

Wintertime greetings to Friends of Ocracoke Island!

We hope you are enjoying a joyous holiday season and we wish for you happiness and the best of health in the coming New Year.

Many thanks to all of you who visited our gallery during your 2001 island vacation, and/or who ordered from our on-line catalog. This is the first year we have not published a paper catalog but our mail-order sales were the best ever. We are in the process of adding a convenient gift wrap option for web site ordering. By the end of January we should have this available for most of the items in our catalog. We look forward to serving you in 2002.

One of the most frequently asked questions from summer visitors is “What do you do here all winter?” Time and space do not permit a full answer to this question. Although many shops and most restaurants are closed this time of year, and there is little to attract the occasional tourist, we islanders are delighted to have more time for family, friends and community.

Again this year, Johnny and Diane Smith brought their draft horses, carriage and sleigh to the island and offered free rides to everyone in the village.



The Community Store parking lot was busy all afternoon with schoolchildren, families, friends and anyone else waiting in line for a ride around town. Sleigh bells jingled to the cadence of massive hooves clip-clopping down highway 12, past the Island Inn and around Silver Lake.



Thanks to Johnny and Diane for starting another memorable holiday island tradition!

On December 18 Jimmy, Linda and Jamie Jackson hosted another outstanding Christmas party at Jimmy’s Garage. It seemed like everyone on the island was there. Hundreds of folks brought casseroles, deviled eggs, fried chicken, cakes, pies and drinks for a wonderful holiday feast. After dinner the picnic tables were moved outside and the garage vibrated with rock & roll music by local musicians. The dance floor was shoulder to shoulder with

native O'cockers, other long-time residents, new folks, visitors, senior citizens, children, creekers and pointers! A great time was had by all.

This season we again enjoyed the annual school Christmas presentation, as well as programs at the Methodist and Assembly of God churches. Also, about two dozen people showed up for the community Christmas caroling and chili supper. On December 22 the Methodist Church sponsored a live nativity scene on the church lawn.

December 22 was also the night of our first annual Winter Solstice celebration. Although the solstice actually occurred at 2:21 pm on December 21 about twenty-four friends and family members gathered for singing, dinner and celebration. In addition, we shared information about the solstice and ancient holiday traditions.

But the highlight of the evening was the coronation of the Queen of the Winter Solstice, 2001. Following a medieval tradition, we baked a bean in a holiday cake. Pat Tweedie, mother of Molasses Creek's fiddler Dave, found the bean in her dessert and was crowned Queen.

Pat, Queen of the Winter Solstice:



One of Pat's duties was to order her subjects to perform as the evening's entertainment. In addition to ballet, cheerleading, head stands, and braying like a donkey, we were treated to the following talents:

Molly Lovejoy playing the piano:



Julie Howard playing "Silent Night" on her harp:



Son, David, making faces:



The last four men in the “Lineup of Baldness:”



After the merrymaking, Dave Frum read information about holiday traditions surrounding the yule log. The children lit the candles and we sang the following song.

“Yule Fires” (sung to the tune of “Greensleeves”

Words by John G. MacKinnon):

In ancient days the folk of old  
When chilled with fright by winter’s cold  
Did kindle up a great Yule fire  
With leaping flames in its great pyre;

So to entice the waning sun  
To rise again and wider run;  
It’s fiery course across the sky,  
To warm them so they would not die.

So we, whose minds now sense a chill

Of anger in the evil will,  
The human conflict, hate, and strife,  
Which hold a menace over life;

Would kindle up a flame of love  
That we within our hearts may move,  
In Yuletide joy, with love embrace  
And thus abide in peace and grace.

### Yule Log and Candles:



So, next time you are wondering what we do here on the island all winter, don't worry about us. We are full of food, friends, community and good cheer.

We hope you all had a very happy Christmas, and we wish you the best of New Years!

Until we see you again, take care,

Philip and the entire staff at Village Craftsmen.

Following is some information that we shared at the solstice gathering. Much of this information was gleaned from various web sites, but unfortunately I neglected to document the sources so I am unable to give proper credit. I will be happy to acknowledge the origins if anyone can provide that information.

#### Origins of solstice celebration

The Earth is actually nearer the sun in January than it is in June — by three million miles.

The seasons of the year are caused by the 23.5° tilt of the earth's axis. The angle of the earth's rays to the surface of the earth varies based on how far the surface is tilted toward or away from the sun.

