

The Times of Halcott



Winter 2007, Volume 41

Editors: Innes Kasanof; Peg DiBenedetto; Judy DiBenedetto; Karen Rauter. Art: Nina Kasanof. NK

Chestnuts Roasting o'er an Open Fire

As you come up the valley into Halcott and pass the Town Grange Hall, there is a small American chestnut tree at the end of the parking lot. It has not exactly prospered since its planting in 2002, but it has held its own. We live in a climate that used to grow chestnuts. In my house, built in 1908, there is quite a lot of swirly-grained trim that experienced woodsmen have told us is chestnut. So where are they today?

On the website of the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, NY, I learned that before the turn of the century, the eastern half of the United States was dominated by the American chestnut. It was known as the Redwood of the east because it grew rapidly and attained great heights. The wood was used wherever strength and rot-resistance was needed. In colonial America, chestnut was a preferred species for log cabins, especially the bottom rot-prone foundation logs. Later posts, poles, flooring, and railroad ties were all made from chestnut lumber. The

edible nut also made a significant contribution to the rural economy. Hogs and cattle were often fattened for market by allowing them to forage in chestnut-dominated forests. Chestnut ripening coincided with the Thanksgiving/Christmas holiday season, and turn-of-the-century newspaper articles often showed train cars filled to overflowing with chestnuts rolling into major cities to be sold fresh or roasted. The American chestnut was an important part of our heritage.

All of this began to change when chestnut blight entered New York on nursery stock imported from Asia. It attacked as a devastating canker, spread by wind, rain, birds, other animals that entered through cracks and wounds in the bark, girdling the trunk and killing everything above it, usually in one growing season. By 1940, nearly 3 and a half BILLION American chestnuts had perished. Since then, there has been essentially no chestnut lumber sold in the United States and the bulk of the annual 20-million-pound nut crop now comes from introduced chestnut species or imported nuts.

Today, the American Chestnut Foundation of Bennington, VT is one of several organizations trying to breed a blight-resistant chestnut. Chestnuts sprout again from the root, so native stock is still available to work with.



*Chestnut seedling at the Mountain Top Arboretum,
Tannersville, NY.*

Seedlings are farmed out to various volunteers, one of whom is the Mountain Top Arboretum in Tannersville. The Arboretum has participated in a program to grow on seedlings since 2004 with mixed success. Tree breeding is a long, slow and sometimes frustrating process: the Arboretum's losses have been due to vole damage and not blight. Although it's satisfying to know that Halcott has (at least one; are there others in town?) American Chestnut, one worries that it might be attacked by the blight

at any time. However, the American Chestnut Foundation recommends that these blighters be planted even though they are susceptible, because they're such enjoyable trees and can prepare a spot for a resistant variety whenever they are developed. We will continue to watch this story unfold. **IK**

Stellar Skies of Autumn

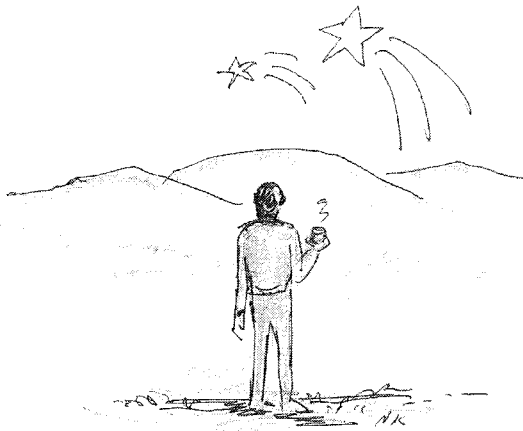
Jim Rauter

One of the truly wonderful aspects of living in Halcott is our untainted night sky. What a precious and increasingly rare treasure this is. Across America the evening sky continues to be dimmed by air pollution and terrestrial illumination, dubbed "skyglow." During Galileo's time, the sky was so clear people really believed the Milky Way was a continuous substance. (Our word "galaxy" comes from the Greek for milk.) With his new-fangled "telescope," Galileo was able to make out the individual stars at the center of our galaxy. Today's urban-dwellers see less than one percent of what Galileo saw with his naked eye.

