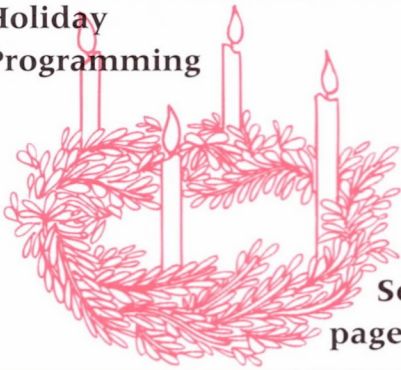


Holiday Programming



See page 2

The Christmas Season **Newsline**

December 25

Christmas Day. The first day of the Christmas season (through January 5), and one of four times during the year when the Lord's Supper was celebrated at Bruton Parish Church and elsewhere in Virginia in the colonial period. Secular observance of the season included entertaining at home.

December 26

Feast of St. Stephen, first Christian martyr.

December 27

Feast of St. John the Evangelist. Minutes of the Williamsburg Lodge of Freemasons show that local Masons celebrated this day annually in the 1770s with great ceremony. They processed as a group wearing the insignia of their order walking in the proper rank from the Lodge to Bruton Parish Church for a sermon. Afterward, they hosted a dinner and ball to which the ladies of the town were invited.

January 1

England and her colonies adopted January 1 as the first day of the new year (instead of the traditional March 25) beginning in 1752. New Year's was not a time of celebration in the modern sense in colonial Virginia, but the *Virginia Almanack* for the year 1774 adorned the January calendar with these lines:

CHRISTMAS being gone, a good
New Year
I wish to all my Readers dear;
Both Health and Wealth, good
Meat, strong Beer
And all Things else the Heart to
Cheer.

January 5

Twelfth Night. The *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies Twelfth Night as Twelfth Day eve, the evening before Twelfth Day (Epiphany, January 6). The word night in this usage suggests, "to spend the night in enjoyment or reveling" as in "to make a night of it." This is consistent with the tradition of making the eves of religious feasts the occasion for secular revelries (debaucheries in the eyes of the authorities who sought to control such excess).

January 6

The Epiphany/Twelfth Day. The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that Epiphany and Twelfth Day are the same day—January 6 and backs up the claim with quotations from the 10th century onward. In the Christian year, the feast of the Epiphany commemorates the manifestation of the birth of Jesus to the eastern magi or wise men via a new star and their arrival at his birthplace bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

[Taken from Linda Rowe's article in *The Interpreter* 23, No. 1.]



Now Christmas comes, 'tis fit that we
Should feast and sing, and merry be;
Keep open house, let fiddlers play,
A fig for cold, sing care away;
And may they who there repine,
On brown bread and
on small beer dine.
From the *Virginia Gazette* in 1766

AMERICANS *Becoming* TODAY

NO. 1 FOR COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!

*Christmas is come, hang on the pot,
Let spits turn round and ovens be hot;
Beef, pork, and poultry now procide,
To feast they neighbor at this tide;
Then wash all down
with good wine and beer,
And so with Mirth conclude the YEAR.*

*The Virginia Almanack,
1765 by Joseph Royle*

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

A number of Christmas customs celebrated in England and the colonies came from ancient traditions, both secular and sacred. Sacred customs stem from the early church's celebration of the birth of Christ on December 25. The word Christmas comes from "Christ's Mass," a religious event that celebrates the birth of Jesus. But before Christmas was ever celebrated, the Romans had several holidays in the winter. Saturnalia, which began on December 17 was the celebration of the winter solstice, when the sun seemed to be returning as the days got longer. The other festival was the Roman new year, Kalaends (from which we get our word *calendar*). These two winter feasts produced familiar symbols that we associate with Christmas: candles, gift-giving, decorating with greens, and much merrymaking with food and beverages.

The early church fathers deplored the pagan revelries that coincided with the Christian holy day, but they found it impossible to abolish all pagan customs. Over the years they wisely Christianized some of the harmless traditions such as their use of greens in the church. In other ways and at different times, church leadership actively repressed pagan traditions. But this dualism—the sacred and the secular, the holy and profane—characterized the celebration of Christmas for hundreds of years before English colonists came to America.

