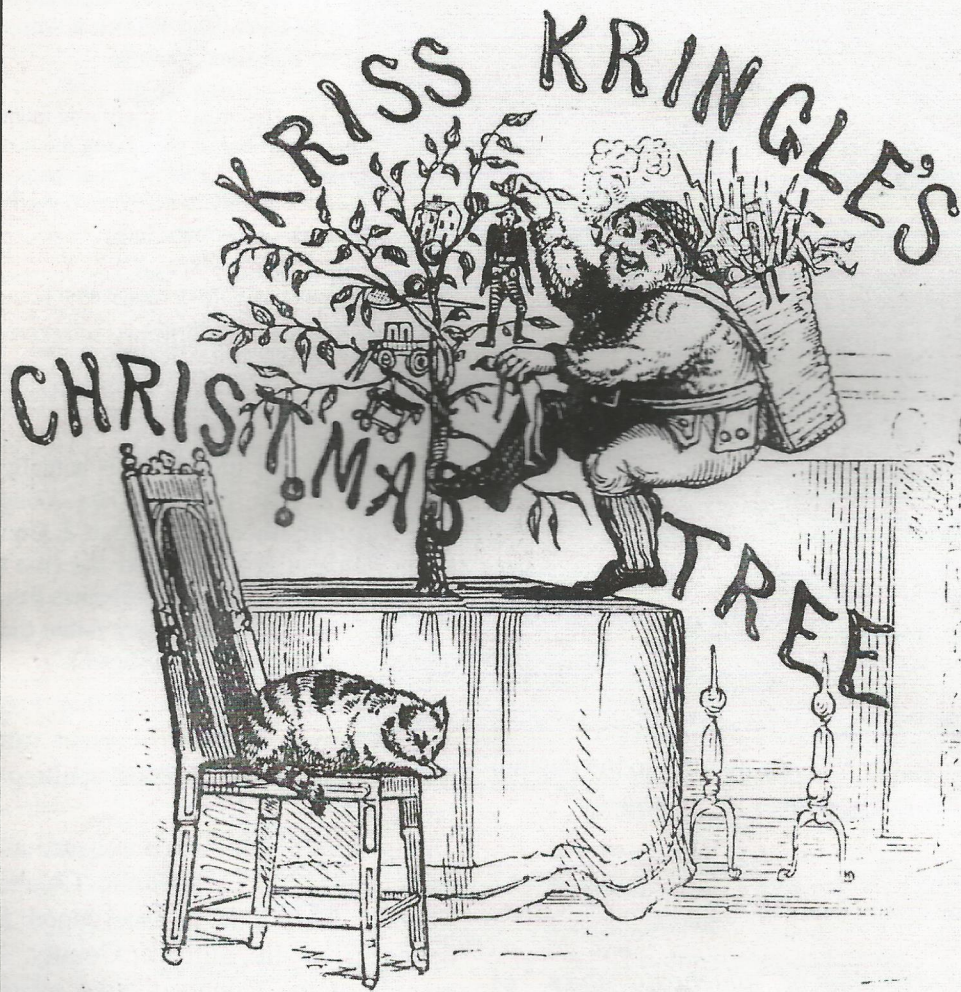




# THE FREEHOLDER

WINTER 2006 THE OYSTER BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOUNDED 1960



E. FERRETT & CO.

PHILADELPHIA:

1845.

☞ 500 YEARS OF  
CHRISTMAS  
CELEBRATIONS

☞ CHRISTMAS,  
SAGAMORE HILL  
STYLE

☞ CHRISTMAS  
PRESENTS FROM  
THE DUTCH

☞ SOCIETY'S  
ESTATE LIFE  
EXHIBIT OPENS!

**THE HISTORY MAGAZINE OF THE TOWN OF OYSTER BAY**



## Editorial

This special Christmas issue marks a return to our normal *Freeholder* format with the usual departments following the Summer and Fall issues on the TR Statue and Oyster Bay estate life, respectively.

This issue will prepare you for the season. In our lead article, Elliot Sayward takes you on an armchair time travel tour to see how the celebration

of Christmas has changed over the course of the last five hundred years. Closer to home, you'll find out how TR and his family celebrated the holiday right here in Oyster Bay through Gus Stahl's article on page 8. Finally, in his "Dutch Next Door" feature, Lee Myles enumerates Dutch contributions to our Christmas celebration.

May the blessings of the season be with you and yours, whatever your faith!

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### THE POST RIDER

To the Editor:

Every issue of *The Freeholder* is "athletic literature," sir. However, the "historical" book reviews, including the thoroughly delicious, anonymous review by W<sup>2</sup> of his own work, which Phil Blocklyn presented in your Spring 2005 issue for the 150th anniversary of the "good, gray poet's" *Leaves of Grass*, were a double joy. I shall copy them onto acid-free paper and tuck a copy into each of my editions

so that future generations will know that criticism of a writer's work won't necessarily relegate a writer to the dustbin of the public's memory or respect.

Judy Spinzia  
New Columbia, PA

*The promotion of "athletic literature," as you call it, befits the "home town" of the President who advocated "The Strenuous Life!" Thanks for all your contributions to this publication over the last ten (!) years, Judy!*

To the Editor:

Regarding the piece published in Spring 2005 sent to you by Sheila Bauhan about

### THE FREEHOLDER

of the

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Purpose: The Oyster Bay Historical Society was founded in 1960 with the express purpose of preserving the history of the Town of Oyster Bay. The Society maintains a museum and research library in the Town-owned c. 1720 Earle-Wightman House, 20 Summit Street, Oyster Bay  
Call (516) 922-5032 for more information.

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### ABOUT OUR FRONT COVER

This issue's front cover illustration is actually the title page from a book entitled *Kriss Kringle's Christmas Tree*. Published by E. Ferrett & Company in Philadelphia in 1845, it marks the first time that Santa Claus is shown with a Christmas tree. He is carefully placing the presents there rather than in stockings. (Library of Congress photo.)

Woodlee built by our grandfather, Frederic C. Thomas, I wish to correct various errors in the matter of dates, spelling and facts.

Sixty acres of land was purchased in two parcels in 1906 by Frederic Chichester Thomas. This data is ascertained from deeds filed in Suffolk County land records at the County Clerks office in Riverhead, NY. Thomas lived from 1858 to 1920. His wife was Katharine Dobbin Thomas. It is correct that they are buried in St. John's Memorial Cemetery in Cold Spring Harbor.

The site of the "Woodlee" estate is marked today by Woodlee Road which  
*continued on p. 21*



## 500 YEARS OF CHRISTMAS AND THEN SOME

by Elliot M. Sayward

*At Christemas merrie may we daunce.*

Geoffrey Chaucer, 1340-1400

### 16th Century

There's lots of Christmas writing from the 16th century but we can't fit it all into the space at our disposal so we've made a couple of not so common selections. The first is an effort to show how responsible people felt about the holiday in those days. Our speaker is Thomas Tusser who was first a musician, then a farmer and finally an author and a poet. The last two roles were chiefly exhibited in a book that is still in print today, *500 Points of Good Husbandry* and that is the source from which his feelings about Christmas are drawn.

At Christmas be  
merrie and  
thankfull withall,  
And feast thy poore neighbors,  
the great with the small,  
Yea, all the yeere long to the  
poore let us give,  
Gods blessing to follow us while  
we doo live.

A good-hearted man in what  
were often bad-hearted times was  
Thomas Tusser. He wanted every-  
body to have a good time. He had



*The Adoration of the Kings (1564) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder  
London, National Gallery*

no prejudice against enjoying  
yourself as the following familiar  
couplet shows.

At Christmas play and make  
good cheere,  
For Christmas comes but once a  
yeere.

And how does one make "good  
cheere?" Tusser's recommenda-  
tion was:

Good bread and good drinke, a  
good fier in the hall,

Brawne, pudding and  
soup, and good mus-  
tard withall

Beefe, mutton and  
porke, shred pies of the  
best

Pig, veale, goose and  
capon, and turkey well  
dressed:

Cheese, apples and  
nuts, Jolly carols to  
heare

As then in the country  
is counted good  
cheere.

But there was a rea-  
son for all this and he  
didn't want you to  
forget it!

