

From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

Easter Bonnets & Hot "X" Buns

by Lydia Lovell

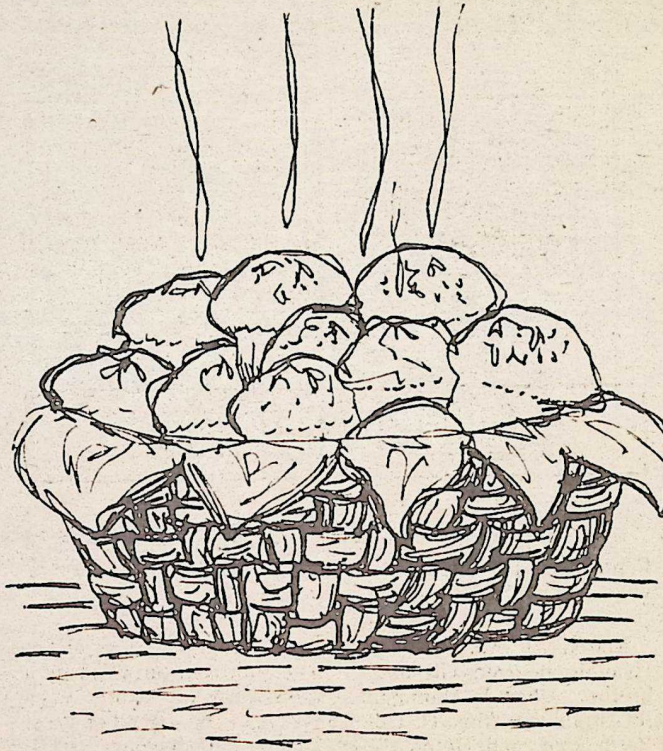
In days long ago when Uncle Henry was still a young man and Aunt Olivia hardly beyond being a bride, entertainment in Osterville was of the home-grown variety. Much of the activity in the village revolved around its churches. Morning and evening services were held every Sunday, and Wednesday evenings were reserved by most people for prayer meeting. One evening a week the Men's Club met; on another, the Women's Club brought people together. Young People's held its club meeting on Saturday evenings in the church vestry where the Ladies Alliance met on Thursday afternoons. Choir rehearsals were conducted at the church on Friday evenings between seven and nine.

Men not affiliated with the Men's Club gathered at the Fire House or joined the village band which rehearsed once a week. Some of the older men were members of the Beacon Club, located on the second floor of the Daniel Block. There they gathered regularly after the evening meal, ostensibly to await distribution of the evening mail. Often, though, once they had climbed the stairs, they stayed on discussing politics and exchanging views on local news, long after Postmistress Parker had locked up the office.

Uncle Henry spent little time at the Beacon Club; he didn't belong to the Men's Club, wasn't a volunteer fireman, didn't play in the band, or sing in the choir. He usually attended church services on Sunday morning because Aunt Olivia did, and she was happiest with him at her side. He almost never attended prayer meetings. And yet, at certain times, Uncle Henry spent two, sometimes three, evenings a week away from home. Entertainment occasionally took the form of amateur theatrics. In these Uncle Henry participated enthusiastically. He possessed a fine singing voice, enjoyed a flair for the dramatic, was blessed with an excellent memory and, most important of all, owned a goodly share of that elusive quality called stage presence. Whenever a play was in rehearsal, Uncle Henry could be counted upon to play a role.

Among my earliest memories is that of Uncle Henry, with Aunt Olivia on his arm, prancing across the stage of the village hall. He cut a magnificent figure, tall and handsome in a black morning coat with long tails and dove gray trousers, tipping a beaver hat to all the ladies. Aunt Olivia looked breathtakingly beautiful to me in her blue satin gown, its tight bodice buttoned from waist to chin and its leg-o'-mutton sleeves buttoned from elbow to wrist. On her head perched a matching blue bonnet with a long feather that curled to brush her cheek. I was entranced when Uncle Henry sang, "In your Easter bonnet with all the frills upon it, you'll be the finest lady in the Easter Parade..." And when he came to the part about "...on the avenue, Fifth Avenue..." he sang, "On the avenue, Wianno Avenue..." and brought the house down.