The International Dark Sky Association rates the night-sky in any given location on a scale of 1 to 9, with 1 being the clearest. Galileo enjoyed a Class 1 sky, which is nearly non-existent today. New York City has a Class 9 sky. Here in Halcott, I estimate we're somewhere between Class 2 and 3, an extraordinary feature that few elsewhere experience.

This past autumn, the stargazing was, well, absolutely stellar. We were graced with a lovely run of clear nights before and after October's new moon. One celestial delight was the Orionid meteor shower. Around 5 a.m. October 22, I stumbled out onto my south-facing deck with a cup of Joe and beheld the hunter spewing streaks of light. I observed

three or four a minute...not bad for this annual event. Meteor showers occur when the earth passes through the dusty stream left behind by



a comet. In the case of the Orionids, it was the dust of Halley's Comet I saw.

Speaking of comets, the number one astronomical event of the year was Comet Holmes, which unexpectedly burst into brightness in late October. Comet Holmes is a short-period comet coming around every 3.9 years. Normally it is not visible to the naked eye, but this year something happened. Astronomers believe pressurized gas beneath its crust exploded, creating a glorious, illuminated sphere.

We first "bagged" this comet the night before Halloween. It could be found in the northeastern sky in the constellation Perseus. To the naked eye it looked like a large but slightly dimmed star. Through binoculars, however, it revealed itself as a huge orb of heavenly fuzz. I continued to enjoy this object into early December. Every clear night, I tested my eyesight by pinpointing its fuzzy essence.

What's most interesting about comets is that they look so "other." They are merely

visitors to our celestial neighborhood. Along with their dusty tails, they leave behind awe and speculation. Aristotle believed they were atmospheric phenomena. The Roman philosopher Seneca correctly suggested they were heavenly bodies, and Tycho Brahe proved him correct through observation in 1577. (Another interesting feature of that Danish astronomer was his prosthetic nose made of silver and gold; the original was sliced off in a duel.)

Comets have two sources. One is the Kuiper Belt lying beyond the orbit of Neptune. It's sort of like a colder version of the asteroid belt. Formed along with the rest of the solar system 4.5 billion years ago, asteroids lost all their water to vaporization. (The asteroid belt, as you may recall from grade school, girdles the solar system between Mars and Jupiter, and thus is relatively close to the sun.) Objects in the Kuiper Belt, on the other hand, still possess volatile gases, ice and snow. Astronomers sometimes call them "dirty snowballs." It is the release of those materials as the object nears the sun that creates the halo and tail of a textbook comet.

Another source of comets is the Oort Cloud. This is a giant sphere of frozen flotsam surrounding the solar system at a much greater distance than the planets. While Kuiper Belt comets tend to orbit the sun fairly close to the planetary plane, Oort Cloud objects can drop in at any angle. What's more, we never know when this will happen. Comet Hyatuke (spring, 1996) was one such comet, as was Hale-Bopp (spring, 1997). Once they fall from the Oort Cloud, these comets can be shot out of the solar system as one-time events or take on regular orbits. Their orbits are long; Hyatuke won't be back for another 29,500 years. Some comets only come around once in three million years!

So what can we look forward to this win-

ter? One dark sky delight will surely be the planet Mars. It can now be seen as an unwavering orange dot in the eastern sky before midnight. It reaches its peak December 18 when it will be only 56 million miles from Earth. It won't be this close again until 2016. It will continue to be visible for several months, as will Saturn. (If you've never seen the rings of Saturn through a telescope, put it on your list.)

Even without some extraordinary comet, planetary conjunction, or astronomical super event, you can always enjoy the night skies of Halcott.