At noontime in the Northern Hemisphere the sun appears high in the sky during summertime and low in the sky during winter. The time of the year when the sun reaches its

maximum elevation occurs on the day with the greatest number of daylight hours. This is called the summer solstice, and is typically on JUN-21 or 22 — the first day of summer. “Solstice” is derived from two words: “sol” meaning sun, and “sistere,” to cause to stand still. The lowest elevation occurs about DEC-21 or 22 and is the winter solstice — the first day of winter, when the night time hours are maximum.

Our Winter Solstice occurs at the moment when the northern hemisphere of the Earth is tilted furthest away from the perpendicular angle. The tilt also causes the seasons to be reversed in the southern hemisphere.

In 2001 the winter solstice occurs at 2:21 p.m., December 21

#### Ancient Celebrations

In pre-historic times, winter was a very difficult time for Aboriginal people in the northern latitudes. The growing season had ended and the tribe had to live off of stored food and whatever animals they could catch. The people would be troubled as the life-giving sun sank lower in the sky each noon. They feared that it would eventually disappear and leave them in permanent darkness and extreme cold. After the winter solstice, they would have reason to celebrate as they saw the sun rising and strengthening once more.

Although many months of cold weather remained before spring, they took heart that the return of the warm season was inevitable. The concept of birth and or death/rebirth became associated with the winter solstice. The Aboriginal people had no elaborate instruments to detect the solstice. But they were able to notice a slight elevation of the sun’s path within a few days after the solstice — perhaps by DEC-25. Celebrations were often timed for about the 25th.

This long, dark night has been the subject of interest and religious ritual for thousands of years. Prehistoric peoples across Europe built reliable indicators of the solstices and equinoxes as early as 3000 BCE in the form of stone monuments such as Stonehenge and Newgrange in Ireland. Other monuments from South America to Asia also pinpoint the astronomical cycles and Solstices.

Egyptian and Persian traditions merged in ancient Rome, in a festival to the ancient god of seed-time, Saturn. The people gave themselves up to wild joy. They feasted, they gave gifts, they decorated their homes with greenery.

Saturnalia and related festivals of its day were ruled by a mock king, the Lord of Misrule, chosen by bean ballot. This evolved into the holiday practice of baking a cake containing a

bean to choose the king.

Many medieval Catholic churches were also built as solar observatories. The church, once again reinforcing the close ties between religious celebration and seasonal passages, needed astronomy to predict the date of Easter. And so observatories were built into cathedrals and churches throughout Europe. Typically, a small hole in the roof admitted a beam of sunlight, which would trace a path along the floor. The path, called the meridian line, was often marked by inlays and zodiacal motifs. The position at noon throughout the year, including the extremes of the solstices, was also carefully marked.

#### Yule Log and Yule Fire

The ancient fear engendered by the failing of the light shaped a striking legend. It's the story of the Kallikantzaroi-ugly monsters of chaos who, during most of the year, are forced underground. During the 12 days of Christmas, the demons are said to roam freely on the earth's surface. They are known more for malicious practical joking than any real harm.

To scare them away, the Greeks kept their Christmas log burning. They also burned old shoes, believing the smell would repel the creatures.

On Christmas Eve, the master of the house would place the yule log on the hearth, make libations by sprinkling the trunk with oil, salt and mulled wine and say suitable prayers.

The disappearance of this custom coincides with that of great hearths which were gradually replaced by cast-iron stoves. The great log was thus replaced by a smaller one, often embellished with candles and greenery, placed in the center of the table as a Christmas decoration.

#### Is December 25 really the day Jesus was born?

No one really knows. What is known is that, in 336, the Roman emperor Constantine moved the celebration of Christmas to December 25 in an attempt to eclipse the popular pagan holiday in Rome, Saturnalia, that celebrated the winter solstice. Constantine probably followed the cult of Sol Invictus, a monotheistic form of sun worship that originated in Syria and was imposed by Roman emperors on their subjects a century earlier.

That's why Constantine decreed that Sunday — "the venerable day of the sun" would be the official day of rest. (Early Christians before then celebrated their holy day on the Jewish Sabbath — Saturday.)

That's also why the celebration of Jesus' birthday was moved from January 6th (Epiphany today) to December 25, celebrated by the cult of Sol Invictus as Natilis Invictus, the rebirth of the sun.

Originally, the celebration of Christmas involved a simple mass, but over time Christmas has replaced a number of other holidays in many other countries, and a large number of traditions have been absorbed into the celebration in the process.