression and war’s rude alarms, and the cheapening of grub,” all worthy goals, there existed the more nefarious goal of bringing the Patrons of Husbandry—or Grangers—into conformance with Pie Eater ritual, for the Pie Eaters considered the powerful Grange a “grasping monopoly whose object is to suppress and crush the Pie Eaters.” The Pie Eaters called for their “Black Order” and “Knights of Danger” to capture and make sacrificial offerings of said Grangers. It should be noted that no missing Grangers were reported.

The organization started innocently enough shortly after 1868. Before the completion of the first building now called Tauy Jones Hall at Ottawa University, university classes were held and all unattached men in town boarded at a house at 2nd and Hickory. According to sources, these included some of the leading business and professional men of the city, including judges, newspaper men and doctors.

Crusty Bachelors Tackled Issues of the Time

As unattached males who were, perhaps, helpless in the domestic arts, they met primarily to eat. But such scholarly and successful men could not just meet without addressing some of the more controversial issues of the time: economics, society, power . . . and the Grange.

Membership Reported to Be in Thousands

Though the Pie Eaters claimed “five thousand members from every nation and every clime,” the only members ever spotted by outsiders lived in the house at 2nd and Hickory. They also contended that, unbeknownst to any non-Pie Eater, they established lodges in many places entirely absorbing the unfortunate Grangers. Again, there was no confirmation from sources outside the Pie Eaters.

The original “golden age” of the Pie Eaters was in the early 1870s, when their activities were covered by the vigilant newspapers of the time. (It has been rumored that one local newspaperman, a Pie Eater, actually wrote for several papers of the time, to further the Pie Eater agenda.) Perhaps the most valuable document to survive (for no actual Pie Eater documents have surfaced to this day) was an article

by The Ottawa *Republic* in July of 1873, “The Pie Eaters Exposed,” which covered a meeting of the “five thousand” which took place in the home of the respected Dr. L.C. Wasson. The intrepid reporter infiltrated and exposed “Their Mysterious Proceedings,” which may have led to the demise of the organization. (Or did they merely go underground, only to resurface a hundred years later?)

Pie Eaters Planned Revolutionary New Order

A highly subversive plan of the Pie Eaters was to abolish the “Republic” as Americans knew it and establish Kingdoms, each led by a Pie Eater. Plate glass would be substituted for money, so each man could have equal wealth. Marriage was to be abolished and all women to be banished to New Jersey, a territory to be inaccessible to any man, with the objective being to reduce the human race and thus to allow the glass money to go farther. No mention was made as to where the less-than-domestic Pie Eaters would obtain their “grub,” nor how Pie Eaters would carry on into the future when they declared a ban on offspring.

Secret, Dangerous Rites Reported By Reputable Sources

As they were reported in the *Republic*, the rites and ceremonies were too complicated, dangerous and frightening to be reported here. Let it suffice to say that black gowns, spears, flowing beards and grim masks made their appearance.

The executive board of the Pie Eaters, the Grand Gyrasticutas and Omnipotent Body of Solons of Pie Eaters, included the Grand Gyrasticutas, the

PIE EATERS

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Past Gyraasticutas, the Grand Gobbler, the Grand Gabster and the Scribe. The High Cock-a-lorum held the position of announcing a new candidate's entrance by "five loud raps and shrill yell," followed by unearthly howls, shrill yells, gnashing of teeth and demonic laughter, apparently by the rest of the Pie Eaters. As the candidate entered the chambers, he was subjected to unspeakable horrors, which will not be recounted here in the interest of protecting our youthful readers.