Of Christ cometh  
Christmas, the name  
with the feast,

A time full of joy to  
the greatest and least.

At Christmas was  
Christ (our Savior)  
borne

The world through  
sinne altogether for-  
lorne

At Christmas in Christ  
we rejoyce and be glad,  
As onely of whom our  
comfort is had

At Christmas we joy  
altogether with mirth,

For his sake that joyed  
us all with his birth.

Well, let's take a look at another  
feature of the expanded Christ-  
mas season, six lines of verse by  
an English poet named Barnabe  
Googe. He was born in 1540 and  
died in 1594. He was a relation of  
Sir William Cecil, Queen Eliza-  
beth's Secretary, and he had a  
good deal of time for versifying  
while he held various government



jobs. He was a bit of a Puritan and he didn't approve of the material you will read. It was originally a Latin poem by a German named Thomas Kirschmaier who didn't approve either. Barnabe translated the Latin of the whole poem which is very long and put it into English verse. It's called, if you don't already know, "The Popish Kingdome."

The mothers all their children on  
the Eve doe cause to fast  
And when they every one at night  
in senseless sleep are cast,  
Both apples, nattes and peares  
they bring, and other things  
beside,  
As cap and shooes and petticoates,  
which secretly they hide;  
And in the morning found, they  
say, that this St. Nicholas  
brought;  
Thus tender minds to worship  
saints and wicked things are  
taught.

Did you know that Santa Claus went back so far? Remarkable tenacity for a folk figure.

### 17th Century

We will begin with some early Christmases in America.

December 25, 1607. According to Captain John Smith the members of the expedition celebrated Christmas in their chapel.

December 25, 1608. This year Smith reported that "they were never more merrie." He went on to describe their feasting and fires, both generous.

December 25, 1620. The *Mayflower* being anchored in Plymouth Harbor, a large party of Pilgrims went ashore to erect their first house. They weren't Christmas-oriented and they certainly didn't believe in Santa Claus.

Next we have a verse from a

song that may have been sung before the Revolution that deposed Charles I and resulted in the Puritan takeover. We don't know its date, only that it was some time after 1607 and before 1641.

"To Drive Cold Winter Away"

When Christmas tide comes in  
like a Bride,  
With Holly & Ivy clad,  
Twelve days in the yeare, much  
mirth and good cheere,  
In every household is had:  
The country guise is then to  
devise  
Some gambole of Christmas  
play,  
Whereat the young men do the  
best that they can  
To drive cold winter away.

The young men of Line 8 are the Christmas mummers, sometimes called guisers, who went from house to house acting out a playlet in which Father Christmas

was one of the parts but St. George of England was the hero. If this song is correctly placed between 1607 and 1641, then we may be looking at the first mention of the mummers.

Charles I was beheaded in 1649. The suppression of Christmas was almost immediate. Some folk continued their celebrations surreptitiously, some tried to defy the new Parliament, but to a large degree what little Christmas remained went underground.

John Evelyn made this entry in his diary in 1653:

"Christmas-day. No churches or public assemblies. I was fain to pass the devotions of that Blessed



In the 17th century cartoon above, "Old Christmas" is threatened by a Puritan (left) and welcomed by a man of more traditional leanings.



day with my family at home.”

He kept right at it. He was arrested at least once but he apparently managed to find some means to celebrate until the return of Prince Charles to England and his coronation as Charles II brought good times once more. Old Christmas was a good deal harder to kill than Charles I.

The “Water Poet,” John Taylor wrote this protest during the bad times.

All the harmlesse Sports with the merry Gambolls, dances and friscolls, which the toying Plowswaine, and Labourer, once a yeare were wont to be recreated, and their spirits and hopes reviv'd for a whole twelve month, are now extinct and put out of use, in such a fashion as if they never had been. Thus are the merry Lords of misrule, supprest by the Lords of bad rule at Winchester. And to roast a Surloyn of Beefe, to touch a Collar of Brawne, to bake a pye, to put a plumb in the pottage pot, to burne a great candle, or to lay one block the more in the fire for the sake of Master Christmas is enough to make a man be suspected and taken for a Christian, for which he will be apprehended for committing high Parliament-Treason.

Things got better after the restoration of the monarchy in 1661. By the end of the century the feast of Christmas was back in full swing. Here's a bit of poetry from *Poor Robin's Almanack* for 1695 that you can use for a shopping list for your holiday celebration.

Now thrice welcome, Christmas  
Which brings us good cheer,



*A mere excuse for drunken carousing and gaming, as seen above, was how Puritans viewed Christmas.*

Minc'd pies and plumb-porridge,  
Good ale and strong beer;  
With pig, goose, and capon,  
The best that may be,  
So well does the weather  
And our stomachs agree

With holly and ivy  
So green and so gay;  
We deck up our houses  
As fresh as the day,  
With bays and rosemary,  
And laurel compleat,  
And everyone now  
Is a king in conceit.

#### 18th Century

In 1701 the *Poor Robin* poet is still at it and still a prime cause of dyspepsia in England. He has clearly mistaken Old Christmas for a cook. That person was somewhat like St. Nicholas and when the two of them met in the City of New-York they merged and formed Santa Claus.

Now enter Christmas like a man,  
Armed with spit and dripping pan,  
Attended with pasty, plum pie,

Puddings, plum porridge, furmity;  
With beef, pork, mutton of each sort  
More than my pen can make report;  
Pigs, swan goose, rabbits, partridge, teal,  
With legs and loins and breasts of veal:  
But above all the minced pies  
Must mention'd be in any wise.

The Puritan strain was still strong in New England. On December 25, 1712, Cotton Mather preached against the manner in which at least some of his Massachusetts neighbors celebrated Christmas:

...by Mad Mirth, long Eating, by hard Drinking, by lewd Gaming, by rude Reveling, by a Mass fit for none but a Saturn or a Bacchus, or the Night of a Mahometan Ramadan.

It's doubtful if Mather had ever attended a Mahometan holiday ceremony for Ramadan doesn't





*George and Martha Washington's wedding is portrayed in this 19th c. engraving.*

fit his picture.

George Washington and Martha Dandridge Custis were married on Twelfth Night of 1759, in those days a traditional time for weddings. At about the same time George made a list of Christmas toys to give to his stepchildren.

Who was the first black poet to be published in America? A man named Jupiter Hammon. What's he doing in this account? He was born in Oyster Bay. Does he need further credentials? Yes. This is supposed to be about Christmas. That's right. His first poem to be published was written on the 25th of December, 1760. Is that good enough for you? You bet. That's a real flower in Long Island's but-

ton hole! The poem, by the way, was called, "An Evening Thought."

Many things happen on Christmas that have nothing to do with its celebration, sacred or otherwise. In England, the owner of Old Crab, the stallion who led the Sire's List in 1748, 1749, and 1750 had reason to mourn. The horse died on

Christmas Day, 1750. Too much of a good thing?

### 19th Century

Christmas trees were in use in Germany and perhaps other parts of Europe as early as the 1500s and probably much earlier for they are thought to have their roots (figure of speech, not a pun) in pre-Christian times. In America various appearances of trees in connection with Christmas have been suggested as the beginning of the custom here. Who knows? In 1819 a Philadelphian artist, John Louis Krimmel, doubtless of German descent, made drawings of his family enjoying a Christmas tree.

The author of the *Peter Parley* books, Samuel Goodrich of Stonington, Connecticut, remembered that



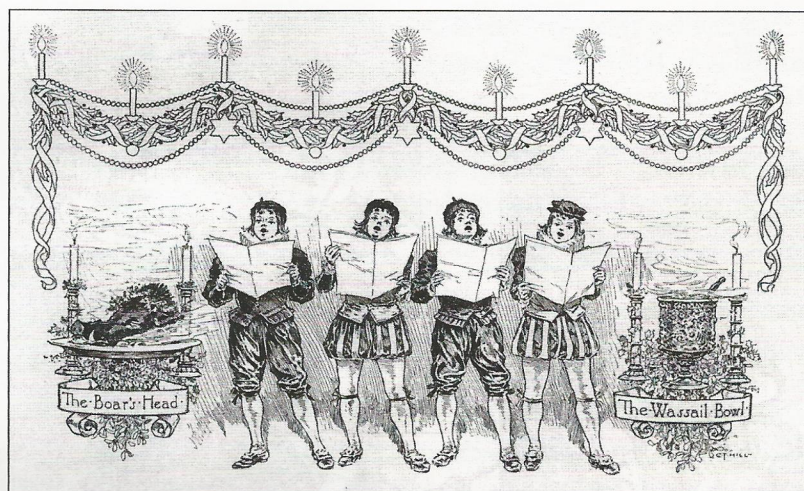
*An early 19th c. German illustration of tree-trimming.*



the cellar of his family's house, "had been dug in a single day" and that day was Christmas. That was perhaps, about 1835 and rural New England were still in the grip of Puritan notions even though by then towns and cities were welcoming Santa Claus and beginning to pull even with other places in America in their celebration of Christmas.

