

MORETOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Fall/ Winter 2023

Volume 1, Issue 13

Memories of Holidays in Moretown

Halloween is the first real holiday of fall. Trick-or-treating popped up in North America in the 1920's and 30's. first in the western half of the continent. After WW11 sugar rations were lifted, Halloween saw a huge spike and within five years, trick-or-treating was a common practice throughout North America. The kids looked forward to this event and started planning their costumes weeks before the day. Costumes were usually handmade and depended on the skill and imagination of the makers. Kids would start trick or treating at one end of the village, usually by the Cutlers where Frena would have you sign the guest book before she would drop one of her popcorn balls in your bag. It was a toss-up between Frena's popcorn balls and Eunice Ferris's popcorn balls, both were excellent.

Then it was up throughout the village, stopping at almost every house along the way to Kingsbury's house at the other end of the village, just before the sharp corners. That seemed to be the cut-off point for the trick-or-treaters since parents didn't encourage walking around those corners on a dark night. There were ghosts, cowboys, scarecrows, and almost anything else you could imagine running up and down the street.

After the trick-or-treating was over and every kid had a sack full of goodies, it was on to the Town Hall for the Halloween party. There you would find a costume parade, apple bobbing, and donuts hanging from strings which you had to bite off to get the rest of the donut. Popcorn, cookies, and cider were served at the party. No one ever mentions a "sugar rush" from all that candy and cider.

While the younger kids indulged in trick-or-treating, and parties, Halloween for the teenagers consisted of mostly harmless pranks. It was not unusual to wake up the morning after Halloween to find farm or mill equipment missing only to turn up on the school lawn or on the store steps. While no real harm was done, the owners of the equipment had to spend time finding and then moving the items back to their proper homes.

As mentioned above, both Frena Cutler and Eunice Ferris were masters of popcorn balls and so as not to cause a feud between the Cutler and Ferris families, here is a popcorn ball recipe from another well-known Moretown family.

4 qts. popped corn	1 ½ c. white sugar
1 c. molasses	2 Tbsp. vinegar
½ tsp. soda	1 Tbsp. butter

Mix molasses, sugar, vinegar, and water and bring to a boil, until syrup spins a thread. Add soda and mix well. Pour over popped corn and mix well and when cool shape into balls.

Mrs. Merle Nelson

Thanksgiving was next. Thanksgiving was a huge family event with baking and cooking beginning in the week before the holiday. Besides the immediate family, there would be uncles, aunts, and cousins to share the meal. Since deer hunting would usually coincide with Thanksgiving, the hunters would go out in the early morning and hunt until around noon time and then come back for a mid-afternoon meal before going out again to be in the woods just before dusk. While the hunters were out through the morning the women would put in the turkey to roast, cook the potatoes, squash, and other side dishes, and catch up on the goings on in town and what was new with other family members. The kids might play outside for a while, if the weather was good, or play inside and probably get underfoot for those who were busy preparing the dinner. With the return of the hunters, dinner would be served. The food would be passed around and there would be oohs and aahs for the golden-brown bird, the stuffing that was seasoned just right. The delicious roasted winter vegetables were lauded and a comment that the mashed potatoes could have used a little more cream. Every table would be full, as well as the bellies. A pot of hot coffee would always be ready to serve with dessert. The talk would center around who had been a successful hunter, who had seen the biggest buck, and of course, the one that got away. The evening might have finished off with a game of cards before everyone packed up their belongings and kids and made the trip back to their own homes. Thanksgiving would be over for another year.

Christmas was another holiday that was very family-oriented and often celebrated with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Families lived closer to each other, and it was much easier to get together then. The weeks leading up to Christmas were exciting for the kids, anticipating what Santa would leave for them and hoping for snow in case he left a new sled or toboggan.

It was also a busy time at school, and I suspect that not a lot of book learning was accomplished in the week before the holiday. All the kids would be busy learning their "pieces" for the Christmas play that would take place. The younger children would be learning Christmas carols, while the older kids would be memorizing their parts for the pageant.

In the week before Christmas, it would be the job of the older boys in the "big room" of the Moretown Elementary School to go out and chop down a tree for the school's celebration. The day was chosen and when everyone came back from lunch the boys would go to find the tree and the older girls would stay behind to make paper chains and other decorations. The boys, knowing that they could be out for quite a while (since it might take a long time to find the "perfect" tree,) would have stopped at the store beforehand and stocked up on candy and snacks for the trip. When they arrived at school before going out on the tree hunt, Mrs. Benedict, noticing the boys' bulging pockets, said that it would be nice if they would share some of the candy with the girls. It sounds like she was one smart cookie.

The Ward family would always host a Christmas party at the town Hall. Everyone in town was invited. There would be two large Christmas trees on either side of the stage at the hall which held popcorn and candy bags for the children and a gift for each of the Ward's employees and their spouse. The men would usually get a pair of gloves or mittens and the women would receive an apron or kitchen towels. Refreshments were served. It was a great way for the Wards to show their appreciation for their employees and a time for the community to celebrate the season.

New Year's Eve was usually a quiet time with the family or perhaps a small dinner party at someone's home. Night clubs and First Night celebrations had not come into vogue at that time. New Year's Day was also usually a quiet day spent with immediate family. If the weather was good perhaps an afternoon walk would be taken to enjoy the day off from work and the start of a brand-new year.

Holidays in days gone by seemed to be of a quieter, simpler nature. Some would say that they were not very exciting, while others would argue that they were some of the best times. Whatever you prefer please enjoy the fall and winter holidays and every day make memories that you can share and that will last.

Contributed by Denise Gabaree

Sources: Trick or Treating history online

Popcorn Ball Recipe: Moretown, VT Mad River Valley Grange Cookbook