

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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Through the years, we've found ways to say 'Happy New Year'
By Joe Getty

Attending receptions and parties, paying social visits to family and friends, sending postal card greetings and holding January 1 weddings were long-standing traditions in Carroll County for celebrating New Year's Day. Many families had an annual ritual for marking the passing of the old year and for ringing in the new year.

In my family, the New Year's Eve tradition was shooting a gun at midnight by my grandfather, Homer Lee Twigg. I can remember as a young boy the anticipation and excitement of getting ready for this annual event. He would stand on the front porch of his house on Main Street in Hampstead and shoot into a tree on his property. The gun was a .38-caliber Smith and Wesson Special given to him by his son-in-law, Stoney Willis. The family tradition persisted even when he was older and feeble, and I would have to support him and hold his hand steady. Like many time-honored traditions, it was very important for him to greet each new year in this manner.

Local newspapers recorded many Carroll County celebrations where citizens shot guns or made loud noises with bells and firecrackers. Festivities of the holiday season, such as masquerading, were carried on until New Year's in Carroll County's small towns and villages at the turn of the century. For example, the Manchester newspaper correspondent reported in 1889 that:

"Masquerading was carried to a greater extent during the holiday season just closed, in this community, than ever before. The spirit seemed contagious and there were many different parties, dressed in fantastic costume and each striving to excel the others in numbers and make up. The conduct of the masquerades was such as to elicit generally favorable comment, and though baccus undoubtedly held a place in the holiday festivities, there were no public manifestations of inebriety and no arrests. Some of the municipal ordinances were severely strained, however, in the thundering volleys with which the old year was followed and the new one ushered in."

New Year's parties were held in family homes, sometimes using Victorian era themes. A "surprise party" was held for Miss Emma Englar of New Windsor in 1889: "All seemed to have no object in view but to have a good time and spend the failing hours of the old year in a pleasant manner ... Games and plays were introduced and time sped swiftly until refreshments were announced, when, as the ladies realized that the privileges of leap year were rapidly drawing to a close, each selected one gentleman whom she escorted to the dining room, where a table was

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found laden with viands of the most inviting description. When appetite was appeased, the clock of time was ticking the last moments of the old year. Then came another surprise. Out of the pockets of numerous wraps came an ample supply of shooting-crackers, which were soon exploding and waking the echoes with the sound, thus bidding farewell to the old and greeting the new year."

In Taneytown, "at a few minutes before twelve, the bells on the different churches and the school house bell were rung for about 15 minutes. Thus the old year was tolled out and the new year rung in." The correspondent from Brummel noted that: "Things were lively on New Year's and some old and young men celebrated it by shooting and drinking tangle-foot."

A popular activity on New Year's Day was a shooting match: "A shooting contest between members of the Baltimore, Hampstead and Westminster Gun Clubs, took place on the grounds of the latter, adjoining this city, on New Year's Day. There were four events. The first was a match between several members of the Westminster club, with clay pigeons, for a pool of money, which was won by Isaac A. Miller. The second, with clay pigeons, was for a 30-pound turkey and money, and Dr. G.E. Baughman won the turkey while the money secured by Isaac A. Miller. In the third event, live pigeons, for money and turkeys, Miller and Baughman divided the money, Samuel Roop won three turkeys and Wm. A. Shriver two. In the fourth, clay pigeons, Samuel Roop won first money, Wm. B. Thomas and David Richards divided second money."

Pleasure shooting also occurred at household gatherings, although the results were not always pleasurable: "On Wednesday last Mr. Theodore Englar entertained a number of his friends at dinner, at his residence adjoining this city. After a sumptuous repast, the gentlemen resorted to one of Mr. Englar's fields where they engaged in shooting at a mark. Mr. Edward S. Baile, of Stonersville, was one of the company, and distinguished himself as a marksman by missing the target and killing Mr. Englar's favorite dog. It isn't true, as reported in some quarters, that the target was the size of a barn door, but it might as well have been so far as the unfortunate canine was concerned."

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: This 1908 New Year's card was sent to 12-year-old Thelma Littlefield (who later married F. Earle Shriner) of Middleburg from H.C. Cover with the following handwritten message: "Here is to wish you, and all, three hundred and sixty-five happy days."