As Canadian songwriter Bruce Cockburn sings, "Step outside, take a look at the stars/catch a glimpse of the way things are."

Meet Judy and Bruce Rowe

I had a wonderful conversation with Judy Rowe the other day. She and her husband Bruce are foster parents for three men who live with them. Judy has been a care-giver to the mentally-challenged for 29 years. As she described her duties and responsibilities, I couldn't help but admire the beautiful gift of love that she and Bruce have given to these men. The men are David, aged 48, Bill, aged 75, and a newcomer, Gary aged 43 who came in the middle of September and is still "finding his way." The men are picked up every morning by a white bus familiar to many who live along

its route, taken to the ARC in Arkville for a day of activities and brought home again in the afternoon. They can never be left alone, so if Bruce and Judy want to take a trip, they must find substitute care-givers. This is not an easy task, as sitters must go through 2 days of training in order to qualify.

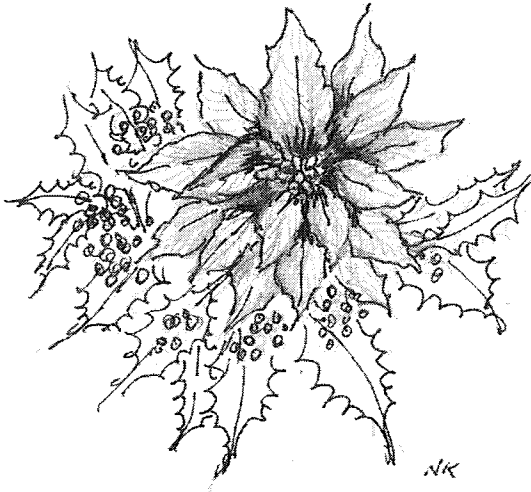
Judy described to me a huge support network that dictates to foster parents how the care is to be given. You must receive two weeks of training that includes a course in medications, and you are issued a manual that you should follow. Once a month your home is visited and checked by a social worker to make sure that everything is in order. Services are available, but hard to get to. The joys of living in a rural setting are sometimes not so joyous when trying to schedule a trip to the doctor. The day we spoke,

Bruce was driving one of the men to Poughkeepsie for dental work.

I asked Judy about these men and women whom society has tucked away and seemingly forgotten. She said that some come to foster homes after having lived with their own families until those care-givers have gotten too old to help. But so many others have families that have just left them behind. How fortunate that David, Gary and Bill have Judy and Bruce to care for them. *IK*

The Hunt!

This past October our son, Greg, had the awesome opportunity to travel to Colorado on his first elk hunting trip. I asked him recently to share some of his experiences with **The Times of Halcott** readers.



Who did you go with?

I went with Bruce Rowe and my cousin Kane.

What preparations did you have to make?

Last spring we all applied to hunt during the muzzle loading elk season through the Colorado Department of Wildlife. All of the applicants' names go into a drawing. Hunters who have applied before receive more preference points than those applying for the first time. None of us were drawn this year so instead of going out for the September muzzle loading season we went in October for rifle season. Hopefully we will try again for September next year. Other preparations for the trip included getting the right gear to be prepared for any kind of weather. We sighted in our rifles at Bruce and Judy's house before we left and Judy made us great tuna melts for our send off!

How did you go to Colorado?

We took Bruce's truck, towing a trailer with two ATV's, and headed out. We went through New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, and then into Colorado. We drove pretty much straight through. The trip took about 32 hours. We stayed in a hotel after arriving in Colorado that next night and the following morning drove through Rocky Mountain National Park where I saw my first elk.

What was camp like?

There were two wall (heavy army-like) tents, one for cooking and one for sleeping. We met Bruce's son, Matt, and his friend, Jay, there.

Tell us about the hunt.