Arkansas, in 1836, became the first state to declare Christmas a legal holiday. Vermont may have been one of the leaders of the New England states. Mrs. Lucia Maria Campbell Wheaton, who was born in Vermont on December 31, 1811, said, "I was 16 years old before people began to hang up stockings on Christmas Eve in Vermont."

In 1819, William Wordsworth



composed a poem that he titled, "Minstrels." We give you the first verse so you will be tempted to look it up and read it, aloud preferably, on Christmas Day.

The minstrels played their Christmas tune  
Tonight beneath my cottage eaves:

While, smitten by a lofty moon,  
The encircling laurels, thick with leaves,  
Gave back a rich and dazzling sheen,  
That overpowered their natural green.

Whether you called the Christmas visitors minstrels, waits, or something else, the well-behaved ones, who had not indulged too deeply in Christmas cheer, added a lovely touch to all the wonder-

ful experiences of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Sixty years ago we called them carolers. It would seem that in most places they have all but disappeared.

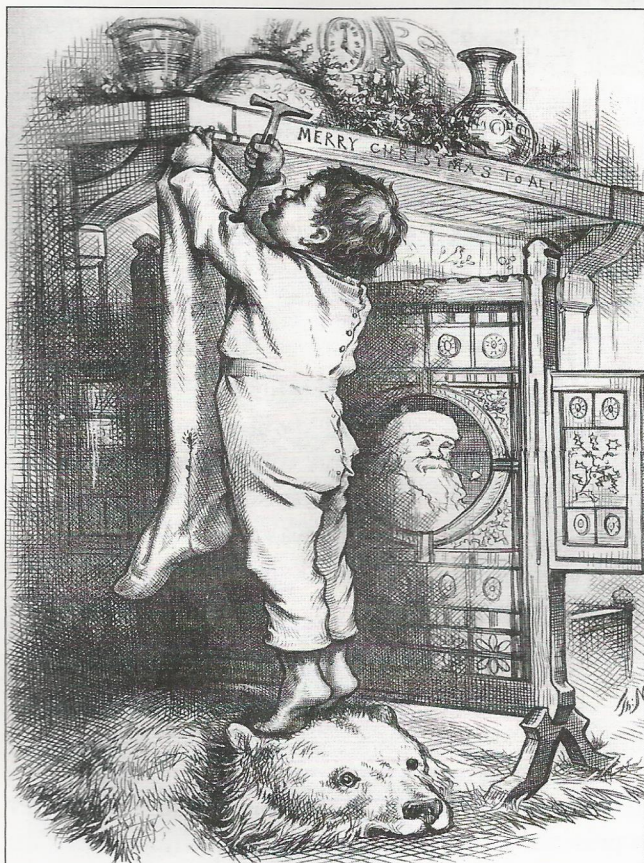
Some of the visitors were extra grateful to be offered refreshments. When toasts had been made and it was time to go they would sing their version of this farewell song long ago collected by some dedicated observer of holiday folkways.

We wish you a Merry Christmas  
And a New Year full of cheer  
With a pocket full of money  
And a cellar full of beer  
And a great fat pig to  
Last through all the year.  
Hear! Hear! say all, Hear! Hear!

## 20th Century

Where Santa Claus lives is open to argument, or was until 1947. At that time Greenland, Iceland and Finland each claimed the old Gentleman lives in their respective countries. Mark Twain, however, had long since stated that St. Nick is not of this world but dwells in the Moon.

*continued on p. 20*





## CHRISTMAS AT SAGAMORE HILL

by Gus Stahl

Despite his many interests and his many public duties, Theodore Roosevelt was always what was called in his time, "a family man." He might be dealing with the problems of the City of New York, the State of New York, the United States or the world, but once the working day was over he would be found "in the bosom of his family." Cliche though that expression may have become, it would have been for him a meaningful description of his most important interest in life.

Christmas time at Sagamore Hill provides many examples of his feelings. The cares of office, the hurly burly of politics were put aside as far as ever they can be and were replaced by the joys of the season expressed through his interactions with his wife and children. Many of these interactions got into the written record, newspapers, reminiscences, family letters and the like.

Perhaps, if we quote a sampling of the Roosevelt activities as described at the time, we can provide an understanding of what it was like when the family came to Oyster Bay at Christmas time. Since this is not intended as a scholarly paper we won't bother with a lot of notes on sources, dates and the like. Neither will we attempt interpretation of these surface accounts of the events which occurred as they affected family members. We have, however, added a word or phrase wherever needed to complete ideas disarranged by editing. Let us start with part of a newspaper article about something that happened every year.

Colonel Theodore Roosevelt



*The Cove School*

appeared today in the role of Santa Claus at the Cove school where all his children obtained their early education. There were about 100 pupils present waiting for the Colonel to distribute the presents from the Christmas tree which for the last thirty years he and Mrs. Roosevelt have found great joy in contributing.

The account goes on to say:

When he was introduced by Miss Stewart, the principal, he told the children of a Christmas he spent in Africa when his Christmas consisted of elephant meat, which he had bagged himself, and his only present was a package of peppermint candy given to him by a guide.

Not only the President but Mrs. Roosevelt as well took part in the Cove school festivities. One year a newspaper reported that:

Last week as usual, Mrs. Roosevelt sent for a list of such things as the children most hoped for as Christmas presents.

She then personally selected each present. This was in keeping with the first time the Roosevelts had made a mass presentation of presents. A newspaper reported that there were dolls among the choices and when they were received from the supplier:

The first installment of dressed dolls was not at all satisfactory to Mrs. Roosevelt and since that time she has made dainty little clothes with her own hands so the dolls could be dressed and undressed.

In Washington, the President learned about a new and wonderful kind of sporting equipment that he was sure would please his sons. It was explained by one of his biographers:

Theodore had learned from a Norwegian employee at the Smithsonian about the use of skis, or Norwegian snowshoes.

They were a big hit. Their father being a rugged outdoorsman,



Christmas presents were likely to include various sports equipment, for Sagamore Hill and the surrounding territory were great places to use it. The house was heated only by fireplaces and open fires were frequent in many rooms. The Roosevelts took advantage of them to gather the family around them for the best kind of home entertainment:

...with Theodore telling stories about his hunting adventures or acting them out with the children, with himself as the big bear and the children as cubs. Then Edith would read some ballad like "Sir Patrick Spens" and their father would follow up with "Sheridan's Ride" or something equally exciting.

A friend and reporter from the *New York Sun*, Lindsay Dennison, called at Sagamore Hill to warn the Governor of some political shenanigans being mounted against him. He found him in the woods cutting down a hickory, doubtless for the insatiable fireplaces.

It was good to see the muscles working under the damp folds of his flannel shirt. The blows made the stout trunk tremble; in ten strokes it was toppling.

Theodore Roosevelt was no stranger to the forest. He took at least one son with him each year to find the family Christmas tree and the one to be presented to the Cove School.

Each year Edith took the children in the wood sled to church to join in the Christmas carols. A feature of the service was the singing of a hymn beginning, "It's

Christmas on the River; It's Christmas Eve on the Bay," Roosevelt wrote in his *Autobiography*. He went on to say,

All good natives of the village believe that this hymn was written here and with direct reference to Oyster Bay; although if such were the case the word "river" would have to be taken in a hyperbolic sense, as the nearest approach to a river is the village pond. I used to share this belief myself, until my faith was shaken by a Denver lady who wrote she had sung that hymn when a child in Michigan...

