

Twelfth Night – A Forgotten Ritual

Twelfth night is the last evening of the 12 days of Christmas and according to an old European custom it calls for one final burst of feasting and revelry to commemorate the close of the Christmas season.

Many years ago, in the Town of Greece and other communities, the twelfth night was celebrated with the ritual of a community Christmas tree bonfire. It was a yearly event anticipated by all.

In the Dewey-Stone neighborhood in the 1930s, Barnard School land was used. That event was eventually moved to St Joseph Villa's lot next to the Barnard Fire House. Grandview Heights, the Legion Post on Dorsey Rd. and Holy Cross Church in Charlotte also had their twelfth night bonfires, as well as communities all around the Rochester area. For several days before the special night the neighbors would bring their trees to the designated empty lot. This was an era before artificial trees, so thousands of trees would make a huge pile. On January 6th, at the appointed hour, thousands of neighbors would gather. Here in Greece, Supervisor Gordon Howe, or some other official, might have said a few words, while a scout troop led the group singing. The fire was lit, and flames would ascend high into the sky. For the youngsters this was a really big deal, as it seemed like the entire town was there to see the huge fire. It was a lot of fun and a memory kept for a life time.

Due to a number of obvious reasons, the ritual was halted sometime in the early 1960s. Instead of burning our trees, we now send our "real" trees to recycling centers where they are turned into mulch for our gardens or other uses. Absolutely a much more environmentally correct thing to do, but not nearly as much fun!



A Typical 12th Night Bonfire

Three of the many articles about the 12th Night bonfires from years past:



**Greece Celebrates Twelfth Night Rite With Huge Bonfire of Yule Trees**

Greece celebrated the Twelfth Night last night with the Town's biggest fire in years. Gathering shortly after dark in the Clark property at the rear of the Barnard Fire House several hundred Boy and Girl Scouts, Legionnaires, Legion Auxiliaries members, Junior Legionnaires, Barnard Actives and Exempt Firemen and their Auxiliaries and Town and Police officials carried out the ancient ceremony of burning the Yule trees. Branches of pine, spruce, and fir that but 12 nights before glittered under the weight of tinsel and other shining decorations went up in crackling flames to

the accompaniment of community singing and general merrymaking. The big stack that Barnard Firemen began collecting a week ago had grown until it numbered well over a thousand trees and made a huge heap 20 feet high. Flames from the trees, once they were well alight cast a glow against the sky that could be seen for miles. The celebration will be made an annual affair members of the committee announced. Included in the committee were: Supervisor Gordon A. Howe; E. Hoppe, H. Schwind, president of Barnard (Please Turn to Page 5)

**Twelfth Night**  
(Continued from Page 1)

Firemen's Association; G. Kohn, ex-chief of Barnard Fire Department; Fred Leonard and George Korn, commissioners of Barnard Fire Department; Mrs. H. Paul, president of the department's Women's Auxiliary, Harold Smith, chief of Barnard Fire Department; Milton H. Carter, Greece chief of police; Sergeant Frank Pitcher and Officer John Swanson of the police department; Guy Travis, assistant chief of Barnard Fire Department; J. D. Stone, vice-commander of Greece Legion Post; Herbert Smith; Howard Coner, deputy chief of Barnard Fire Department; Warren Dettman, Roy Ayers, Mike Walsh and N. Montelbein. Gates-Chili Fire Department also held a celebration of burning the Yule trees at its fire house, Howard and Lyell Roads.

Greece Press Jan. 6, 1949

**Scouts Arrange 12th Night Fire At Villa Tonight**

By Everette VanPutte  
A Twelfth Night celebration will be held tonight on the St. Joseph's Villa property next to the Barnard Firehouse in Dewey Avenue. The affair will begin at 7 p. m. and will be sponsored by the Scout units of Greece. Troops participating will be Boy Scout Troops 118, 14 and 248, Cub Packs 118 and 248, Girl Scout Troops 142, 40 and 242 and Brownie Scout Units 236 and 257. Miss Mary Simonds of Girl Scout Troop 142 will be mistress of ceremonies. Supervisor Gordon A. Howe will light the fire and is expected to say a few words. Edwin Wilcox of Troop 14 will lead the group singing. All troops bringing trees are requested to have them on the grounds by 6 p. m. Everyone is invited to attend the colorful ceremonies.

Greece Press Jan. 5, 1950

**Twelfth Night Ceremony Set For Tomorrow**

The annual Twelfth-Night tree-burning celebration will be held at Barnard Firehouse at 7:30 p. m. tomorrow, weather permitting. Should there be a heavy rain or high winds, the festivities will be held the following night. Residents are urged to place their Christmas trees on the pile on the field adjacent to the firehouse. All Scout units will meet with their leaders on the lot north of the firehouse and march to the scene of the fire in a body. This includes Explorer, Cub, Brownie and Boy and Girl Scout units. Scouts are asked not to bring American flags to the celebration. Unit flags are optional. There will be caroling as the trees burn.