

Greetings from Gagetown merchants

Age-old customs, traditions shape contemporary holidays

For all of the many symbols of Christmas—a welcoming wreath upon a door, gaily wrapped packages spilling out from under a tree, twinkling lights dancing upon tinsel—seldom is the special significance of the holiday season obscured.

From large cities to remote country villages in lands both near and far, a spirit of good cheer prevails among the people.

There is great excitement as age-old customs are followed in preparation for the holiday celebration. And, though the customs may differ from land to land, the holiday sentiment remains much the same in many cultures.

Midwinter had always been a season of joyous celebration in ancient civilizations. The Romans paid tribute to their deity of agriculture, Saturnus, during the winter season of Saturnalia.

A Roman holiday

It was a week-long festival marked by processions, gift-giving, feasting and decorating the home with laurel and evergreens.

In winter also, the Hebrews celebrated the Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah, which is still observed today by people of the Jewish faith. It is a holiday which commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem by Judas Maccabees in 165 B.C.

The Temple had been pillaged by the Syrian army, and only a small amount of sacred oil remained. Although it was judged to be enough to last for only one day, the oil burned for eight days. Therefore the Jews observe Hanukkah for eight days in honor of this miracle.

Winter rites

Similarly, wintertime festivities took place in early Egyptian and Greek civilizations. The Goths, Saxons and Druids of the northern lands all celebrated the arrival of the winter solstice with great feasting and sacred rituals.

These pagan rituals eventually melded with the Christian celebration of the birth of Christ, and the season's festivities took on an international character as Christianity grew in acceptance throughout the centuries.

At first, the Church resisted observation of pagan rituals but, failing in that attempt, it incor-

porated the forms into the Christian celebration.

Custom of gift-giving

Perhaps the most well-known and widespread of all Christmas traditions is the practice of giving gifts.

The early Romans made gifts to their emperors during Saturnalia; the three wise men, or Magi, brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ child; and an Archbishop from Lycia brought the gift of faith to many.

This generous Archbishop from Asia Minor was the good Saint Nicholas, or Santa Claus, the patron saint of girls and boys.

Children all over the world write to him at his home at the North Pole with their gift requests, a practice which has been abstracted from a Germanic legend.

The symbols of Christmas are both sacred and secular. From special holiday cakes to the star on the Christmas tree, from sidewalk Santas to the scene of the nativity, the mix of pagan and Christian symbolism is thorough.

Celtic traditions

Kissing under the mistletoe stems from ancient Celtic tradition. Decorating the tree—in early times, with fruits and sweets—stems from an early Germanic worship of vegetation.

Sending Christmas greetings to friends and associates to express friendship and goodwill first came about in Victorian England.

An English first

Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, introduced the

first Christmas tree in England from his native Austria in 1841.

Centuries-old customs have been handed down in a spirit of heart-warming brotherhood. Children grow excited at the thought of Santa's visit, or the chance to sit on his knee at the local department store.

Singers both young and old venture out into the crisp night, filling the air with the sweet sounds of Christmas carols.

College students gather in the dorm lounge, surrounded by bowls of popcorn, needles and thread, red and green ribbons, and an eight-foot tree waiting to be decorated.

Heart-warming season

Very few hearts escape being touched by the spirit of Christmas. Bussing commuters don't seem as easily irritated during the holiday season.

The mailman steps a little lighter, despite the increased weight in his bag. Teachers give less homework. Mothers allow their babes an hour or two longer before bedtime.

Christmastime is time to take stock of the good things in life: the simple pleasures, the comforts, the blessings of family and friends.

Pleasures of memory

And, when the 12 days of Christmas have passed, and the decorations return to their boxes until next year, there is always the lingering pleasure in remembering all those smiling faces and dancing eyes, the true symbols of holiday happiness.

"Hanging of the greens" fuels Yule spirit at YWCA

Savoring traditions of the old while imparting flavors of the new, Young Women's Christian Associations in more than 6,000 locations throughout the United States fuel the Yule spirit with their decades-old "Hanging of the Greens" celebrations.

