

# Sons of the American Revolution



Lt George Ewing Chapter (Athens, Gallia, Jackson, Meigs, Vinton Counties, Ohio) Dec 2016

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Sergeant at Arms	Benz & Moody	
Color Guard	(Tom Romine, Jim Smith, Scott Moody, Andy Chiki)	

**WEBSITE, please visit:** <http://www.sar-ewing.org>



Tom Romine and Scott Moody, Veteran's Day 2016 Parade Color Guard, marching the length of Court Street, Athens OH with other veteran units

## Chapter Meeting Dates and Presentations

Jan 26, 2017	Tom O'Grady, What is the Southeast Ohio History Center? History in the making.
Feb , 2017	TBA
Mar , 2017	TBA
Apr 27, 2017	Dr. Sarah Kinkel, OU History Professor, "Women of the American Revolution"
May , 2017	TBA
Jun 3, 2017	Noon, annual DAR/SAR potluck and planning meeting, 4841 Angel Ridge Road, Athens.

# We Won't Go Until We Get Some: New England Colonial Christmas Traditions

<http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/wont-go-get-new-england-colonial-christmas-traditions/>



Twelfthnight (The King Drinks), by David Teniers the Younger (1634-1640)

Just how rowdy was a New England Colonial Christmas? It depended on who was celebrating. But it bore little resemblance to Christmas today, and it was a touchy subject from the start.

The [Pilgrims who arrived in Plymouth](#) were a mix of people. They were led by separatists who despised the Christmas traditions of the [Anglican Church](#) as well as the [Roman Catholic Church](#). They wanted to establish their own protestant churches, free of [Christmas](#). But many of the Pilgrims were not drawn to America for religious reasons at all. They were craftsmen or farmers who were recruited to ensure the colony would survive, and they simply wanted to make a better life in America.

On their first Christmas at Plymouth, the Pilgrims celebrated the best way they knew how: [They worked right through it](#). By the next year, Christmas traditions began infiltrating the group, and [Gov. William Bradford](#) had to put down the celebrations. He went so far as to call the Christmas treat [mincemeat pie](#) ‘idolatrie in a crust.’

As the [Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony of Boston gained ascendance](#), they had plenty of disagreements with the Pilgrims in Plymouth. But they were largely united in their dislike of Christmas.

There remained in their midst, however, people who did celebrate Christmas with gusto. [Especially in the fishing communities](#), Christmas was embraced. The holiday was mostly celebrated by the less-literate members of the community, and much of what actually happened was never recorded. What was recorded was seen through the eyes of the religious/civic leadership, and they painted an ugly picture of Christmas indeed.

The main complaint raised by the Puritans against Christmas was that it was a festival born out of an unnatural ideological marriage between the Roman Catholic Church and the pagans, with its origins in the [Roman festival Saturnalia](#). Just how pagan is Christmas? We won't try to settle that debate. But Christmas was a growing irritant to the Puritans, and they decided to stomp it out.