By the 16th century, the time of Reformation, factions within the Christian church held different beliefs about how to celebrate the nativity as a joyous feast day. But dissenters, called Puritans, who supported more radical changes, favored abolishing special observance of all holidays, including Christmas. They were unsuccessful under Elizabeth I and James I; and, as we all know, it was from this group the original settlers of New England came. Back home in England in the 1640s the Puritans gained control of Parliament, and Christmas for Englishmen changed. Note a complaint from the time: "All the liberty



and harmless sport, the merry gambols, dances, friscols, with which the toiling ploughman and labourer revived their spirits and hopes for a whole twelvemonth, are now extinct and put out of use." The Puritan ordinances were enormously unpopular—people were no doubt overjoyed when Charles II took the throne and Christmas-tide was restored in England in 1660.

Englishmen and Englishwomen who settled in the New World brought with them their Christmas customs—traditional English music, games, merrymaking, and trimming with greens. Captain John Smith, snowed in with the Indians, gives us our first record of a Virginia Christmas: "Wee were never more merrie, nor fedde on more plenty of good oysters, fish, flesh, wild foule, and good bread. Not never had better fires in England then in the drie warme smoke houses of Kecoughtan"

The dates bracketing the season are derived from two feasts of the church calendar. The first, of course, is the celebration of the birth of Christ; the other is Epiphany (January 6), when the Magi arrived at Bethlehem.

Although not noted for their religious piety, Virginia Anglicans were expected to attend their parish churches on Christmas Day, and most complied. English, and thus Virginian, religious celebrations followed the canons of the Anglican Church, with communion, scripture, and sermons. In other words, the service was "Christ's mass."

English secular music for Christmas was plentiful and included some of today's best loved carols.



Christmas Gambols from *Wit's Magazine*, 1784.

Colonial Virginians thought Twelfth Night a good occasion for balls, parties, and weddings. As a popular festival, Twelfth Day was inferior only to Christmas. The alleged object was to do honor to the three wise men and the festival dated back to the Middle Ages. It included feasting and drinking and general merriment. One of the features of the Twelfth Day ceremony was the Twelfth Cake. This was a very large cake baked with a bean inserted, and when family and friends were assembled the cake was cut. Whoever got the piece containing the bean was called "King of the Bean" and was accepted by the group to reign until midnight.

Happily, the holiday season coincided with slack time in the agricultural sched-

ule: crops were already harvested, but it was not yet time for spring plowing and sowing. Planters, farmers, and their laborers could take a brief respite from matters of the land. Townspeople probably followed a similar schedule. School terms were arranged so that a vacation fell at this time.

Colonial Virginians were noted for hospitality throughout the year, but their entertaining at Christmas and Twelfth Night was especially festive. Visiting kin and neighbors thronged together for dinners, fox hunts, and dances. Traditional holiday foods from England (roast beef and goose, plum pudding, and mince pies) were supplemented by such Virginia delicacies as wild turkey, duck, fish, and shellfish for Yuletide Feasts. December was the right time for slaughtering, so they had fresh meats of all sorts, as well as some seafood. Then as now, beef, goose, ham, and turkey counted as holiday favorites; some households also insisted on fish, oysters, mince-meat pies, and brandied peaches.

[Taken from Lou Powers's article "Christmas Past and Present" in *The Interpreter* 9 (November 1988), and her article "Christmas Customs" from *The Interpreter* 16 (Winter 1995-1996).]



Christmas Food

See page 2

TWELFTH NIGHT

Virginians throughout the eighteenth century celebrated in the evening on Epiphany (Twelfth Night), often with dinner and a ball or a special cake and a drawing, sometimes punctuated with playacting. For example, William Byrd II recorded in his diary attending festivities at Lord Percival's in London on January 6, 1719. Back in Virginia, Byrd wrote of entertaining several people at Westover on January 6, 1721, with dinner; after dinner, the company "acted proverbs and were merry till one o'clock. . . . We danced country dances about two hours before we acted proverbs." In 1770, Landon Carter wrote on Sunday, January 7, that "Captn. Beale had invited this family yesterday [Jan. 6] to a dinner and a twelfth Cake." On January 7, 1775, Nicholas Creswell in Alexandria Virginia, wrote in his journal, "Last night [Jan. 6] I went to the Ball. It seems that this is one of their annual Balls supported in the following manner: A large rich cake is provided and cut into small pieces and handed round to the company who at the same time draws a ticket out of a hat. . . . He that draws the King has the Honor of treating the company with a Ball the next year. . . . The Lady that draws the Queen has the trouble of making the Cake"

[Taken from Linda Rowe's Article in *The Interpreter* 23, No. 1.]