Theodore and the family often sang that hymn, which he referred to as "one of my favorite carols" in Christ Church in Oyster Bay. [Ed. note: See *"The Gathering Place"* for the words and music to this seemingly for-

*gotten "local" carol.*]

As youngsters the Roosevelt children had hung their stockings from the mantelpiece in the master bedroom at Sagamore Hill or wherever else they might be domiciled. That underlines the closeness of the family man's family. Years later the teenagers were still doing it. But earlier, when Theodore had gone to the White House, things were conducted in much the same way even in that historic place.

When on December 26, 1902, as President, Theodore wrote to young James Garfield, a playmate of the four Roosevelt boys and a grandson of former President Garfield, he said,

Yesterday morning at a quarter of seven all the children were up and dressed and began to hammer at their mother's and my room in which their six stockings

all bulging out with queer angles and rotundities were hanging from the fireplace. So their mother and I got up, shut the window, lit the fire, taking down the stockings, of course, and prepared to admit the children. Then all of them came to our bed and then opened their stockings.

They couldn't have been more of a family at Sagamore Hill but we can bet that on that day they would rather have been there!



*Above, TR makes short work of a log at Sagamore Hill.*





### ASK UNCLE PELEG

*Compliments of the season to those of you who usually read this page and to those who don't, welcome aboard. I hope you'll make your presence a regular one. Merry Christmas to All!*

*Expecting an issue with seasonal material in it, I collected several inquiries over past months and held them for the issue when its time should arrive. Here they are. Oh, I answered the questioners when I got their letters.*

Dear Uncle Peleg:

Last Christmas my little sister got a copy of *The Night Before Christmas*. The one with the poem. She was four years old then and she couldn't read. She still can't but she loves the pictures and she gets it out all the time to look at. This time she asked me to read it to her. I've heard it a lot of times and looked at it too but I never noticed something crazy. It says "Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash." I know what the sash is. It's window glass. That's inside the shutters, except our shutters won't even shut. They're nailed to the wall outside. But the person who made the poem got it backward. I

told my father about that and he said, "No, that's right." I said it's backward. Glass sash opens first then the shutters when you're in the house. He said ask Uncle Peleg in the museum magazine. He said he would help me with the letter and if I wrote it, he would type it. He did. Thank you.

Courtney

*Thank you, Courtney. The shutters that protect the window glass and keep out bears and so forth are on the outside. They are only closed when necessary. That's for houses built in old fashioned times. Many modern shutters like yours won't close. They're for looks only. The shutters people used to have on the inside were to keep out light and superfluous noise and to help keep the warmth in the house and the cold outside. The outside shutters on the house in the poem ought to have been closed for warmth as well. There was snow on the ground outside. But the poet didn't want to make it too complicated to see St Nicholas and his reindeer approaching. That's called poetic license.*

Dear Uncle Peleg;

I have been told that the "minced pies," (or is it "mince pie?") presently offered us in American bakeries and food stores or baked by American household cooks, especially around the holidays of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day, are pale shad-

ows of the original assemblages. Would you care to comment on the ingredients and construction of the preeminent holiday pie and rule on the acceptability of the modern version?

D.D. Wardle

Mr. Wardle:

*Your name seems familiar to me and I am of the opinion that your two bare, unadorned initials stand for Dingley Dell. That an old holiday celebrant such as yourself should seek my comments on the minced pie is flattery of the most acceptable kind. However, this department is not a cooking school and I'm not equipped to give you recipes. I can say, as you already doubtless know, that yesteryear's minced pie, whether you pronounce it with two syllables like a poet with meter problems or more shortly, often contained rather more ingredients than the modern version. Here's a list of some that might have been used by Henry the VIII's cook: Flour, butter, suet, beef, sugar, currants, raisins, citron, ginger, apples, Seville oranges, mace, cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, cider, wine, brandy and more. And that was how he got his jolly red nose.*

*continued on p. 21*







## CURRENTS OF THE BAY



*This section focuses on the doings of local historical societies, museums, and communities in the Town of Oyster Bay and its neighbors. Upcoming special events, exhibits, lectures and tours are featured, so send your submissions to the Editor if you would like to see your events covered in **The Freeholder**.*

### **SOCIETY OPENS "AN UPSTAIRS, DOWN- STAIRS LOOK AT OYSTER BAY ESTATE LIFE" EXHIBITION**

There is nothing more compelling than a photograph; the old cliché, "A Picture Speaks a Thousand Words" stated it best. The exhibit that hangs in the Discovery Room at the Earle-Wightman House is a visual story of a bygone era. Tom Kuehhas, the Director of the Oyster Bay Historical Society, collected the photographs and interviews that are displayed on the walls. The exhibit consists of photographs and comments from families of these grand estates and the families who staffed them. Behind the faces of these vintage photos are the personal stories of their lives and how the different social and economic classes coexisted.

The opening reception for the exhibition on Sunday, October 30th, was a success. Visitors stood in line eager to see the photographs and read the personal quotes and stories. Many guests attending the reception were the children of the original staff or the children raised on these North Shore estates. During the opening reception the visual exhibit evolved into a living history discussion from family decedents. Family members were sometimes surprised and delighted to see their own pictures and those of their homes hanging on the walls of the Oyster Bay Historical Society.

The "Upstairs, Downstairs"

exhibit was a tribute to the people who maintained the wonderment of these enchanted estates. Their hard work and dedication will be memorialized in the photographs and documentation assembled in this extraordinary exhibit. Please come in and experience this unique look at Oyster Bay estate life prior to the exhibition's closing on February 28th.

### **SOCIETY'S CURATOR DIS- CUSSES FUTURE STORAGE OF COLLECTIONS**

Yvonne Noonan-Cifarelli,  
Curator

So much of our collection is unable to be exhibited due to our limited space. We are fortunate to

live in a community rich in history. With adequate space we would increase our educational programs, offer lecture series and exhibit much more of our collection. Our dedicated staff and board members work extremely hard to present exhibits and events aimed at raising funds for a larger building to better serve the community. This building would serve multiple purposes as library, offices, and proper archival and artifact collections storage.

It seems a shame that so much of Oyster Bay's history is locked away, waiting for the moment it can be properly presented so all may enjoy our rich heritage.



*A spectacular event was held at the home of Drs. Cynthia Lama and Carlos Aviles on Saturday, September 17th. The couple lives in the home originally built by the Beekman family in the mid nineteenth century, and the evening was planned around a "Gilded Age" theme, including a period menu, fine wines, carriage rides and music. The Society is indebted to the Aviles' for their generosity and willingness to open their beautifully-restored home on the Society's behalf. All proceeds went into the Society's Building Fund. Shown above are Dr. Aviles, Society Curator Yvonne Cifarelli, Events Committee member Barrie Curtis Spies, Dr. Lama, and Society Director Tom Kuehhas. Photo courtesy of the Oyster Bay Enterprise-Pilot.*



Please donate to the Oyster Bay Historical Society Building Fund.

### **HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND RAYNHAM HALL CO-HOST PRESERVATION ROUNDTABLE**

A Roundtable Discussion on Historic Preservation was held on Sunday, Oct. 2, at the Oyster Bay Community Center. Hosted jointly by the Oyster Bay Historical Society and the Friends of Raynham Hall, the roundtable could not have been more timely, taking place the week of the Town Board meeting at which the building moratorium was proposed. Society President Maureen Monck stated, "We wanted to allow the public an opportunity to become conversant with the issues surrounding preservation, particularly as they apply locally and felt that this would be the proper venue."

A panel composed of Charla Bolton, Preservation advocate for SPLIA; Lisa Ott, Director of the North Shore Land Alliance; John Collins, architectural historian; Kyle Rabin, Director of Friends of the Bay; and Steve Conlon, a local attorney familiar with preservation issues were present

to discuss historic preservation as it relates to Long Island's North Shore. Society Director Tom Kuehhas acted as moderator. The event was well-attended and the question and answer session which followed was quite lively!

### **FARMINGDALE-BETHPAGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

On Sunday, November 20, Nassau County Historian Edward J. Smits spoke on "Toys - An Insight Into Our American and Long Island Heritage" at the Society's annual meeting held at the Farmingdale Public Library. Through the medium of antique toys Mr. Smits explored the role that toys and games have played in American culture, economics and life.