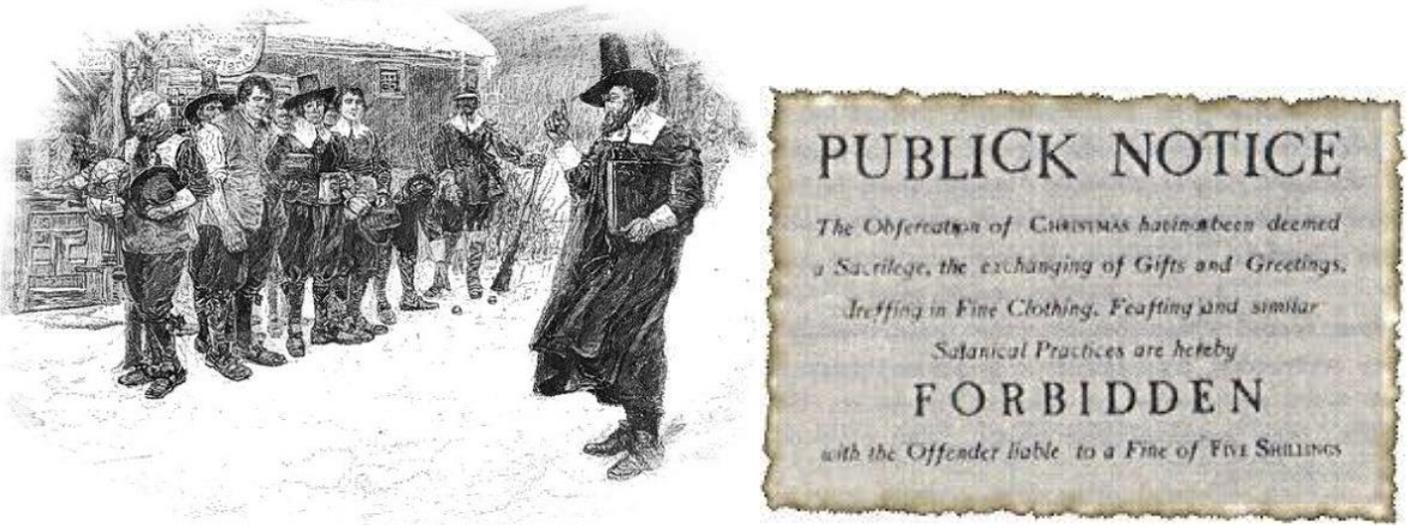


Illustration of Gov. William Bradford putting down the Christmas revels in the earliest days of Massachusetts. (Howard Pyle)

In 1647, the reformers in England outlawed Christmas. And in 1659, the [Puritans in New England followed suit](#). People who celebrated Christmas would be subject to a fine of five shillings.

## Paganism

In 1662, William Hoare of Beverly, Mass., was brought to court for hosting a drunken gathering on Christmas Day. Hoare was a troublemaker whose family was frequently at odds with Puritan society -- eventually their attitudes would cost his wife her life, as she was hanged [as a witch in the Salem witch frenzy 30 years later](#).

A second glimpse of Christmas mayhem occurred on Christmas Day in 1679 in Salem, Mass. Joseph Foster, Benjamin Fuller, Samuel Brayebrooke and Joseph Flint decided they [wanted some booze for the holiday](#). They apparently didn't know anyone as obliging as Hoare. But they did know 72-year-old John Rowden had made perry, a liquor made from [pears](#). So they dropped in to pay him an unscheduled visit.

Rowden told them to get out. Fuller refused, saying "it was Christmas Day at night and they came to be merry and to drink perry, which was not to be had anywhere else but here and perry they would have before they went," according to court records. The encounter ended in a fight and stolen property.

Drinking was just the tip of the iceberg when it came to Christmas debauchery. Wassailing, mumming, gambling and feasting were all popular Christmas pastimes. And it was a constant struggle for the Puritans to keep Christmas under control because Christmas was embraced by some of the *hoi polloi*, who thought it was quite a good time.

With the harvest over and the cupboards full and the long winter yet to come, December seemed a perfect month for a ripping good celebration.

## Lord of Misrule

In England and elsewhere in the colonies, towns would appoint a "[lord of misrule](#)." This custom borrowed from Saturnalia as well. Generally someone of lower standing was appointed to this role to serve as master of ceremonies of the Christmas celebrations and festivities either up to or including the [Twelfth Night](#) festivities. This was to demonstrate that during Christmas, roles were reversed and the poor would rule over the wealthy. In addition to the feasting and drunkenness, the more outgoing celebrants used the holiday as an excuse for [wassailing](#). This was the practice of barging into the houses of the wealthier citizens, singing a song or two or putting on a short skit, and demanding food, drink and money.

Perhaps you've sung the Christmas carol, *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*, with its chorus of "Oh, bring us a figgy pudding...we won't go until we get some." They weren't kidding.

