



Christmas Gift-Giving in 1790's Lancaster?

By Sarah Alberico, Curator

I had recently been paging through several resources that I have collected over the years regarding the study of “Christmas” during Edward Hand’s time. I came across a claim (Emma L. Powers, *The Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter 1995-96) that stated, “Williamsburg shopkeepers of the eighteenth-century placed ads noting items appropriate as holiday gifts, but New Year's was as likely a time as December 25 for bestowing gifts.” Wondering if the same applied in Lancaster, I immediately checked the *Lancaster Intelligencer* newspaper, which was founded in 1796, through the year 1807 to see what exciting holiday ads I would find! My excitement started to wane as I found absolutely nothing relating to “holiday gifts.” I decided to expand my search to Philadelphia newspapers and found only these three articles of interest:



1. John Burge in an ad for his business on Fourth Street as a wholesale and retail confectioner mentions, “CHRISTMAS SUGAR TOYS may be had at the above place.” (*The Independent Gazetteer*, December 14th, 1792.) These are likely similar or identical to Clear Toys, which are see-through miniature figures made of sugar that have been cast in molds.

2. Throughout the year 1803, an *Aurora General Advertiser* subscriber in Philadelphia consistently places the same ad about his “manufactory” on North Seventh Street and his Warehouse on Market Street that manufactures an extensive list of items. Included in this list is the simple mention of “Christmas boxes, small and large.” I immediately thought of “Boxing Day” originating from English customs and traditions.

3. Finally, the third and last mention of anything relating to holiday gifts was the following article from December 31st, 1789 in *The Independent Gazetteer*: Origin of New Year’s Gifts

At this time of the year, why should presents be made upon the first day of January, more than at other times? The origin of this custom is attributed to the reign of Romulus, and Tatins, King of the Sabines, who governed jointly at Rome in the seventh year of the town. Here it is said that Tatins, having been presented on the 1st of January with some boughs out of the forest of the Goddess Stranis, in token of good luck, began this custom and called the present Strana. The Romans made this a holiday, and consecrated it to the honor of Janus, offering sacrifices to him, and the people went in throngs to Mount Tarpeia, where Janus had an altar, clothed with new clothes, and chose to begin their respective employments, or work, on this day. They wished one another good luck and were careful not to speak anything ill-natured or quarrelsome. The common presents among the meaner sort were dates, figs, and honey, which were usually covered with leaf gold; and those who were under the protection of great men, used to add a piece of money. In the region of Augustus, the populace, gentry, and Senators, used to send him new-year’s gifts; and if he was not in town, they carried them to the capitol. From the Romans this custom went to the Greeks, and from the heathens to the Christians, who early came into the practice of making presents to the Magistrates. Some of the fathers wrote very strenuously against the practice, upon account of the immoralities committed under that cover and protection: But since the governments of the several nations in Europe are become Christians, the custom is still retained as a token of friendship, love and respect.

-An Antiquarian

My review of these late 18th century newspaper advertisements and articles indicate that the practice of holiday gift-giving – which seems at times to have almost completely subsumed the celebration of contemporary Christmas in America – was probably only a minor footnote in the world of Edward Hand and his family. Although the twelve days of the Yuletide Season (December 25 through January 6) were a time for parties and gatherings with family and friends, they were not about gift-giving. In this sense, perhaps they provide us with a reminder of the true joys of the holiday season?

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New Handsewing Workshop Scheduled for January 2021

By Sophie Walters, Volunteer

Greetings! My name is Sophie Walters. Throughout my childhood, my mother regularly forced me to watch BBC's nearly six-hour-long adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. This habit instilled in me a passion for historic dress. I am fascinated by the everyday lives of our ancestors, particularly how dress affected them. Last January, I was looking for an exciting activity when I heard about a local historic dance group, the Historic Rock Ford Dancers. After joining the group, I wanted to learn more about the history of the home. I started as a volunteer docent at Historic Rock Ford in September this year, and it has been a fantastic learning experience. After a tour, I find most visitors to have a newfound connection with the history of the home. It is important to me that guests gain a full understanding of the history of the home, the family, and Rock Ford's place within the Lancaster community.



I was recently searching for 18th Century methods of organizing sewing materials when I stumbled upon something called a "hussif" or "housewife." A hussif is a small sewing kit for keeping needles, thread, wax, and other sewing items together. Hussifs were used during the American Revolution by soldiers, who were responsible for mending their own clothing. Women used hussifs for sewing as well as a sort of wallet or purse. By reading through the proceedings of Old Bailey, London's Central Criminal court, we understand how many common people organized their necessary items by using a hussif.

With this in mind, I decided to make one for transporting my own hand sewing materials. Although I have not been using my hussif for a long time, it is much better for carrying your hand sewing materials than by dragging around a larger sewing box. In addition, the hussif took no more than a couple hours to construct. What better way to bring 18th Century history to life than by fashioning a hussif for yourself?

I am planning a handsewn hussif workshop which will take place at the Rock Ford Barn on Saturday, January 16, 2021 (Snow date: January 23) from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm (please bring a face mask and a bagged lunch). The cost will be \$30. Details are posted on our website. Reservations may be made through the Historic Rock Ford website or at rockford.yapsody.com. To comply with social distancing requirements, this workshop will be limited to 15 people, so I encourage you to sign up early to avoid disappointment. I look forward to sewing with you!

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*Best Wishes for a
Happy Holiday
Season from All of Us
at Historic Rock Ford!*

An Important Update Regarding “Silent Night”

For the health and safety of our volunteers and visitors, the Rock Ford Foundation Board of Trustees has made the decision to cancel our new “Silent Night” event. We look forward to holding this event next year when it is safer to do so.

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