The season started the following day. The mountains were really different from the Catskills. There were open and forested areas and the terrain was quite steep in spots. The elevation was around 11,000 feet so it was quite an adjustment to the thin air. Even just walking was hard in the beginning. One cool thing was the sound of birds' wings as they flew over. A

crow sounded like a giant above! On one hike I saw a snowshoe rabbit. It was white and huge compared to the rabbits we have here. Over the next several days we hunted off and on and ate really well. Four out of our group of five men got an elk. I saw a couple bulls but I never had a clear shot.

Would you go again?

Absolutely! It was a great experience and I'm really thankful to have been able to go. **JD with Greg Dibenedetto.**

ONE-TWO-FOUR-THREE-UH-OH

Everyone in Halcott who has tried to order something over the phone or the internet knows the frustration of being told that we live in Fleischmanns. Even our Greene County voting list states that our residence is in Fleischmanns. Oh, the woes of sharing a postal code! Halcott used to be 12437, but our mail comes through the 12430 zip and gradually, software programs and zipcode lists have swept us together with our nearest neighbor, Fleischmanns. It is one of the many changes that have happened as a result of the USPS trying to reinvent itself more profitably.

Despite the instant gratification of email, we really depend dearly on our postal service. What other changes should we brace ourselves for? Are we in danger of losing the small, caring post office in Fleischmanns because it does not have enough business to render itself profitable?

I spoke with the postmistress, Christine Weaver the other day, and the first promise she made to me was that they are not in danger of closing. She, her assistant Linda Gockel and dear Lanore Miller, our mail carrier, are all totally committed to keeping their service personal. Chris said they appreciate every single customer and that providing one-on-one service is very important to them. Those of us

who have stood in line for a long time at other nearby not-to-be-named post offices, shout "Hallelujah!"

They are particularly concerned to be responsive to people in town with special needs. You can go on line to www.usps.com to get a package picked up, but you can also call the Fleischmanns Post Office at 254-6947 and get a real person to help you. Of course they benefit when we buy stamps at our local post office, so please continue to do so. How else can we help them? They ask that you use an accurate mailing address when you give it out, so that you can be found easily. And Lanore adds with a smile, "Please shovel out your box." As for the bullying of large mail order houses insisting that we live somewhere we don't, Chris assures me that we are always going to be able to use the word Halcott in our address. Dear Fleischmanns Post Office, we in Halcott salute you for providing us with such caring service, even if it takes place in a different county! **IK**

Assemblyman Pete Lopez

On November 29th, Assemblyman Pete Lopez came to Halcott to hear our concerns. There were only a few of us, but we filled his ear (and his clipboard) with current issues that demand attention in town. In turn, he gave us a snapshot of what it is like to serve in New York State's

Assembly. Pete represents the 127th, an impossibly-shaped district that sprawls across bits and pieces of 7 counties. He's driven over 44,000 miles since he was elected to office this past January, trying to stay in touch with his constituency. His eyes were red-rimmed and he was a little late because he got lost, but he gave us all the time we wanted to ask questions and paid close attention to each detail. Nothing is more refreshing than spending time with a person who enjoys the challenges of his position, and we all came away from our meeting feeling fortunate that Pete is our representative. If you need his help or advice, you can contact



Lopez with Townspeople (l to r) Ted Randazzo; Walt Miller; Pete; Alan Reynolds; Karl VonHassel; Innes Kasanof. Chris DiBenedetto took the picture.



him through the following office numbers: 518-455-5363 in Albany and 518-943-1371 in Catskill. *IK*

Town Topics

Halcott Propane Buying Group members should be receiving 15% off retail. Our price, as of October 30, 2007, was \$2.37915 per gallon. Suburban asserts the discount is being applied to those existing members who in the past had received a discount. When you receive your bill, if the price per gallon does not go out to the 5th decimal place, but only 3 decimal places, you're not getting the discount and are being billed at the retail rate. Let me know via email, and contact Donna Ward at Suburban:

dward@suburbanpropane.com

New members are eligible for our bundled installation packages -but should go in under the group's auspices. In addition, Buying Group members who refer a new customer are eligible for 35 gallons of product free. All through me via email, please: alanadelson@verizon.net. *Alan Adelson*

Halcott Schedules a Reval: A Lay(wo)man's Explanation

When we receive our taxes in the mail, how is our bill determined? And is it a fair assessment? The process begins with an assessor evaluating my property. For town taxes, all the properties in town are added up, the amount needed is divided by the total value of all parcels, and a tax rate is determined. That rate, multiplied by my assessed value of my home and lands is what I pay. If I disagree with my assessment, I can come before the Halcott Board of Assessment Review (meets in May of

each year) and argue my case with them.