The end of the old year and beginning of a new one have long been marked by special ceremonies and decorative motifs themed to imaginative uses of holiday greens.

Because of the diversity of the YWCA locations, decorations usually reflect green plant and tree specialties of these areas, according to Jewel Freeman Graham, president of the YWCA of the U.S.A.

Preparing for the festive season is an "all hands" effort, with women and girls from varied ethnic, social and economic backgrounds contributing their expertise.

"It's this sharing that points up the fact that Christmas and other special events marked by people of other faiths makes this period of the year a holiday for everyone."

"It's a holiday time which draws ideas from everyone to strengthen mutual understanding and to unify us in both a religious and secular sense as we mark the season," she says.

The creche, the international symbol of Christmas, is one feature of "Hanging of the Greens" observances. Set in a bank of fresh pines, the Nativity figures are always the center of attraction.

Holly is used extensively, re-

Game dinners are perfect at holiday time, and the hunter in the family will love this special, festive table arrangement.

With duck, for example, compliment the hunter by really dressing it up elegantly with an orange glaze, and garnish it with orange slices, parsley and red cranberries. You'll also please him by serving another classic—Erlanger beer, the perfect beverage with game.

Decorate you table imaginatively with a hunting horn or any other hunting paraphernalia you have.



Whether you've got an in-house hunter or buy your game from the store, a classic holiday dinner is a beautifully glazed duck with Orange Sauce. To please the hunter even more, serve a cold and frothy "special label" beer. An imaginative centerpiece of Christmas greens with bottle candleholders, dressed up with holly, makes the table festive.

Make a festive centerpiece with a wreath of seasonal greens, placing a number of "special label" beer bottles in the center to serve as candleholders, and dress the bottles with small holly necklaces. To prevent tipping, fill the bottles with water, pebbles or sand. Add small ornaments and a bow to the wreath.

ROAST-DUCKLING WITH ORANGE GLAZE

- 1 duckling, about 5 pounds
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup orange marmalade

Sprinkle duck with salt and pepper; truss.

Place duck, breast side down, on rack in shallow roasting pan. Roast in 350°F. oven 1 hour. Turn duck over; roast about 1½ hours longer or until duck is tender.

Spread duck with orange marmalade for last 15 minutes roasting time. Serve with Orange Sauce.

ORANGE SAUCE

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- Few grains pepper
- ½ teaspoon catsup
- ½ cup orange juice
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons orange marmalade
- 2 navel oranges, sectioned

In small saucepan over low heat, melt butter with orange peel and garlic.

Blend in flour, salt, pepper and catsup until smooth.

Gradually stir in orange juice, chicken broth and marmalade. Cook and stir over medium heat until mixture thickens and boils.

Lower heat and simmer 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add orange sections. Serve over duckling. Yield: 2 cups.



OLD-FASHIONED PEANUT BRITTLE from the microwave oven is a favorite Yuletide treat.

Old-fashioned peanut brittle quick, easy in microwave oven

Everybody loves the holiday season—it's the time of year when friends and family are busily preparing special mouth-watering goodies to share with others.

Old-fashioned peanut brittle is one tempting treat that has been a Yuletide favorite through the ages.

"Even nicer," say home economists "delicious peanut brittle can now be made quickly and easily in a microwave oven. No more stirring constantly and checking closely until the mixture reaches the proper temperature."

Quick-cooking

The following recipe takes only nine minutes to prepare in a microwave oven, and it's so good you'll want to make several batches for gift-giving, too.

OLD FASHIONED PEANUT BRITTLE

- 1 cup raw peanuts
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup white corn syrup
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 1 tsp. butter

In a 1½-quart casserole, stir together peanuts, sugar, syrup and salt.

Cook 8 minutes at HIGH, stirring well after 4 minutes. Add butter and vanilla. Cook 1 minute longer at HIGH.

Add baking soda and quickly stir until light and foamy. Immediately pour onto lightly buttered baking sheet.

Spread out thin. When cool, break into pieces. Store in air-tight container.

Merry Christmas

Let Santa go modern if he likes... but the sentiment is old-fashioned, still. Warm greetings and thanks for your loyalty.

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