The more obliging citizens would fork over the goods. Others, however, declined -- resulting in fights, rock-throwing and hard feelings. Even more abhorrent to the Puritans was the sexual promiscuity that accompanied Christmas. Inhibitions were cast aside. One of the more colorful traditions was mumming, [in which men would dress like women \(and vice versa\)](#) or simply disguise themselves in a range of costumes. Mumming could be as innocent as street theater or as bawdy as a loosely disguised roving orgy.

The Puritan objection to the custom was that a person disguised could slip into a neighbor's house for an assignation without raising eyebrows. How commonplace was the debauchery? It's probably impossible to say, though the good Puritans wanted nothing to do with it. In 1681, with the Civil War over in England, the [crown began pressuring Massachusetts to embrace the Anglican Church](#) and roll back Puritan reforms. The colony complied by repealing the laws against Christmas. But the holiday remained frowned upon.

## Mad Mirth

In 1687 the Puritan minister [Increase Mather](#) railed against Christmas. He declared that those who celebrated it "are consumed in computations, in interludes, in playing at cards, in [revellings, in excess of wine, in mad mirth](#)." No one really disagreed. It just didn't bother some people the way it did Mather and the Puritan leadership.



Charles Dickens and his Christmas ghosts helped with the

PR makeover for the holiday.

It would take more than 100 years for Christmas to develop the wholesome, shiny veneer it has today. While the southern colonies and New York, with its Dutch roots, embraced Christmas earlier, New England Protestants would hold out well beyond 1800, and their influence was felt nationally. In 1789, for instance, [Congress was in session](#) on Christmas Day. Businesses throughout New England were always open on Christmas. And children attended school on Christmas well into the 1800s.

By the early 1800s, however, with Episcopalians and Catholics already celebrating Christmas, the holdout Protestants felt pushed to join in, though most still believed Christmas was essentially a pagan holiday that the Catholic Church had coopted for its own purposes. The poem ['Twas The Night Before Christmas](#), published in 1822. and Charles Dickens' classic [A Christmas Carol](#) in 1843 gave the holiday a facelift, and the opposition in the church began to relent.

[After the Civil War](#), the battle was over. New England joined the rest of the country in embracing Christmas. And Christmas, by the way, embraced New England values, at least to some degree. The over-the-top debauchery and drunkenness gave way once and for all to the quieter, conventional celebrations we know today.

*To read more about the history of Christmas in New England, you may want to read [The Battle for Christmas](#), by Stephen Nissenbaum. This story was updated from the 2013 version.*

## The History of Wassailing and Mumming

Wassailing is a very ancient custom that is rarely done today. The word 'wassail' comes from the Anglo-Saxon phrase 'waes hael', which means 'good health'. Originally, the wassail was a drink made of mulled ale, curdled cream, roasted apples, eggs, cloves, ginger, nutmeg and sugar. It was served from huge bowls, often made of silver or pewter. Jesus College, in Oxford University, has a Wassail bowl, that is covered with silver. It can hold 10 gallons of drink! Wassailing was traditionally done on New Year's Eve and [Twelfth Night](#), but some rich people drank Wassail on all the 12 days of Christmas! The Wassail drink mixture was sometimes called 'Lamb's Wool', because of the pulp of the roasted apples looked all frothy and a bit like Lambs Wool! Here is a [recipe for wassail](#).

One legend about how Wassailing was created, says that a beautiful Saxon maiden named Rowena presented Prince Vortigen with a bowl of wine while toasting him with the words 'waes hael'. Over the centuries, a great deal of ceremony developed around the custom of drinking wassail. The bowl was carried into a room with a great fanfare, a traditional [carol](#) about the drink was sung, and finally, the steaming hot beverage was served.

From this it developed into a another way of saying Merry Christmas to each other! One of the most popular Wassailing Carols went like this:



Here we come a-wassailing  
Among the leaves so green,  
Here we come a-wassailing,  
So fair to be seen:

Love and joy come to you,  
And to you your wassail too,  
And God bless you and send you,  
A happy New Year,  
And God send you,  
A happy new year.