But suppose the properties in town were assessed a few years ago (as is the case in Halcott) and don't accurately reflect the current market value of real estate? That becomes a problem when a group of municipalities must be taxed together, like all the towns in Greene County or all the municipalities in the Margaretville Central School district. If your town's evaluation is more than my town's because you were measured at a peak of real estate values and I was measured in a trough, then without some sort of equalizer, you're going to pay more taxes than I will. And so the equalization rate was invented, a magic formula that somehow adjusts each town's evaluation to reflect accurately where they actually are in value. It's confusing, because right after a town has been re-evaluated, that equalization rate is at 100%, which means that the Town needs no adjustment to its taxes. However, as assessments get old, the rate sinks lower and lower. Halcott today has an equalization rate of 49%. Translated into a tax bill, when other municipalities have a higher equalization rate, it means that Halcott will be responsible for a disproportionate amount of the total taxes owed. In a time when all taxes are a burden, it seems doubly unfair to have to pay too large a share.

That is why the Town Board voted in September to hire our assessor Gary Marks to conduct a re-evaluation in Halcott. Known as "reval," the process will take about three years and cost the Town under \$30,000. Gary and his associates will



go through every property, re-visiting, re-assigning, re-adjusting its value. It is an arduous task and requires patience and skill. We're very privileged to be able to work with someone who knows our Town so well. Although we must pay higher taxes to afford this re-evaluation, we will save money on our school and County taxes going forward. The end result will be a lower tax bill. If you've gotten this far in this convoluted article, and have questions about the reval process, Gary can answer them. He can be reached at 586-4400.

IK

Another Tax Issue

On November 20, 2007, the Greene County Legislature voted unanimously to provide an exemption from real property taxes for veterans who rendered military service to the United States during the "Cold War." The exemption is to be 10% of the property's assessment, not to exceed \$8,000 multiplied by the latest final state equalization rate (See? This needs to be larger for Halcott!)... If you qualify for this exemption, you can get more information also from our assessor, Gary Marks.

Land Use in Halcott

The Town Board has placed a 12 month moratorium on large subdivisions while it looks into options for land development regulations in Halcott. A Land Use Commission, headed by Alan White will meet every other Thursday, beginning January 10th, 2008, to discuss how to proceed and townspeople will be asked to voice their thoughts at public meetings throughout the process. Keep your eye on the Catskill Mountain News for meeting announcements or contact Alan at his work: 586-1002, or his home: 254-6031. There is also an email chain that you can join for updates that Karen Rauter is managing. Her email address is: jjkrauter@yahoo.com.

Oops!!!

In the last issue of the **Times of Halcott**, we listed Amanda Petry's beauty salon services at the wrong number. Sorry! The correct number is: 254-6373.

CORRESPONDENCE

From the Auxiliary of the Margaretville Memorial Hospital & Mountainside Residential Care Center:

"To the Halcott Community Fund: Thank you all so very much for your generous donation to the Auxiliary. We sincerely appreciate all that you do for us and 'our' community. Thank you, Lee Austin."