### **HUNTINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Friday, December 2nd, marked the 100th Anniversary of the Trade School at 209 Main Street, Huntington. Carpentry and canning classes were first held for boys and later classes in dress-making and cooking were added for girls. Two hundred and fifty boys and girls of all ages attend-

ed classes. In 1982 the three-story building was taken over by the Historical Society for use as its administrative headquarters and research library.

The Holiday House Tour is scheduled for December 11th, from Noon to 4:00 PM. The tour will visit the historic Village Green homes, the Arsenal and the historic house site of the Daniel Gale offices. Starting at the Dr. Daniel W. Kissam house there will be an exhibition of antique sleds and sleighs on display in the Kissam Barn, where refreshments will be served. Tickets are \$30 each and are in limited supply. Call 427-7045 ext. 401 to order.

### **SEA CLIFF VILLAGE MUSEUM**

The Fall 2005 exhibit "The Artisans of Sea Cliff: The Art of Craft" depicting the works of talented craftsmen both past and present, opened Saturday, October 15, 2005, in Community Room "C", 2nd floor of the Sea Cliff Village Hall.

### **SAGAMORE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE**

Projects, which commenced this fall, were restoration of the historic split-rail fencing, painting and repair of the TR home and replacement of the roof on the "new" barn.

### **RAYNHAM HALL MUSEUM**

A Special Preview Party and Reception was held Friday, September 9th for the inauguration of "The Townsend Slave Bible" exhibition. A reception was held in the Victorian Garden. The

### **OYSTER BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY Categories of Membership**

Individual	\$ 35	Business	\$ 75
Family	\$ 45	Business Sponsor	\$ 100
Contributing	\$ 75	Business Friend	\$ 300
Sponsor	\$ 100	Business Patron	\$ 500+
Sustaining	\$ 250	Benefactor	\$ 1000+
Patron	\$ 500		

Member Benefits: Quarterly Magazine, Members' Party, Invitations to Exhibition Previews and Special Events, 10% Discount on Publications and Workshops. Call (516) 922-5032 for more information on joining the Society.



**Visit the Oyster Bay  
Historical Society's  
NEW website!**

**[www.oysterbayhistory.org](http://www.oysterbayhistory.org)**

Annual Fall Lecture/Luncheon was held at the Seawanhaka-Corinthian Yacht Club on Wednesday, October 12th. Cynthia Copeland, Education Curator of the New York Historical Society, presented her lecture entitled "Black Life in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century New York."

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF THE MASSAPEQUAS**

The Society's annual Antique Fair took place Sunday, November 20th, at the Massapequa High School Gym on Merrick Road, Massapequa. The Society's General Meeting at the Old Grace Church followed this on Monday, November 21st. A lecture by John Hammond, Oyster Bay Town Historian, followed the meeting. He discussed the many cemeteries located in the Town of Oyster Bay.

**OYSTER BAY  
RAILROAD MUSEUM**

On October 8, 2005, a ceremony was held at the Hicksville Community Center to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the end of steam locomotives on the Long Island Rail Road. The event was co-sponsored by the Hicksville and Oyster Bay Historical Societies and the Friends of Locomotive 35 (soon to become the Oyster Bay Railroad Museum). Richard Evers and Richard Althaus were instrumental in helping to plan this event.

The event was attended by over 100 people, including NY State Assemblyman Charles Levine, Nassau County Comptroller Harold Weitzman, LIRR President James Dermody, Railroad Museum of Long Island President Dennis Harrington and Town of Oyster Bay Historian John Hammond. Also present



Scout Fred Ruff of Brooklyn accepts bell from Vice President and General Manager T. M. Goodfellow, right, while Nassau County Executive A. Holly Patterson, left, and Oyster Bay Supervisor Lewis N. Waters look on at the presentation.

*Photo, above, of 1955 ceremony courtesy of LIRR.*



*Shown above are Nassau County Comptroller Harold Weitzman, Oyster Bay Town Councilman Angelo Delligatti, Hicksville resident Fred Ruff, and LIRR President James Dermody. Photo courtesy of Vanessa Rusulis.*

**Many thanks to Harry L. Dickran of Levon Graphics Corp., Route 109, East Farmingdale, for printing *The Freeholder* for the Society.**

**His generosity allows the magazine to reach a much wider audience than was heretofore possible. Please patronize our sponsors!**



**The Society now has available a "1900 View of Oyster Bay," which shows every building in existence at that time and includes a list of businesses and prominent residences. Eminently suitable for framing, this print is a great bargain at \$20 plus shipping. Contact the Society at (516) 922-5032 to order yours today!**

**Also available are an 1833 map of Oyster Bay (\$5) and a map of Gold Coast estates c. 1920 (\$12.50). Shipping is additional.**

were Oyster Bay Town Board members Angelo Delligatti, Rosemary Walker, Mary McCaffrey and Town Clerk Steve Labriola.

The Long Island Rail Road officially commemorated the end of steam locomotives on Long Island by holding a public ceremony on October 8, 1955, at the Hicksville Station. Steam locomotive #39 carried one passenger car of Boys Scouts from Jamaica to Hicksville and Steam Locomotive #35 similarly brought Boy Scouts in from Riverhead.

Upon arriving at Hicksville, both trains pulled into the south siding, facing each other. Two new RS-3 diesel locomotives were brought in from the Morris Park Shops. The diesels were uncoupled, operated into the east and west ends of the south siding and coupled to the passenger cars to bring the Boy Scouts back to Jamaica and Riverhead. Thus ended the Age of Steam Locomotives on the LIRR.

Equipment at Hicksville on Oct. 8, 1955:

Steam Locomotives #35 and #39  
Diesel Locomotives #1555 and #1556

Passenger Coaches #2923 and #2924

This year's anniversary was highlighted by the appearance of long-time Hicksville resident Fred Ruff. Fred was the Boy Scout who rang the locomotive bell at the 1955 End of Steam Ceremony. The Friends of Locomotive 35 brought the engine's bell to the anniversary event and Fred Ruff once again rang a steam locomotive bell, 50 years later to the hour.

There were numerous photo displays at the event as well as a diorama depicting the 1955 ceremony. Dave Morrison prepared the diorama using one of his model RS-3 diesel locomotives and several model coaches. Another RS-3 was loaned by Plainview resident Greg Gatanzarini. RMLI

President Dennis Harrington loaned his G5s steam locomotive #39 and the Wilkinson Foundation provided the G5s steam locomotive #35. Lawrence Scripps Wilkinson had generously donated the G5s and 5 vintage LIRR coaches to the Friends of Locomotive 35. Mr. Wilkinson has also donated many model trains to the New York Transit Museum, which can be seen on display in the museum's Grand Central Terminal and Brooklyn locations.

Presently, Steam Locomotive #39 is at Riverhead undergoing restoration by the Railroad Museum of Long Island and Steam Locomotive #35 is at Oyster Bay undergoing evaluation for restoration. Diesel locomotive 1556 is at Riverhead, as is passenger coach #2924.



*New York State Parks Commissioner Bernadette Castro (shown above left, with her two granddaughters) came to Oyster Bay to present O.B. Historical Society Director Tom Kuehhas with certificates attesting to the placement of the Oyster Bay Train Station and the turntable on the National Register of Historic Places. A ceremony was held at the station prior to the "TR Day in Oyster Bay" parade. Ms. Castro is shown above with "TR" (Jim Foote) and New York State Senator Carl Marcellino, who was instrumental in securing a grant for the restoration of the turntable.*

*(Photo courtesy of the Oyster Bay Enterprise-Pilot)*





## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE



Our test for this issue enables you to ask yourself how much you know about the non-sacred features surrounding the celebration of Christmas since Clement C. Moore wrote his famous poem in 1822. We may have failed to find the correct or complete answer to some of the questions given. If so, we'd appreciate correction. As always, we just provide the questions and answers. You're in charge of matching our answers against yours and awarding yourself appropriate recognition for your good work.