# Mumming

Mumming is also an ancient pagan custom that was an excuse for people to have a party at Christmas! It means 'making diversion in disguise'. The tradition was that men and women would swap clothes, put on masks and go visiting their neighbors, singing, dancing or putting on a play with a silly plot. The leader or narrator of the mummers was dressed as [Father Christmas](#).

The custom of Mumming might go back to Roman times, when people used to dress up for parties at New Year. It is thought that, in the [UK](#), it was first done on St. Thomas's day or the shortest day of the year.

Different types of entertainments were done in different parts of the UK. In parts of Durham, Yorkshire and Devon a special sword dance was performed. There were also different names for mumming around the UK too. In Scotland it was known as 'Gusards' in Somerset, 'Mumping', in Warwickshire or 'Thomasing' and 'Corning' in Kent.

In Medieval times, it had turned into an excuse for people to go begging round the houses and committing crimes. It became so bad that Henry VIII, made a law saying that anyone that caught mumming wearing a mask would be put in prison for three months!

One poem that people said when mumming was:

Christmas is coming, the **beef** is getting fat,  
Please **drop** a penny in the old man's hat.

Over the years, this was changed into a very similar poem that is said by some carol singers today:

Christmas is coming, the **goose** is getting fat,  
Please **put** a penny in the old man's hat.

The early settlers from the UK took the custom of Mumming to [Canada](#). It is known as Murmuring in Canada, but is banned in most places because people used it as an excuse for begging.

There's also a famous Mummer's Day parade New Year's Day in Philadelphia, in the [USA](#), which lasts over six hours! Mumming is still done in parts of the [UK](#), [USA](#) and [Canada](#).

Source: <http://www.whychristmas.com/customs/wassailing.shtml>



General George Washington and troops during the winter at Valley Forge

## Regional Meeting

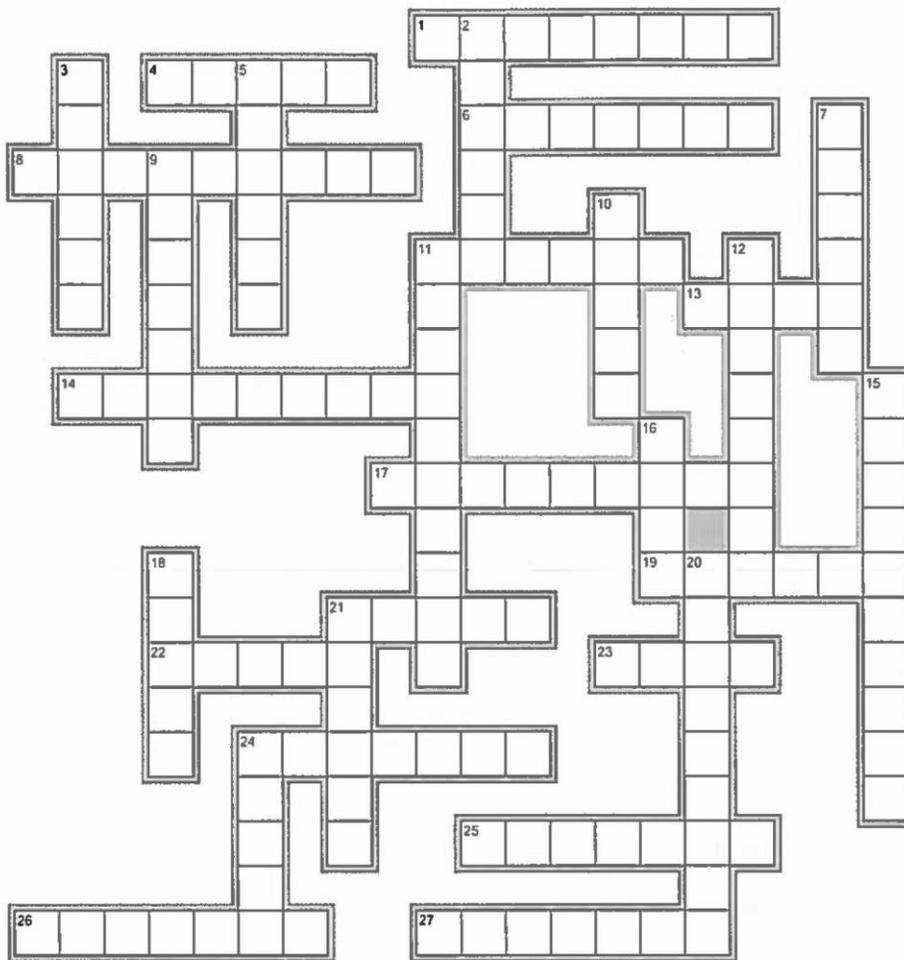
President Lochary, Treasurer Moody and Rose Isgrigg (Nabby Ames Registrar) attended the SAR/DAR Annual Regional Holiday Luncheon, Parkersburg Country Club, Dec 4<sup>th</sup>. Moody served on the Color Guard.