PASSAGES

Jack Lucas

On July 3rd, 2007, Jack Lucas died in Kentucky. Jack was born in 1918 and came to Halcott Center as a youngster, living first at the Mountain Star on Turkey Ridge Road and then moving to Turk Hollow. Halcott United Methodist Church records show that he was baptized on June 16, 1929 and became a member on April 5, 1931, under Pastor F.P. Venable. He enlisted in October, 1940 and during the course of his 4 years, nine months, 26 days in the military, he became an Army Sergeant. Jack was a modest man. When he died, his friends were astonished to learn of all his awards while in the Army: the American Defense Medal, Asiatic Pacific Service Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Philippines Liberation Ribbon with Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

When Jack returned to Halcott from the war, he married Pete Ballard's older sister Harriet on August 14, 1945, because, as Jack puts it, she was the first one to kiss him when he returned from the Pacific. They bought the Hiram Avery Farm in Turk Hollow and Jack went into dairy farming. He also did some log-

ging in Halcott, cutting logs for Jim Johnson, and did some dynamiting to help build Belleayre Ski Slope. Harriet worked for Jim and Blanche Peet at The Maples Boarding House. Jack was proud to claim that he and Harriet had the first TV in Halcott. He said that the screen was tiny and the picture very snowy.



Sgt. John C. Lucas

Jack told me his fondest memory of life in Halcott happened when he was a kid and tipped over a 1929 Model "A" pick-up while carrying milk cans to the creamery. He said he was showing another kid how fast he could go. The kid landed on his bottom and ripped the seat of his pants. Jack said the covers came flying off the milk cans and everything tumbled into the stream. The farmers at the creamery saw all the milk and the cans floating down the creek and said to each other, "That's Jack!" **IK**

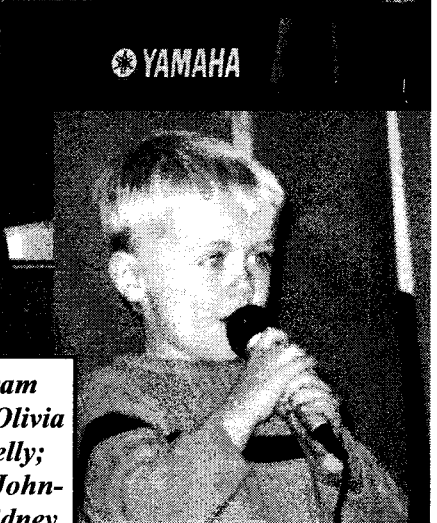
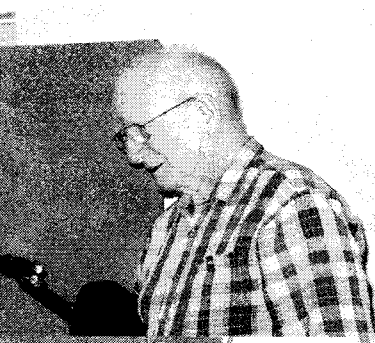
CHRISTMAS PROGRAM 2007

Every year Halcott is privileged to have Santa come for a visit early in December. This year, as usual, he was brought to the Grange by the Fleischmanns Volunteer Fire Department, arriving in a shiny red vehicle to match his shiny red suit. Shiny red-nosed Ru-

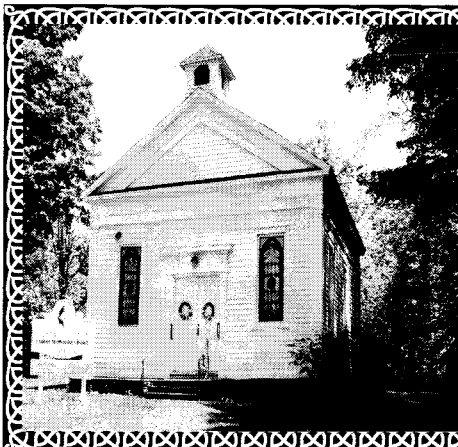
dolf had another engagement, and since the weather was clear but icy cold, Santa needed no guide. Thanks to the efforts of Pattie Kelder, everyone enjoyed the music and the pageant performed by children from within and without Halcott. The mistress of ceremonies, Kirsten, daughter of Nora Ibe, did a splendid job including prompting reluctant performers from behind the curtain as various carols were sung. Kayla Petry stole the show as King Herod, who, far from being horrid, was a delightful imp who couldn't stop smiling. Her brother little Tim was a perfect baby Jesus, who sat on Mary's (Lindsay Day) lap in angelic acceptance as Joseph (Julian Rauter) looked on.