Uncle Henry didn't sing in the choir. Aunt Olivia didn't either. But I did. I sang in the choir because all the other village girls my age belonged to the choir. The unfortunate fact that I could not carry a tune made no difference to me nor to that patient long-suffering soul, our choir director and church organist. Choir rehearsal was a Friday evening ritual. On special holidays such as Christmas and Easter, extra rehearsals were called for Tuesdays and Thursdays as well. We sang no such songs as "Easter Parade," but our hymns were spritely, nonetheless.



On Easter Sunday we sang at three services, giving a different performance at each. The one I most enjoyed was the earliest, the sunrise service. Choirs of all the churches in town gathered in the parking lot of the Hyanisport Golf Club, just below the crest of the hill that is topped by St. Andrews by-the-sea Episcopal Church. In pre-dawn light, shivering with cold, as many as 18 or 20 church choirs joined in raising voices in praise of the Lord as the sun rose gloriously.

After the service we disbanded and were driven home to a waiting breakfast, warning ringing in our ears to back at our respective churches ready for Easter Sunday morning services at 10:45.

We anticipated breakfast with enthusiasm for we had risen early, left home with empty stomachs, and returned ravenously hungry. Aunt Olivia was ready for me. The whole family sat down to bowls of fresh orange and grapefruit sections combined with sliced bananas and topped with strawberry jam. Poached eggs in toast cups followed, accompanied by several strips of crisp bacon.

To make eggs in toast cups, Aunt Olivia removed the crusts from eight slices of her homemade bread and brushed both sides with melted butter. She pressed each slice into a custard cup, placed the cups on a baking sheet, and toasted them in a 325° oven for 15 minutes. When I arrived from the service, she broke an egg into each toast cup, seasoned it with salt, pepper, and a dot of butter, and returned them to the oven for another 15 minutes. We ate our fruit with a wonderful aroma of bacon and eggs emanating from the kitchen. Slices of bacon baked in a 400° oven for 10 minutes had been prepared earlier. Our final and favorite traditional treats on Easter Sunday morning were **Hot Cross Buns** made the day before and reheated as we demolished bacon and eggs. This is Aunt Olivia's recipe:

2 pkgs. active dry yeast	3-1/2 C. sifted flour
1/3 C. warm water	3/4 t. cinnamon
1/3 C. scalded milk	3 eggs, beaten
1/2 C. cooking oil	2/3 C. raisins
1/3 C. sugar	1 egg white, slightly beaten
3/4 t. salt	3/4 C. confectioners sugar

Soften yeast in warm water. In a large bowl, combine milk, oil, sugar, and salt. Sift one cup of flour with the cinnamon and stir into milk mixture. Add eggs and beat well. Stir in softened yeast and the raisins. Add enough of remaining flour to make a soft dough. Cover with a tea towel dampened in warm water and wrung as dry as possible. Let dough rise in a warm place until double (about 1-1/2 hours). Punch down.

Turn dough out on a lightly floured surface and pat to a thickness of 1/2 inch. Using a 2-1/2" biscuit cutter, make two dozen rounds. Shape into buns by tucking cut edges under to form globes. Place on greased baking sheet about 1-1/2" apart. Cover with tea towel and let rise in a warm place until almost double (about an hour).

Snip a shallow cross in the surface of each bun with very sharp scissors. Brush tops with beaten egg white. Bake about 12 minutes in 375° oven.

Mix remaining egg white with confectioners sugar and; while buns are still warm, pipe a cross on each one. Having made these the day before, Aunt Olivia reheated them on a wire rack in a skillet with water boiling in the bottom. It took about five minutes over boiling water to warm them through. She did not cover the skillet; if she had, the frosting would have melted.

Can you think of any finer way to begin an Easter Sunday? Entertainment, whether at church or on stage at the village hall, has always been augmented with good food. That's as true today as it was half-a-century ago when Uncle Henry serenaded Aunt Olivia, on stage and off, with "Easter Parade."