

Thanksgiving's tasty traditions

by Lydia Lovell

A lot of little things, things that had become traditional, combined to make us all look forward to Thanksgiving at Aunt Olivia's. It was more, much more, than just counting our blessings and eating enough to make us uncomfortable. For one thing, it was a day of reunion, not only for family members but for friends as well. Some years between twenty and thirty of us, all in holiday mood, shared the turkey dinner and all the fixings. Shared is the right word, too, because everybody took part.

No one arrived empty-handed, and everyone pitched in to help. Under Uncle Henry's supervision, the men stretched the tables and put in all the extra leaves. Then they carried in folding chairs they's brought from home or borrowed from the church vestry to ensure plenty of seating space.

The women spread the tablecloths and counted out the silverware. While one child set the places, another folded napkins and a third filled tiny paper baskets with salted nuts. Under adult supervision an older child printed names on placecards; these, cut from cardboard in the shape of gobblers, were propped against the appropriate nut baskets.

Days before, Aunt Olivia had made one of her Thanksgiving specialties. A family favorite, **Marinated Vegetable Relish**, improves with time in the refrigerator. Combine the following:

- 1 16 oz. can french-cut green beans, drained
- 1 8 oz. can LeSeur peas, drained
- 1 8 oz. can whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 small jar of pimentos, drained.
- 1 small green pepper, seeded, diced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 large stalks of celery, diced

Bring to a boil and then pour over mixed vegetables:

- ¾ C. apple cider vinegar
- ¼ C. salad oil
- 1 T. water
- 1 C. granulated sugar
- 1 t. black pepper

Stir thoroughly before spooning into pint jars. Refrigerate



at least 24 hours. Drain marinade before serving but save it for storing any leftover vegetables.

Relish was served in a silver compote with a matching silver ladle that had been a wedding present to my great-grandmother. As the oldest little girl in a family that ran primarily to boys, I looked forward to the "someday" when the compote and ladle would be mine.

In addition to vegetable relish, we filled a crystal bowl with cranberry sauce and a shallow oval china dish with sliced cranberry jelly. A berry spoon served the sauce; a small pearl-handled slicer, the jelly.

Cousin Evelyn filled the sections of her compartmented glass platter with black olives and green, celery stalks stuffed with seasoned cream cheese, carrot sticks and cauliflower flowerets, and heaps of her homemade sweet pickle chips. This platter, along with an assortment of desserts (mince,

apple, and squash pies, applesauce cake, pound cake, and custards) contributed by Cousins Sarah and Kate, Aunt Cora, and Ruth Bailey, was kept cool, fresh, and near at hand on the unheated screened porch. Here, too, until the turkey came out of the oven, waited pans of dinner rolls to be baked at the last minute.

If Aunt Olivia planned to make turkey pie later in the week, she was well-advised to reserve a bowl of stuffing for the purpose because there was seldom any left over. To make enough **Turkey Stuffing** for a 20-pound bird, use a cake rack like a grater to crumble three loaves of unsliced white bread. Add to the crumbs and mix well:

- 4½ t. poultry dressing
- 1½ t. powdered ginger
- ½ t. salt
- 1/8 t. pepper

In a 12" frying pan, melt a stick of butter or margarine. Mince and saute, slowly until golden, 2 medium or 1 large onion and 2 outer stalks of celery, including the leaves. Combine with crumbs. Mix together in a small bowl, one lightly-beaten egg and ½ cup of ginger ale; pour over crumb mixture and stir thoroughly.

By preparing the stuffing the night before, Aunt Olivia's Thanksgiving morning preparations were simplified. Always the first person in the kitchen in the morning, on this day she arrived early and began the day by spooning stuffing lightly into the neck and body cavity of the cleaned bird, then skewered, trussed, and began roasting the gobbler in a 325° oven at 7:00 a.m. The turkey was done a turn by 11:30 when it was removed from the oven, lifted to a big platter, and allowed to rest until time to call Uncle Henry to sharpen the carving knife.

That last hour before dinner was busy with making gravy, lining up a big boy to mash potatoes, being certain everything was properly arranged in the dining room, and seeing to bowls and serving pieces for all the good things the guests had brought.

An old-fashioned cast-iron kitchen stove was remarkably well-suited to holiday meal preparation. As many as eight to ten pots and pans could be kept warm at the same time on its broad, deep surface. To be heated were green peas, creamed onion, and turnips . . . the white ones that Cape Codders prefer to the yellow variety. A pan of buttered parsleyed carrots, a casserole of candied yams, a big pot of mashed potatoes, the gravy, and the little saucepan of milk to be used in the potatoes all crowded the stove top.

As soon as the yeasty rolls, now browning nicely, came out of the oven, Aunt Olivia called Uncle Henry to carve the turkey. This he did in the kitchen for he enjoyed sitting down and joining his guests at the beginning of a meal rather than carving at the table. As he heaped slices of turkey meat on platters, the women dished up the vegetables. Older children put cracked ice in water goblets, poured water from the big cut glass pitcher, and sliced and distributed butter pats. Aunt Olivia poured gravy into a silver boat and a china one, too, so there would be one at each end of the table. She ran cold water into the pot the potatoes had cooked in, set the tea kettle over the hottest part of the stove so that, later, there would be hot water for tea or coffee.

Just as she took off her apron and stepped through the door to her end of the table, the last vegetable dish arrived, and Uncle Henry, carrying a platter of turkey meat in each hand, entered the dining room.

Young, old, and in-between, the Lovells and their company took their places, everyone exclaiming over the beautiful table, and sniffing delicious aromas of turkey, stuffing, and gravy mingling with that of toasty hot rolls. As soon as everyone was seated, the babble of voices hushed for Uncle Henry remained standing with one hand folded over the other just below his belt buckle. Smiling down the table's length at each one of us until his eyes met those of Aunt Olivia's at the far end, he bowed his head gravely.

"Lord, for this day, for the company of one another, and for all your blessings, we are truly and deeply thankful. Amen."

As he raised his head, he asked, "White meat or dark, my dear?" And Aunt Olivia, as she always did, responded, "Just a bit of each, Henry, thank you." And Thanksgiving Dinner was underway.