

Decoration Day doings

by Lydia Lovell

Until fairly recently, Memorial Day was celebrated on May 30th whether or not that day fell on a Monday. Sometime within the past decade or two, someone realized that three-day holiday weekends mean good tourist trade for resort areas. Businesses had no objections to closing on Monday rather than on a day in the middle of the week, and that's why Memorial Day falls on the Monday preceding May 30th. Does it matter? Not really.

Parades still honor those who fought and died for their country. Veterans don their uniforms and march with measured tread. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America carry their flags, bands play, drums rattle, politicians make speeches, and people line the streets to watch the parade pass by just as they did in the old days. Only then, we celebrated Decoration Day and placed flowers on graves of soldiers at the cemeteries.

In Aunt Olivia's time there were relatively few graves to be decorated. We hadn't had that many wars. Only five...the War of Independence, the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I...had been fought in more than 200 years. In comparing that with the fact of our sending our boys off to fight in three more in the past 50 years...World War II, Korea, and Viet Nam...I wonder if we're growing more or less civilized. Those of us who recall these most recent wars feel somewhat apprehen-

sive because the world's political climate on this Memorial Day reminds us of international tensions that preceded wars of this half-century.

On Decoration Days of long ago, speeches were delivered by school children rather than by politicians. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was a favorite, and Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!" was another.

All the elementary school children participated in the ceremonies, marched to the cemetery carrying their armfuls of fragrant lilacs, and placed the blossoms on graves where little American flags were flying. After assembling and singing in unison "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," we stood at solemn attention while a youthful bugler played "Taps" on his trumpet. Then we were dismissed in time to reach home for our noon meal.

When my brother and I arrived at Uncle Henry's for lunch after Decoration Day exercises, we had worked up good appetites: Aunt Olivia was well-prepared for us. For the occasion she often made a **Danish Gammon**. (I use a slice of boneless ham about an inch thick when I make this dish.)

1 to 1-1/2 lbs. gammon

1 T. brown sugar

1 C. tomatoes, peeled and coarsely chopped

1 C. sweet Spanish onions, thin-sliced

1/2 C. washed, wiped, and sliced fresh mushrooms

Juice of 1/2 lemon

Dash of black pepper

Chopped parsley for garnish

Place gammon in a shallow baking pan, one large enough so that meat lies flat. Add enough cold water to cover and bring slowly to a boil. Pour off water, Remove any rind from edge of meat, and snip fat at intervals around edge to keep ham from curling while cooking. Return to pan and sprinkle with brown sugar. Run under the broiler until sugar melts and surface of meat browns. Layer onions and tomatoes over meat. Season with pepper. Cover pan with foil and bake at 350° for 1-1/2 hours. Just before serving, boil mushrooms in lemon juice for 3 minutes, adding water if necessary to keep from burning. Drain and arrange mushrooms around meat. Served with fresh asparagus or broccoli spears, and creamy new potatoes, Danish Gammon made Decoration Day truly memorable.

After eating such a hearty lunch, we might have been expected to want only a light supper, but that's forgetting the traditional first swim of the season on Decoration Day. Sometimes the weather was damp and chilly, sometimes ideally hot, but whatever the temperature of air or water, to swim we felt obliged. An excellent exercise, swimming stimulates appetites; when we returned home, we were ready for another square meal. We never knew what to expect but were never disappointed for Aunt Olivia well knew we would be hungry. Sometimes she prepared **Breaded Baked Chicken**.

6 to 8 chicken parts (thighs, breasts, and drum sticks)

1/4 C. cornmeal

1/4 C. flour

1/2 t. chili powder

1 crumbled bouillon cube

salt and pepper to taste

1/2 C. milk

In a shallow bowl, combine all ingredients except chicken and milk. Pour milk into a soup bowl or pie plate. Remove skin from chicken parts and dip parts first into milk, then into flour mixture, then back into milk, and finish by dipping into flour again. In a shallow casserole, arrange chicken in a

single layer. Bake, uncovered, at 375° for 45 minutes. Serve with parsleyed carrots, baked potatoes, and a tossed green salad. Makes four to six servings.

If hamburger happened to be a better buy, or if the family had eaten chicken recently, Aunt Olivia might choose **Mushroom Burgers** as the main course for supper. This makes enough for six.

1-1/2 lb. lean ground beef

3/4 lb. fresh mushrooms,

chopped

3 T. dry red wine

1/2 C. soft breadcrumbs

1 t. seasoned salt

Dash of pepper

1-1/2 t. Worcestershire

2 eggs, well beaten

In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients. Refrigerate and allow flavors to blend for at least an hour. Shortly before serving time, shape into six patties. Broil, pan fry, or grill to desired doneness (about 10 minutes), turning once. Serve on fresh bakery buns with a choice of mustard, ketchup, sliced onions, mayonnaise, relish, sweet pickle slices, and dill pickle strips. Cucumber salad is good with mushroom burgers, and so also, are **Broiled Tomatoes**.

Slice off the tops of six ripe, medium-size tomatoes. Place on broiler pan, cut side up. Sprinkle lightly with lemon juice, seasoned salt, and lemon pepper. Top with grated Parmesan cheese (or garlic powder stirred together with chopped parsley), and broil for three minutes, being careful that tops do not burn.

Uncle Henry, a firm believer in "eating hearty to give the ship a good name," was particularly fond of rich desserts, and Aunt Olivia seldom disappointed him. She often told me that one of the secrets of establishing a reputation as a good cook was making sure to serve unforgettable desserts. "People," she said, "are satisfied easily when they are hungry. But when they eat something because they can't resist it, that's when they think the cook is better-than-ordinary." Make desserts irresistible, then, because few people are still really hungry after eating the main course. **Caramel Apple Charlotte**, according to Uncle Henry, fit that description.

2 envelopes unflavored gelatin

10 T. dark brown sugar

3 eggs, separated

3 C. milk

2 large apples, peeled and chopped

2 T. butter

1-1/2 t. vanilla extract

1-1/2 C. heavy cream,

whipped

1/2 C. chopped pecans

In a medium saucepan, combine 8 T. brown sugar with gelatin; separate eggs and beat yolks with milk. Stir into gelatin mixture. Let stand for one minute; then stir over low heat for five minutes until gelatin dissolves. Add apples, butter, and vanilla; continue cooking, stirring, until apples are tender. Remove from heat and pour into a bowl. Chill in refrigerator until mixture holds its shape when dropped from a spoon. Beat egg whites into soft peaks. Combine with remaining sugar and beat until stiff. Fold into apples; then fold in whipped cream and pecans. Heap into a 9" springform. Chill until firm. This makes 10 to 12 servings and is an ideal dish to serve when you've invited guests to come after supper to join your family for dessert and coffee... really gives them something to remember on Memorial Day.

Bon appetit.