December 14, 1769

Last night there was a ball and elegant entertainment at the capitol, given by the Gentlemen of the Hon. House of Burgesses to his Excellency the Governour, his Majesties' Council, and the Gentlemen and Ladies of this city, who were chiefly dressed in Virginia clothe, and made a genteel appearance. The capitol was illuminated upon this occasion.

Virginia Gazette, Purdie & Dixon,
Dec. 14, 1769

WILLIAMSBURG, Dec. 28

LAST Tuesday [Dec. 26] his Excellency the Governour [Botetourt] gave a ball and elegant entertainment at the Palace to the Gentlemen and Ladies of this city.

Virginia Gazette, Purdie & Dixon,
Dec. 28, 1769

Saturday 25 [1773]

I was waked in the morning by Guns fired all round the House. The morning is stormy. . . . Nelson the boy who makes my fire, blacks my shoes, does errands &c. was early in my Room, drest only in his shirt and Breeches! He made me a vast fire, blacked my Shoes, set my Room in order, and wish'd me a joyful Christmas, for which I gave him half a Bit.—Soon after he left the Room, and before I was Drest, the Fellow who makes the Fire in our School Rooms, drest very neatly in green, but almost drunk, entered my chamber with three or four profound Bows, & made me the same salutation; I gave him a Bit, & dismissed him as soon as possible—Soon after my Clothes and Linen were sent in with a message for a Christmas Box, as they call it; I sent the poor Slave a Bit, & many thanks. I was obliged for want of small change, to put off some days the Barber who shaves & dresses me.—I gave Tom the Coachman. . . two Bits. . . I gave to Dennis the Boy who waits at Table half a Bit—So that the sum of my Donations to the Servants, for this Christmas appears to be five Bits.

Philip Vickers Fithian, while tutor to Robert Carter's children, December 1773

24. At home all day writing as yesterday—alone.

25. Went to Pohick Church with Mrs. Washington and returned to dinner.

26. Went a hunting in the Neck early. Killed a Fox and dined with several others at Mr. Peak's

George Washington's diary, December 1771

CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS FOOD AND DRINK

Dinner offerings were surpassed only by the variety and quantity of beverages. Alcoholic beverages were plentiful around the table on December 25 in well-to-do households. Others had less because they could afford less. Rum or arrack punch, rum flip, and syllabub were popular, as were French brandy, sherry, beer, ale, and Virginia cider. Toward the end of the century eggnog claimed its place among holiday drinks. Slave owners gave out portions of rum and other liquors to their workers at Christmas-time, partly as a holiday treat (one the slaves may have come to expect or even demand) and partly to keep slaves at the home quarter during their few days off work.

A SAMPLE WINTER DINNER

FIRST COURSE

Onion Soup/Ham Remove

| | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| Boiled Cabbage Pudding | Roast Beef with Potato Balls | Pickled Beets |
|------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|

| | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Onion Pie | Roast Chicken with Carrot Puffs | Indian Meal Pudding |
|-----------|---------------------------------|---------------------|

SECOND COURSE

| | | |
|----------------------|--|-----------------|
| Sweet Potato Pudding | Chicken Pye with Rabbit Stuffed with Pudding | Mincemeat Tarts |
|----------------------|--|-----------------|

| | | |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Gingerbread | Oyster Loaves | Lemon Pudding |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|

DESSERT

| | | |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|
| Candied Orange Peels | Almonds | Peach Preserves |
|----------------------|---------|-----------------|

DECK THE HALLS!

The decking of houses with evergreens at Christmas sprang from customs prevalent during Roman festivities. In ancient times, Romans celebrated their Saturnalia with displays of lights and hardy greenery formed into wreaths and sprays. At one period, early English ecclesiastical councils prohibited members of the church from imitating this pagan practice. However, Christian churches have long been decorated for Christmas. Certainly for many years before the seventeenth century, the English decked their houses and shops with evergreen, oak, holly, bay, rosemary, laurel, ivy, and mistletoe. With evergreens all around them, colonial Virginians very likely followed the English custom of decorating homes and churches with greenery for the holidays. We have no descriptions or illustrations of Christmas decorations in eighteenth-century Virginia. The few contemporary English prints show very simple greens, like a generous cluster of mistletoe hanging from the center of the ceiling and small sprigs of holly or bay on windowpanes. The decorations seemed to have been concentrated inside buildings.