If you weren't at the Christmas Program this year, put it on your calendar for 2008,. It's always the first Saturday evening in December. The delight that comes from watching adorable children on stage dressed as shepherds, angels, kings and the like is a good start to the season of joy. **IK**





Some Halcott Christmas Program musicians: Clockwise from left: Olivia Balcom; Kayla Petry; Hilton Kelly; Billy Miller; Stella Kelly; Kevin Johnson (or is that Ken??) Center: Sidney Asher with her mom, Denise.



THE TIMES

OF THE
HALCOTT METHODIST CHURCH
WINTER, 2007

PATTIE KELDER, CORRESPONDENT

Fall Features

We had a scrumptious bake sale on Election Day. Many thanks to all who helped out. The Christmas Program at the Grange Hall was once again enjoyed by young and old alike. All who participated did a fine job. Let's get together again the first Saturday of December in 2008! Last year's audience members shared family Christmas traditions with each other. They are listed below.

Advent Traditions:

1. We put straw in a crib every day preceding Christmas so on Christmas the stable is ready for Jesus.
2. To count the days until Christmas, we use an Advent Calendar.
We put out an Advent Calendar, too, and hide the bear that goes through the house looking for Christmas.

Christmas Tree Traditions:

1. We go to Lew Beach to pick out our Christmas tree – nothing too big or too small!
2. We always have multiple Christmas trees in the house.
3. We always put the angel made by our youngest daughter on top of the tree. She

brought it home from school when I was thinking we needed an angel!

4. We always put up a Christmas tree powered by candles.
5. Everyone brings an ornament for the tree, and then tells why the ornament was chosen. We put a Homer Simpson Doll instead of a star on our Christmas tree.

Christmas Stocking Traditions:

1. We hang up our Christmas stockings, and then under the stockings we put one carrot for each of Santa's reindeer and cookies-n-milk for Santa.
2. We always put an orange in the bottom of the stockings.
We open stockings before breakfast but don't take anything from under the tree until after eating breakfast.

Christmas Eve and Day Traditions:

1. We have eight kinds of fish at our Christmas Eve dinner.
2. We go to the Christmas Candlelight Service next door.
3. Each member of our family gets to open one or two gifts on Christmas Eve.
4. We sing the Twelve Days of Christ-

mas. For each day several family members are appointed. They sing their version of the day with great gusto. It turns out to be a very hilarious rendition of the song and we all look forward to it every year.

5. We have broccoli and cheese casserole for Christmas dinner – thank you, Nanie!

6. We go to Grandma's house in the afternoon to open all of the gifts. When we begin you can't see at least half of the tree but when we end, you can.

7. We sing every Christmas as a big family group.

We have a Christmas Tree Cake for Baby Jesus and sing Happy Birthday to him.

Christmas Reflection

This year an advent devotional booklet was written by some of the people of the Upper Catskills Larger Parish. A few copies are

still available for the asking.

Here's a sample:

A few years ago, singer song writer Mark Lowry wrote a stunning poem about the kinds of things Mary might have kept and pondered in her heart. (Luke 2:19) The poem sat on a shelf for several years gathering dust until someone set it to music. Some of its questions asked include, "Mary did you know that your baby boy will one day rule the nations?" and "Mary did you know ... when you kissed your little baby, you kissed the face of God?" Imagine - until this point in history, no one, not even Moses, had ever touched God. This song, nearly consigned to obscurity, has now taken an enduring place amid inspirational Christmas music.

May we, like Mary, pause to ponder. May we feel her awe. May we experience fresh understandings of Christ among us.