## Treasurer Report, June-September 2016, by Scott Moody

Date	Credits	Debits	Balance
June 1 beginning			360.90
June 6 donation	41		
June 28 Roy Holter		48.15	
Sept 22 Donations	115		
Sept 22 Dues	105		
Sept 22 Meals	155	252	501.92

## Dec 2016 SAR Newsletter

Scott M Moody



EclipseCrossword.com

## Word bank

ANGLICANS    BEEF    BRADFORD    CHRISTMAS    DICKENS    FARMER    FIGS    FISHERMEN    FIVE  
 GOOSE    HARVARD    HEALTH    HENRY    MATHER    MINCEMEAT    MINISTER    MUMMING    NIGHT  
 OGRADY    PAGAN    PERRY    PILGRIM    PURITAN    QUINCY    ROWENA    SATURNALIA    SEOHC  
 WALKER    WASSAIL    WASSAILING

## Across

1. First Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony
4. Our November meeting was held at the new \_\_\_\_\_ site
6. a drink made of mulled ale, curdled cream, roasted apples, eggs, cloves, ginger, nutmeg and sugar often drunk at New Years
8. Less literate colonists who clandestinely celebrated Christmas
11. Bill \_\_\_\_\_ presented lots of historical information about the family of Lt George Ewing at the November meeting
13. How many shillings would you pay as a fine for celebrating Christmas?
14. Children went to school and businesses were open on \_\_\_\_\_ until the 19th century
17. "idolatrie in a pie crust"
19. As a youth John Adams told his father that he wanted to stop going to school and just be a

## Across

21. \_\_\_\_\_  
8th in line King who made a law imprisoning those who went mumming
22. Traditional Christmas fowl eaten by English and Germans
23. Fruits for Christmas Pudding
24. Early English colonists of Massachusetts coming to Plymouth in 1620
25. English colonists immigrating by the thousands to Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630's
26. Analogous to "tricking and treating" but an excuse to dress up clandestinely and beg for drink and gifts
27. His classic published in 1843 finally made Christmas celebration legitimate \_\_\_\_\_

## Down

2. Beautiful Saxon maiden who is claimed to have started the wassailing tradition
3. Birthplace of John Adams
5. Tom \_\_\_\_\_ will be our speaker for the January meeting
7. Puritan Minister who preached against "mad mirth" at Christmas
9. Oldest college in the colonies established in 1636 in New Towne by the Puritans
10. A liquor made from fermented pears
11. Christmas and New Year practice of people going door-to-door, singing and offering a drink in exchange for gifts.
12. John Adam's father wanted him to go to Harvard College and become a \_\_\_\_\_
15. Roman Holiday for the Winter Solstice incorporated into Christmas
16. Originally the meat eaten at Christmas rather than a goose
18. Twas the \_\_\_\_\_ before Christmas
20. Vernacular name for Episcopalians
21. Anglo Saxon "waes hael" translates as good \_\_\_\_\_
24. Pilgrims and Puritans banned Christmas celebrations as being \_\_\_\_\_