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PUTTING SLAVIN' ASIDE

There is no information about how poor whites and free people of color celebrated Christmas in early Virginia. For some of them, the religious aspects of the holiday probably prevailed. With limited incomes, of course, material manifestations of the season—gifts, special meals, decorations, and so on—were simply not possible.

We know more about slaves' treatment at this time of year because of letters, diaries, and other documents written by the masters, mainly gentry planters. A February 1726/7 law that established patrols to guard against invasions and insurrections mentions that slaves usually congregated in some numbers at the three main yearly festivals. As part of the rationale for the patrols, the legislators called to mind the "great danger [that] may happen to the inhabitants of this dominion, from the unlawful concourse of negros, during the Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide holidays, wherein they are usually exempted from labour."

Lorena Walsh's research on plantation management in colonial Chesapeake shows that slaves were allowed three to five days' holiday at Christmastime. In 1786, for example, George Washington noted on December 29th, "The hollidays being over, and the People [slaves] all at work, I rid to the Ferry, Dogue run, and Muddy hole

Plantations." A Christmas respite must have been allowed to field hands more readily than to domestics; house servants had more work than usual when guests were in the house for extended visits or if the master and mistress expected special meals and entertained during the holidays.

Traditionally, slave owners allowed their workers to have alcohol during the Christmas break. Some masters actually made gifts of rum and other spirits to their bondsmen. This was a very manipulative move and not offered strictly for the slaves' benefit and enjoyment. Frederick Douglass and others explained that slave owners actually encouraged drunkenness at Christmas and a few other occasions to keep slaves from running away. Some individuals, it was said, drank so much that they could not enjoy their temporary freedom.

Naturally, what a master could give, he could also take away. On the last day of 1774 Colonel Landon Carter congratulated himself for his wisdom in suppressing the slaves' celebration at Sabine Hall that year. "I can't but fancy that I have been quite happy in not letting my People keep any part of Christmas." Carter thought his strictness had averted a slave revolt.

Source: Emma Lou Powers from *The Interpreter*, Fall 1999

INTERPRETATION



BEST OF THE 70s THE HISTORIC AREA HOLIDAY SEASON 2005

This year the programming team (PHD) invited sites to determine their own best year for presentation during the holidays. Herewith are those sites and years.

Governor's Palace—1774: Last year before the war. The Governor and his family are reunited. Baby Virginia is born in early December. The Murrays are at the height of their popularity. (*Kid's Holiday Weekend site*)

Everard House—1775: Maintain the interpretation that is most familiar to the volunteer staff. Everard entertains visits from his daughter and other relations.

Wythe House—1774: George Wythe is home from Philadelphia. The Continental Association is in effect, but it has yet to place a strain on the household. (*Kid's Holiday Memories program site and Kid's Holiday Weekend site*)

Geddy House—1774: The focus for the site remains on family, education, and religion. The Association has yet to have a direct effect on the businesses on the site. (*Kid's Holiday Weekend site*)

Randolph House—1774: Peyton Randolph is back from Philadelphia. While there is a strain in the relationship between John and Peyton there is no permanent rift. The slaves in the household have their usual work in preparing for the holidays.

Magazine—1775: The war offers an opportunity to engage guests in discussions and activities related to the Virginia Regiments—Battle of Great Bridge. (*Kid's Holiday Weekend site*)






















Raleigh Tavern—1774: Business goes on as usual though some activities must be curtailed due to the Association. (*Kid's Holiday Weekend site*)

Capitol—1770s: Third-person tour—The 1770s and the Road to Revolution.

Benjamin Powell House—1776: Hannah Powell was married in 1776. Though her wedding took place in November we have presented the program during the holidays in the past. (*Kid's Holiday Weekend site*) There will be general family activities in the morning as some of the staff will be involved in the Kid's Holiday Memories tour.

A Friendly Address

Adults and children in the 18th century enjoyed puzzles and games. A rebus is a puzzle that uses pictures or symbols for some of the words or syllables of words. You can find examples of rebus puzzles at the Print Shop on Duke of Gloucester Street. See if you can solve this rebus and earn the reward!

2 solve this , U + s
your m +  + nd.
Thin +  hard will help, U + ll
f +  + nd. U + r 
will  an EZ 1.
Get on 2 the s +  named
for  Anne's . Seek t + 
st +  @ the s +  + n of
the  selling  & 's
& , it's worth the trip!
G +  -h the clerk a friendly a + 
&  the words
"Pur +  of Ha +  + ness."

