

12th Night

by Lynne Belluscio

On January 6, 1946, 700 people gathered at the athletic field behind the high school for the first LeRoy Twelfth Night celebration which was organized by the LeRoy Rotary Club.

Boy Scouts from Troops 21 and 23 collected all the old Christmas trees in town and brought them to the athletic field. *The LeRoy Gazette* noted that the stadium was filled to capacity. It was a balmy evening, more like a night in April than in January. Rev. Beyers from the Presbyterian Church talked about the traditions of 12th Night and how the English celebrated Epiphany and the arrival of the three wise men.

It was the English who also held the tradition of the Yule Log ... a huge log that was cut on Christmas and then seasoned for a year and placed in the fireplace to be burned during the Twelve Days of Christmas. Italian traditions include January 6 as well as the Greek Orthodox Church. For Americans, the Christmas holiday ends with 12th Night.

The president of Rotary, Arthur Freeman led everyone in the singing of "America" and then the Village President (Mayor) Walter Davis, with a lighted torch, set the trees ablaze. As

the trees burned, everyone sang Christmas carols. The songs had been arranged by Sid Horgan and were led by Mrs. Shirley Luther, joined by the youth choir from the Presbyterian Church. The brass section of the school band accompanied the singing. Just in case, Chief Joseph Lapp from the fire department had arranged for a fire truck to be standing by. As the fire dimmed, everyone sang "God Bless America."

When I grew up in Rochester in the 1950s, our Girl Scout Troop would go to the Twelfth Night bonfire. I'm not sure where it was held, but perhaps it was at Edgerton Park. I don't think it was particularly "balmy." In fact it was down-right cold. We sang Christmas carols and drank hot cocoa. All of this comes to mind as I read the morning paper which announced the places where people can take their trees to be recycled. I guess in many ways, it makes more sense to recycle the trees. My tree at home becomes a haven for birds near the bird feeder and then after all the needles fall, it goes out to the woods and becomes the tree that is decorated with white lights for next year. Extra evergreen branches help protect my azaleas.



1952 burning, not in LeRoy.

This year, my grandson has built a lean-to in the woods and any extra evergreens will become part of the roof.

But burning Christmas trees, like burning leaves, and skating

on the creek are all memories of the past that are not part of today's generation. It will be interesting to see what memories are held in fifty years.

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