

*"Heap on more wood!
The wind is chill;
But let it whistle as it will
We'll keep our Christmas
Merry still."*

Sir Walter Scott

As the Geddy garden slumbers we find ourselves in the midst of Christmastide. We enjoyed our annual festivities of the season.

Jennifer and Noel Poirier once again hosted our junior interpreters' Christmas party. We built a fire in the Geddy yard and brewed our Christmas wassail as we have in the past. We then wassailed our way to the party, blessing the trees along the way. We sang appropriately as we went. Robert Herrick wrote,

*"Wassaile the trees, that they may beare
you many a Plum, and many a Peare:
For more or lesse fruits they
Will bring
As you doe give them Wassailing.
What sweeter music can
We bring
Than a Carol, for to sing
The Birth of this our
Heavenly King?
Awake the Voice! Awake the
String!"*

We greeted the Poiriers at their door, playfully and joyfully singing "We wish you a Merry Christmas," and we were cheerfully welcomed into their home.

Among the many carols we sang was the 18th century, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," by Charles Wesley. Charles Wesley had a difficult entry into the world. The eighteenth child born in his family he had been born several weeks prematurely and failed to open his eyes or cry for two months. He was never sure of the exact date of his birth but knew it was just before Christmas. Isn't it fitting that he is responsible for giving the world one of the all-time favorite Christmas Carols?

Christmastide causes me to imagine the landscape of the Holy Land in ancient times. The trees found there and then are mostly unfamiliar to us. One evergreen tree is the Carob which is also known in the Bible as John's Bread Tree. (Matthew 3:4) The fruit from the Carob is eaten by both animals and people. Other evergreen trees found there are the Aleppo Pine, and the Cypress. Olive trees and Date Palms grow wild in the desert and are mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:8. Also found in the desert is a member of the Mimosa

family, the Acacia, or Wattle. This tree provides food for the desert animals and is mentioned in Exodus 25:10.

The large impressive and important Kermes Oak is abundant in the Holy Land but probably the most beautiful of the ancient trees is the Almond tree which is mentioned several times in the Bible and blooms in the spring with showy pink and white blossoms. What a beautiful land this must be.

Doc and Margaret Hassel hosted the Geddy party at their home. We enjoyed delicious food and Christmas cheer and fellowship at an outdoor oyster roast.

Oysters were available and enjoyed in the 18th century in Virginia. They were known to be served on the half shell at Mt. Vernon by the Washingtons. George Washington also mentioned having a snack and eating cold cuts. These words sound so modern and familiar but were actually written in the 18th century. Some other holiday foods to which we can relate today are cranberries. George Washington served spiced cranberries at Mt. Vernon and early on William Byrd writes in his diary, "Said my prayers and ate some cranberry tart for breakfast."

Many holiday recipes can be found in 18th century cookbooks. Hannah Glasse offers a recipe for Yorkshire Christmas Pie. In the Country Housewife and Lady's Director (1732) recipes for mince or Christmas pies, and Plum or Christmas pottage are offered. The latter is like Plum pudding. There is even a Christmas cookie recipe in Amelia Simmons' American Cookery.

Martha Washington wrote instructions on the way to store cherries. She wrote in her cookbook, "To keep Cherries yt (so that) you may have them for tarts at Christmas without preserving."

Dining was definitely a favorite form of entertaining then, as it is today. But equally as important in 18th century holiday hospitality was drinking. After saying grace before a meal, the toasts began. Ladies at the table were often toasted individually, then the gentlemen and then the country and so on.

A traditional Christmas drink served then and also usually served at our Geddy Christmas party is syllabub. Sometimes considered a ladies drink, it is made with white wine, cream, milk, egg whites, sugar, nutmeg, and the juice and rinds of lemons. Other holiday drinks enjoyed by the colonists had colorful names such as flips, shrubs, and bounces.

Benjamin Franklin had a special recipe for orange flip, which began with a gallon of rum! He also was the writer of a drinking song, which ended with the line, "For there can't be good living, where there is not good drinking."

Happy New Year,

Janet Guthrie