1. Who wrote the poem often called "The Night Before Christmas?"
2. A Connecticut clock maker is said to have invented the spring powered clockwork first used to power children's toys, a big Christmas item. Name him.
3. The Tin Toy Manufactory is said to be the first American producer of toys made of tin-coated, thin guage sheet iron. Where were they located?
4. In 1904 the first of the Christmas Seals for charitable purposes were issued. In what country was that?
5. The 20th Century's most notable (well, not quite) statement was made when somebody said, "There ain't no Sanity Clause! " Who was that?
6. Was the convention of decorating with holly, ivy, and evergreens instituted before or since "The Night Before Christmas" was written?
7. Which President had the first Christmas Tree in the White House? Was it: Martin Van Buren, Franklin Pierce or Benjamin Harrison?
8. The Christmas Cracker was invented by an Englishman named Thomas Smith. That's the tube with a paper hat, a tiny toy or candy and a "Banger" that pops when you open it, all wrapped in colored paper with flaring, twisted ends. In what year was it introduced?
9. It was a twentieth century President who first provided a lighted Christmas tree on the White House lawn for guests and passers-by to delight in. Who was it?
10. In 1880, it is said, manufactured Christmas tree ornaments were first sold in the USA. Who was the merchant who offered them?
11. The first Santa Claus in a department store was impersonated by the owner himself, a man named James Edgar in 1880. Name the town and state where this happened.
12. Who wrote in 1856, "We are in a transitory state about Christmas here in New England. The old Puritan feeling prevents it from being a cheerful holiday; though every year makes it more so." Was it: Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow or Harriet Beecher Stowe?
13. Who wrote the story of "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer?" Ira Gershwin, Robert L. May or Gene Autry?
14. What was Belschnickel ? A Christmas beverage containing crab apples, a part in a play by a band of Christmas Mummers or one of the aspects of St Nicholas who wore rough clothing, a grim visage and dealt in punishments as well as rewards?
15. What was the name of the commercial artist who, on behalf of the Coca Cola Company, turned out a memorable and lovable picture of Santa Claus every year from 1931 to 1968?

*Answers will be found on p. 22.*





## THE GATHERING PLACE



*"The Gathering Place" is the department of the magazine housing contributions of an historical slant but of short length that might otherwise be lost among the longer pieces. To our members who are not ready to attempt long or deeply researched articles, this is the place for your notions and comments, however brief.*

### **The Dutch Next Door**

by Lee Myles

Some Holiday Presents  
From The New York Dutch

The efforts of Doctor Charles W. Jones and any who accepted without question his belief that the Dutch of New Amsterdam did not preserve a pleasant fiction, common in the home land, seem to be losing ground. That fiction? That St Nicholas did yearly, on the night before his December 6th birthday, bring to children delicious and delightful presents, only very occasionally leaving a switch for parental use on the naughty ones.

We believe that the colossal work performed during the last thirty some years by Dr Charles Gehring in translating and transcribing the thousands of records left by the Dutch administration of New Netherland and currently housed in the state library at Albany will finally permit complete reinstatement of the fact that the Dutch introduced Santa Claus to this country. And about time.

O.K. This quarter we will give you a list of the presents the Dutch colonists gave Americans.

The Dutch gave our country Santa Claus. That's right. Although he was brought here under many other names by immigrants from many other places, Santa Claus got his name



*An early Thomas Nast illustration of St. Nicholas filling stockings by the fireplace.*

because the Dutch name, Sinterklaas, got a little twisted in American speech.

The Dutch helped attach Santa Claus to the Christmas holiday. That's right. When the Dutch came here Saint Nicholas Eve was December 5th. But there were lots of people to be satisfied as to when gift giving should be. New Year's was tried but wasn't right. Christmas was tried and seemed pretty good. Then Clement Moore wrote "The

Night Before Christmas" and it was a sure thing. How do the Dutch get credit for that? A New York Dutchman named Gulian Verplanck provided his friend Moore with inspiration and assistance. Moore said so to his family but the story got mixed up and people thought it was his Dutch gardener.

The Dutch gave us the Christmas stocking. Thought it was wooden shoes, didn't you? Some of the Dutch used stockings; they



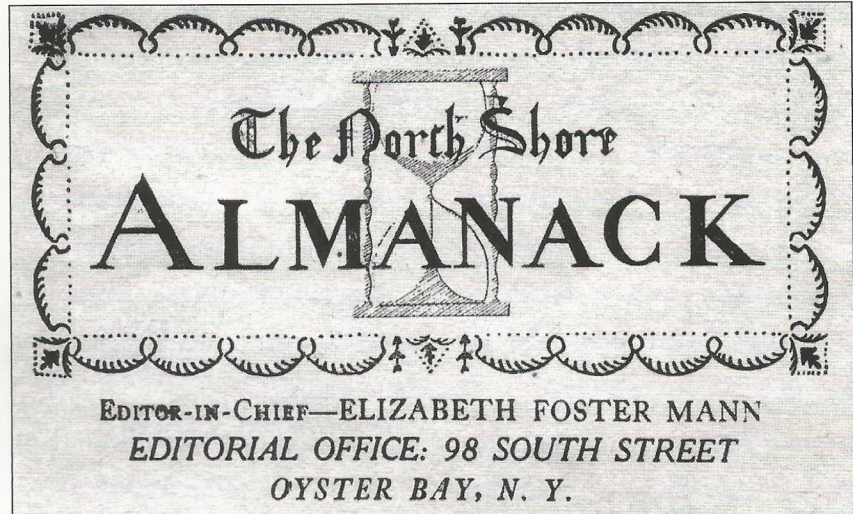
held more. There is a seventeenth century drawing by Cornelis Dusart in the Netherlands that shows a Dutch family around a fireplace with their stockings and their presents.

The Dutch gave us part of what we think is Santa Claus' appearance. When the Dutch St. Nicholas is in his costume, his vestments are red. He was a bishop, you know. He had a long white or grey beard. Washington Irving believed all Dutchmen smoked pipes, or so he would have you think. He thought of Nicholas as a Dutchman so in the *Knickerbocker History* he gave him one.

The Dutch gave us several stockings stuffers. The Dutch in several of their early Christmas songs mention oranges in connection with St Nicholas presents. They thought Nicholas came from Spain and Spain was orange country. When the writer was a young person in New Jersey, oranges were standard stocking fillers. New Jersey was part of New Netherland, you know. If the reader is old enough, he or she may remember an orange residing at the tip of the stocking's toe. Otherwise, take our word for it. The others were candy and cookies.

And who told us about "down the chimney?" The Dutch, of course. Through Washington Irving again and then through Clement Moore.

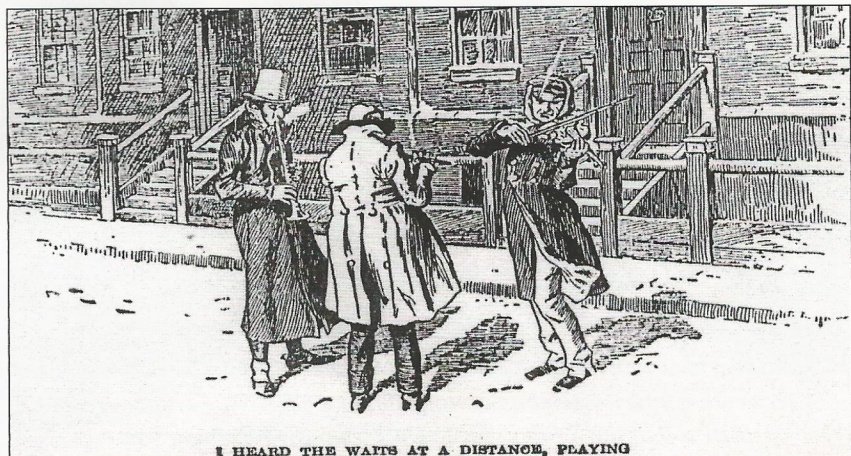
Merry Christmas to All!



*Ed. note: The following short article was taken from the pages of a four-page publication called The North Shore Almanack, whose masthead appears above. It was found in the Historical Society's collections. Can any of our readers enlighten us as to that publication's history, or anything about the Editor-In-Chief, Elizabeth Foster Mann? A search on Google turned up a couple of individuals in Maine, one who died in 1963, and one who is still living. Although the publication was undated, we were able, through some references to movies and the end of Prohibition, to narrow it down to the late 1930s. More information would be helpful.*

Waits, according to an ancient Almanack in our desk, were minstrels attached to kings' courts, who were hired to play all day and police the streets all night. At some point in their history they combined the two, and while they called the long hours of the night they played upon their viols and hautboys. The majority of the population must have complained to the authorities, for by the middle of the nineteenth century waits were only heard during the Christmas season. And by now we have grown so practical that they are no longer heard even on Christmas Eve.