Business Acumen Unparalleled

While presenting the dark side of the Pie Eaters, it is only just journalism to highlight some of the good they accomplished. Successful businessmen that they were, the Pie Eaters' executive board mandated that the Pie Eaters would accept no bids for supplies for more than 50 percent of the cost, no Pie Eater would be permitted to deal with any ordinary mortal, no member would ever pay any money for any purpose and all bills presented for supplies to the den automatically would be rejected. Indeed, their financial acumen was remembered in a newspaper article of January 1, 1915, which reported that when a newspaper proprietor "offered to 'throw off' half of a disputed bill against the Pie Eaters, George B. Jenness, one of his employees but a more enthusiastic member of the fraternity, moved (to the Pie Eaters) an acceptance of the proposition with the proviso that the club would 'throw off the other half.'" Early creative financing perhaps can be attributed to the Pie Eaters.

Power Extended into a Slice of Community Life

The Pie Eaters, in their power, granted brother members permission to leave the state to marry (perhaps this was before the "all women must live in New Jersey" edict). So feared and respected were they that a local Judge Franklin referred a young man to the Pie Eaters for consent to leave town to return East to marry.

The Pie Eaters organized parades for the 4th of July and attended parties, dressed in full

regalia. An unfortunate resemblance to the white-sheeted appearance of the Ku Klux Klan was offset by their banner depicting a youth eating a pie and the pie plate which hung like a medallion around each Pie Eater's neck.

Ladies' Tart Revolt Against Pie Eater Agenda Falls Flat

An unsurprising footnote to the Pie Eater history is the group of young ladies at the time who organized an anti-Pie Eater society. It caused great controversy thereafter. Perhaps they were handled in the mysterious and undocumented "Granger" method.

The Pie Eater Philosophy Rests In Uneasy Peace

The house at 2nd and Hickory has since been torn down. Some will claim that it could no longer remain standing for structural reasons. Yet perhaps it was considered that the power of the Pie Eaters needed to be nipped in the bud at the place of its origination to destroy any malevolent power still lurking there. Whatever the reason, this reporter has reason to believe that the legacy of the Pie Eaters was not wiped out with the razing of the building. The seeds the Pie Eaters sowed still germinate in Ottawa. And as wildflower seeds can lie dormant in the soil until the right combination of warmth and rainfall allow germination, so did the idea of the Pie Eaters.

Pie Eaters Resurface Today In Our Community

We have learned that the Franklin County Historical Society has met several times in recent years in the name of the Pie Eaters. While the "five thousand members of the first Pie Eaters Order may be resting in Hope and Highland Cemeteries," as noted by the *Ottawa Herald*, new recruits have appeared to eat pie and hear historical programs. Some of the presenters of these programs have been initiated into the Esoteric and Terrible Order.

While this sounds innocent enough, harken back to the original Pie Eaters' purpose of "relieving mankind from oppression. . .and cheap. . .grub."

Further Research Has Uncovered The Smoking (Steaming?) Gun

The Franklin County Historical Society, the very instrumentality responsible for reviving the Pie Eaters, has come across written evidence to bolster the belief that the Pie Eaters' obsession with pie had some underlying reason connected with—this shouldn't surprise you—Grangers. An article in a September 18, 1873 *Ottawa Journal* recounts a visit by our old friend and Pie Eater George B. Jenness to Lane, Kansas, where he dined sumptuously on "Granger cake," either a corn cake or a decorated pound cake—the article isn't clear on which. There remains little doubt that this is the very comestible that the Pie Eaters vowed to wipe out by the unswerving consumption of Pie.

Community Must Take Stand!

If you are not among the intrepid (and pie-hungry) souls to attend these recent meetings, we advise you to attend future Pie Eater functions put on by the FCHS and observe for yourself. Enjoy the variety of pies and the entertaining speakers. But should white and scarlet-robed figures appear, accompanied by the wailing and gnashing of teeth and dangling pie tins, you must decide in your heart if the way of the Pie Eater is the way of truth: do you want to send your female family members to New Jersey or wrestle the Grange into submission, reigning old vendettas? Or does the call of cheap, and good grub and innovative financial methods sing out louder than our warnings whispered in your ear? Or you may find the Pie Eaters of today, as perhaps were the Pie Eaters of yesterday, merely seeking some good, clean fun and the most remarkable pies in the county. You must decide.

