

Expert shares customs at Victorian Christmas tea

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Of all the customs shared during a December 8 Victorian Christmas Tea held at the Masonic Temple in Farmington, a children's game was the one most guests would probably not replicate for their holiday celebration.

According to tea and etiquette consultant Ann Petterson of All Things Victorian, currants were

placed on a plate, then covered with brandy. The brandy was set afire and then something happened that most - hopefully all - parents would not allow these days.

"The children would reach in and grab the currants," Petterson said, as she demonstrated all but the last element of the game.

Her discussion of the Victorian era punctuated an afternoon repast of hot tea, tiny sandwiches and delicious sweets, delivered by costumed servers who addressed guests as "sir" or "ma'am."

Petterson also provided a little bit of local history, noting the Masonic Temple's Italianate Victorian architecture. "At one time, it served as the Farmington Public Library," she said.

But her true love and the substance of her presentation had to do with the Victorian era and Queen Victoria, who ascended to

the throne in 1837.

"At the age of 18 years and four months old, she was queen of the most powerful national in the world," Petterson said.

While Victoria's uncles were old, sick and "not interesting people," she explained. When a young, attractive, unmarried woman took charge, all of a sudden, everyone was interested in everything she did.

Victoria's reign, during the Industrial Revolution, came at a time when more people were moving into the cities to work in factories. As the demand for information grew, the first newspapers were published, Petterson said.

A "penny post" was established, offering Victorians the chance to send anything within the country for just a cent. Their Christmas cards were more like modern-day Valentines, very sentimental and sweet, with lots of symbolism.

Victoria chose a distant cousin, Albert, as her consort; the couple had nine children.

"Albert guided her in many ways," Petterson said. A native of Germany, he brought the tradition of Christmas trees to Buckingham Palace.

As guests looked at illustrations from an 1848 edition of the London News, Petterson described that first tree as a fir set on a table that had been draped in damask. Branches were decorated with candles, sweets and toys; more sweets and toys supported the base.

"The angel at the top of the tree signified the purity of the



Must be Santa: Denise Tawya of host group Blue Circle helps Victorian Santa Christopher Cummins read "Twas the Night Before Christmas" at Saturday's Victorian Christmas Tea, held at the Masonic Temple.

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