

Let Children Discover Distant Christmases

If your younguns wake up this Christmas, race to the tree and come back with disappointed faces over the reduced number of packages compared to those of last year, you just might suggest that they need to discover a little bit about Christmases of the distant past—Christmases

without a cheerful tree and stockings containing, at best, a few sticks of candy, some nuts, and perhaps an orange.

Willard Watson, a maker of folk toys at his home on Wildcat Road near Boone, remembers many lean Christmas mornings: "Oranges? Lord a-mercy, I didn't

know about 'em till I was way toward grown. I was lucky to get a few pieces of stick candy—and hope maybe a hand-me-down pair of brogans!"

But if the presents were few in the Watson household, there was food in abundance to compensate: fresh pork, sausage,

liver mush, steaming pots of backbones and ribs, chunks of tenderloin, and wedges of cracklin' bread. Younguns today, according to Willard, know little about the good eating of the past: "All they know is burnt hamburgers and canned rubber biscuits. Maybe they wouldn't be so all-fired anxious about presents if they got the same good eating I got."

Frank Hodges, a near neighbor of the Watsons, echoes Willard's sentiments: "No, I don't remember much by way of presents—a few things in my stockings on Christmas morning—but I do remember the cakes and pies baked especially for the holidays. Apple sauce cake was a favorite—made with molasses instead of sugar—and then we nearly always had dried apple and pumpkin pies. We didn't worry much about presents."

Mrs. D.W. Cook, also a craftsman, who lives at Sands, North Carolina, also notes the lack of Christmas tree and the limited presents, but she also attests to the abundance of good food: "As far as our Santa Claus was concerned, we might get a wax, China or rag doll in addition to fruits and nuts, but we usually went to church for Christmas tree services."

"Food? There was always plenty. Turkey, chicken, wild game, country ham, sometimes a goose. We had all manner of bread, from biscuits to skillet cornbread, but most of all I remember the desserts: top apple pie, stickies, fruit cakes—called 'knee deep' because it had so many layers—and maple sugar candy."

Estella Barnes, another craftsman who lives on the Jefferson Road just outside Boone, like

Mrs. Cook remembers an occasional doll for Christmas, often a Dell or China doll, with "painted on hair." She, too, recalls for Christmas, often a Dell or China doll, with "painted on hair." She, too, recalls the Christmas food, in particular that prepared over an open fire: "There was usually a vegetable pot going, and sometimes we cooked ham and other meat over the flames. Also

we would sometimes have spice of sassafras tea, along with roasted chestnuts and other nuts which we would 'shatter out' on the hearth."

Readers are invited to look materials to Rogers Whitener, English Department, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608.

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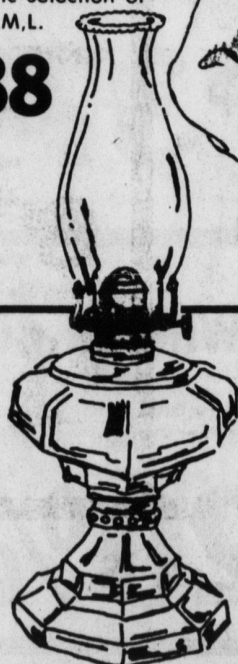
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