Which is really a great pity. Once in our childhood we spent the Christmas holidays in a



I HEARD THE WAITS AT A DISTANCE, PLAYING



remote province of New England, where the waits actually sang carols from house to house on Christmas Eve. They would sing one carol, to the accompaniment of the town fiddler; and then would enter the front hall of the house and refresh themselves. It was all very merry, and in good spirit; but I am told that the custom has fallen into disuse of late years. Having no beer during Prohibition, the householders gave the waits a home product which sent them reeling from house to house in an unorthodox manner, and made them sing off-key. So the waits were dropped

from the Christmas celebrations; but let us hope that they are back again with beer.

We can imagine nothing nicer than to be serenaded by our policeman as he makes his nightly rounds, It may be that he will break into song some night soon, and if he does we have the was-sail waiting. If all goes well on Christmas Eve, we may be serenaded by the voice of that radio in the policeman's car, which will broadcast, instead of the latest crime in Nassau County, the suitable strains of "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."



### **"Christmas on the Sea" A Christmas Tradition**

The singing of this lilting song in the hamlet of Oyster Bay is a Christmas tradition that goes back before the turn of the last century. Mary Fanny Youngs, who lived in the old Youngs Homestead in Cove Neck, felt that the song was as much a part of Christmas as the ride through the snow to church on Christmas Eve. President Theodore Roosevelt declared it one of his favorite carols and he and his family often sang it on Christmas at Christ Church in Oyster Bay.

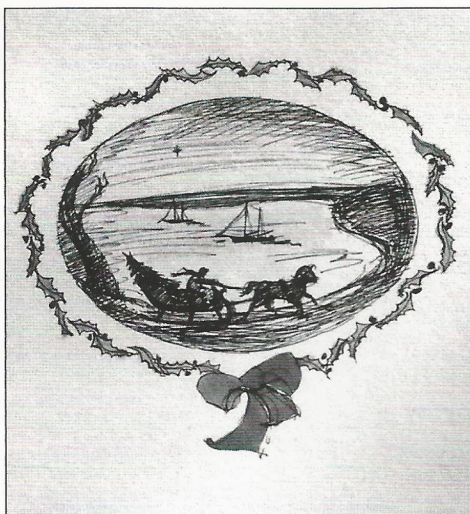
The song was one of many hymns and carols written by George F. Root, who was best known for his popular Civil War songs. The most famous of Root's war songs was the rousing Union Army marching song, "The Battle Cry of Freedom." The words of the carol were penned by Hezekiah Butterworth, long time editor of the *Youths Companion*.

There are many reports of "Christmas on the Sea" being sung in Long Island communities and word of its popularity comes from as far as Colorado. In spite of this, generations of residents of Oyster Bay look upon "Christmas on the Sea" as their own Christmas Carol, "indigenous to the soil of the lovely old village by the bay."



*A sixteenth century German painting shows a St. Nicholas procession. Notice that the Saint is preceded by a man bearing a tree.*





## Christmas on the Sea.

H. BUTTERWORTH.

G. F. ROOT.

1. It is Christmas day by the riv - er, It is Christmas day by the bay, And the soft-winged snows  
 2. There are happy lights by the riv - er, There are happy lights by the bay, And the lone-ly lights  
 3. Now the bells ring o-ver the riv - er, Now the bells ring o - ver the bay, But the ships still move

they are fall-ing On the o - cean far a - way. From the hand of God they are fall-ing, Snow-y  
 they are drift-ing O'er the o - cean far a - way. But the sail-or thinks of his dear ones, And his  
 in the si-lence O'er the o - cean far a - way. But the sailor's heart it is cheer-y, And he

doves on this Christmas day, On the havened waves of the riv - er, On the o - cean far a - way.  
 home on this Christmas day, While the wind sweeps wild thro' the cordage On the ocean far a - way.  
 says, "It is Christmas day," And tho' winds and waves may be dreary, They are happy far a - way.





### Poor Richard's Christmas Sayings

The world famous editor of the popular *Poor Richard's Almanack*, Benjamin Franklin, was renowned for his witticisms, but he also passed on some sound advice on how one's life should be lived. Here is a gathering of "Poor Richard's" thoughts on the Christmas season and the end of the year:

1740  
Neither praise nor dispraise, till  
seven Christmasses be over.

1741  
Let no Pleasure tempt thee, no  
Profit allure thee, no Ambition  
corrupt thee, no Example sway

his Precepts! O! 'tis easier to  
keep Holidays than Command-  
ments.

1748  
In Christmas feasting, pray take  
care;  
Let not your table be a Snare;  
But with the Poor [,]God's  
Bounty share.

1751  
'Tis not a Holiday that's not kept  
holy.

1754  
Now glad the Poor with *Christ-  
mas* Cheer; Thank God you're  
able so to end the Year.

thee, no  
Persua-  
sion move  
thee, to do  
any thing  
w h i c h  
t h o u  
knowest  
to be evil;  
So shalt  
t h o u  
a l w a y s  
l i v e  
jollily; for  
a good  
C o n -  
science is  
a continu-  
al Christ-  
mas.

1757  
When other Sins grow old by  
Time,  
Then Avarice is in its prime,  
Yet feed the Poor at *Christmas*  
time.

1758  
With bounteous Cheer,  
Conclude the Year.

### 500 Years of Christmas... *continued from p. 7*

The Dutch, who had introduced him to America in 1640, have announced flatly that every year Sinterclaas comes from Spain. This is contradicted by the well known 19th century expert on all things having to do with Santa Claus, Thomas Nast, who makes strong claims that this is not so. He has made authoritative pictures of Santa's home and workshops at the North Pole to substantiate his claims. Fortunately, a real authority, the United States Government, through its Post Office Department, got into the act in 1947 and made it clear and unchallengeable that Santa Claus lives on Long Island at the Brooks Home for the Aged in Great Neck! If you don't believe it, check out "Miracle on 34th Street."

1743  
H o w  
m a n y  
observe  
Christ's  
Birth-day!  
How few,  
its Post Office Department, got  
into the act in 1947 and made it  
clear and unchallengeable that  
Santa Claus lives on Long Island  
at the Brooks Home for the  
Aged in Great Neck! If you don't  
believe it, check out "Miracle on  
34th Street."

We are sad to announce that Dayton C. Fouts of Tucson, Arizona, the man who held the record of 60 years as a stand-in Santa Claus, has passed on at 85. He played Santa from 1937 to 1997. How many kids did he delight in that wonderful career?

During the years of the 20th century, Santa Claus became a staple in Tin Pan Alley. There



are a number of songs with Santa Claus in the title including:  
 "Santa Claus is Coming to Town"  
 "Santa Baby"  
 "Here Comes Santa Claus"  
 "Jolly Old St. Nicholas"  
 "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus"

That should inspire you. The person who thinks of the most Santa titles gets to take the Was-sail Bowl home.

Around the beginning of the century all was not as wonderful as it might have been for the poor and the downtrodden. Things have improved somewhat but the level of "wonderful" for everybody is still to be reached. We hope you keep that in mind and find that you can make things better for somebody. This is not a sermon. Just a recipe for having a wonderful time yourself. In the beginning of the 1900s there was a sad, sad poem written about a poor widower in the workhouse. I won't give the name and the author, for you wouldn't want to read it. However, it inspired a lot of rough-edged parodies. Here is one of them.

It was Christmas Day in the  
 work'us  
 The best day of the year  
 The paupers were making merry  
 Their guts were full of beer  
 In strode the work'us master,  
 Cheers echoed from the walls  
 He shouted, "Merry Christmas"  
 And the paupers answered, ".....!"

### Ask Uncle Peleg *continued from p. 10*

Dear Unc:

Old Santa Claus seems to do his laughing in three bursts of "Ho Ho Ho's!" I can't remember when I first read or heard that expres-

sion and I sort of feel that chor-tles would better fit the old dear's personality. Clement Moore never offered a single "Ho," much less three of them. How did the "Ho's" come about? Did they originally belong to some other jovial character and get trans-ferred? Sign me.

Vixen, the lady reindeer

*I can't answer your question. I don't know and I can't find out. Mr. Google told me there were 1,990,800 "Ho Ho Ho's" on the*

*Web. I tried a few of them but no soap. There was a song called "The Merry Old Land Of Oz" that used the phrase but I think that's unlikely as a source. I do not anticipate exploring the 1,990,800 citations on the Web. Perhaps some alert reader knows.*

### The Post Rider

*continued from p. 2*

passes through the land extending from Woodbury Road to Saw Mill Road in the Town of Hunt-



STRANGERS.

FATHER CHRISTMAS. "WHAT! NOT KNOW ME!—OH, THIS MUST BE ALTERED!"





ington. It bears a Cold Spring Harbor address.

Although his life spanned that of Theodore Roosevelt, they may have been no more than nodding acquaintances. If they traveled from the city by train they would have ridden on different branches of the LIRR, one terminating at Oyster Bay, the other terminating at Port Jefferson. However, in pur-

chasing the land to build "Woodlee," Thomas retired from the architectural office of George B. Post in 1907 and remained a country gentleman. Roosevelt, on the other hand, was restless, traveling to Africa and South America as well as within the United States. Thank you.

Katrina Thomas

## Answers to Test Your Knowledge,

*from p.15*

1. Clement Clark Moore. Don't you believe it if someone tells you it was some obscurity named Henry Livingston.

2. George Brown

3. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

4. Denmark

5. Chico, not Groucho, Marx

6. Before; way before, way, way, way before

7. Martin Van Buren

8. In 1840

9. Calvin Coolidge

10. F.W.Woolworth

11. Brockton, Massachusetts. His store was The Boston Store.

12. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

13. Robert L. May, who worked for Montgomery Ward and was assigned to create a Christmas give-away. Later when it was put to music Gene Autry sang it.

14. The "nickle" at the end of Belschnickle tells that it was one of the aspects of St Nicholas. It

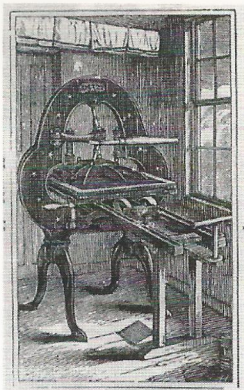
was Pelsnickle in Germany, Belschnickle in Pennsylvania and it meant Nicholas in animal skins.

15. Haddon Sundblom. He is said to have used his own face for Santa Claus.





## Blocklyn's Books



Book Reviews by Philip Blocklyn  
***The Long Island Sound. A History Of Its People, Places, And Environment.*** By Marilyn E Weigold. New York Univ Press, 2004. 267 pp. B&W illustration. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

The trouble with any history of Long Island is that sooner or later, despite your best intentions, in the face of your worst fears, you have to deal with the twentieth century.

Not that all the preceding centuries since European settlement are such bargains. In this updated edition of her fine 1974 book *The American Mediterranean*, Marilyn Weigold can't help cataloguing the various iniquities of coastal Connecticut and the Island's North Shore. These run from the violent dislocation of native peoples to smuggling, tax evasion, war profiteering, espionage, privateering, and the widest possible array of business speculation, chicanery, and scheming. Is there any wonder that New York Colony governor Earl of Bellomont, declaring Long Island "lawless and unruly" and "a receptacle for pirates," hired Captain William Kidd to bring the situation under control?

It was a desperate hiring, and it didn't work.

But it's not all about mayhem. Weigold is essentially good-humored and optimistic, even if much of the humor comes at the expense of regional icons like the legendary Long Island Railroad. The railroad's abiding dream was to complete a line between Brooklyn and Greenport, with steam connections to cross the Sound, and so win the ruling share of traffic between New York and Boston. By 1844 the work was done, and Railroad President George B. Fisk threw a great tent party in Greenport, providing invitees with forty baskets of champagne and half a case of brandy. Guests, reportedly, had to be carried back to their railroad cars. Within six years, the railroad was bankrupt, a victim of the New York-New Haven-Boston line that LIRR officials had insisted could never, ever be built. The New Haven line got all the business, leaving the LIRR with a route "from Brooklyn to nowhere ... through the wastelands that stretched from Jamaica and Hicksville to the east," inhabited by a people "not abreast of events, nor did they care to be."

This, of course, was not the railroad's only inglorious moment. In fact, Oyster Bay itself played a part in another fiasco, when Austin Cor-

bett in 1891 inaugurated the Oyster Bay-Wilson's Cove [Norwalk CT] ferry, complete with steel-constructed steamboats to carry passengers and railcars across the Sound for a Boston connection. This venture did not succeed. Within a few months, reports arose of cardboard dummies riding the cars in window seats. This fooled no one, from Oyster Bay or elsewhere.

Still, despite its many well-deserved troubles, the railroad, along with the tourist steamers of the Sound, managed to transform the region as a whole by the last quarter of the 19th century, knitting city and suburb together in business and in pleasure, for better and for worse. A writer in a July 1880, issue of *The Long-Island Democrat* proclaimed that:

A god-send to tired New Yorkers is old Long Island... The Long Island Railroad has spread its arms all over the island, taking in scores of shady villages and settlements, and affording quick and comfortable transit to thousands of pleasant summer homes.

*continued on p. 24*



*Construction of the Long Island Expressway.*



## Blocklyn's Books

*continued from p. 23*

It would be nice to stop right there, amid the shady villages, but we can't. We have to go on to the 20th century, where we meet Robert Moses and William Levitt. It is important to say that Moses with his parkways and Levitt with his construction offered the middle class access to recreation and housing at levels pretty much denied on Long Island before them. Unfortunately, their work brought with it an explosion of residential and commercial development aided and abetted by local governments' zoning authorities and their willingness to approve every single strip mall, convenience store, and subdivision, no matter how harebrained or wrongheaded the concept.

Weigold appears to think the region is capable of producing a rational policy of land use and development, but is this really possible when the greediest minds of our generation remain intent on determining how big and ugly a house can be built on how small a scrap of land?

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS!

### DECEMBER through FEBRUARY

Museum hours.

#### Exhibition

Earle-Wightman House Museum  
20 Summit St.,  
Oyster Bay

Visit the Society's Earle-Wightman House museum to view the exhibition entitled "An Upstairs,

Downstairs Look at Oyster Bay Estate Life," which closes at the end of February. [Please see related story on p. 11.]

The exhibit consists of rare photographs and excerpts from interviews conducted with families of these grand estates and the families who staffed them, as well as

related artifacts.

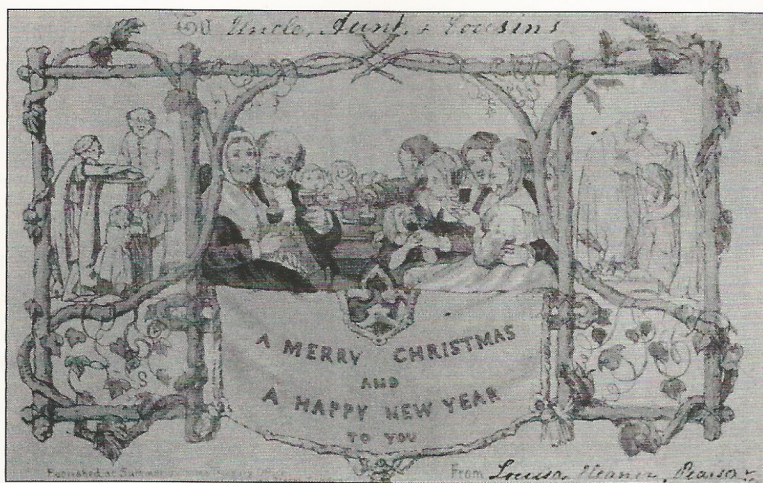
Behind the faces of these vintage photos are the personal stories of their lives and how the different social and economic classes coexisted.

Don't miss your last chance to view this ground-breaking exhibition!



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*One of the earliest printed Christmas cards, c. 1843.*

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as generously as you can!**

**THE FREEHOLDER WINTER 2006**