

Go A-Wassailing



Whether you have a good singing voice or not, get into the swing of the holiday season with Go Caroling Day on December 20. You may be surprised to hear that carols did not originate as holiday songs at all. Carols were folk dances, and *carol* meant “to dance in a ring.” Most often

these dances and their accompanying songs were sung in the pubs (along with the presumptive overindulgence of ale). So when did carols make the jump from the alehouse to the church house? The answer might lie in Victorian England.

Wassailing, or the act of wishing good fortune on your neighbors, was a fairly common practice during the medieval era. It was believed that if you passed well wishes to your neighbors, they would reward you in turn. Caroling, or performing folk songs of well-wishes to neighbors, became traditional during local festivals and on holidays like May Day. But it was during the Victorian Era that caroling became forever merged with Christmastime. Legend has it that the first Christmas carol service was held in Truro, England, in 1880, when Edward White Benson attempted to lure carolers out of the pub on Christmas Eve by publicizing a carol service at church. Benson would go on to become the Archbishop of Canterbury.

It was also during Victorian England that Christmas became more popular and commercialized. Publishers began compiling and printing vast anthologies of carols. Some went so far as to take ancient songs and rewrite them as hymns to the birth of Christ. Many of the most famous Christmas carols date from this period, including “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen,” “The First Noel,” “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing!,” and “Joy to the World.” Nowadays, Christmas caroling is almost uniquely found during church services. Rarely do carolers venture door-to-door *a-wassailing* as they once did in olden times. But on December 20, Go Caroling Day, the practice may be revived. So don’t be surprised if you hear a knock on your door and a choir of voices.

Mark Your Calendars

Thurs., Dec. 6
Coping with Hearing Loss
11:15am-12:15pm

Fri., Dec. 7
Making of the Greens
10am-1pm

Tues., Dec. 11
Assisted Living Contracts
1-2pm

Fri., Dec. 14
Songs and Sweets of the Holidays
1-3pm

Tues., Dec. 18
Nordic Impressions
1:30-3pm

Christmas Crossing

It was nearly midnight on Christmas of 1776 when Revolutionary War General George Washington daringly crossed the freezing Delaware River to turn the tide in favor of the colonists. Washington had suffered numerous defeats, resulting in the loss of many strategic locations,



including New York City in the north.

Washington’s plan included three crossings of the Delaware. He led a division of 2,400 men to surprise a group of German Hessian soldiers gathered at Trenton. When Washington’s force descended the next morning, the Hessians were caught unawares after a night of Christmas revels and were easily overwhelmed. When Washington’s other two divisions of 3,000 men failed to make the rendezvous, he was forced to withdraw. While the victory was not particularly strategic, Washington’s renown and the morale of the Continental Army grew.

Lee Senior Center

5722 Lee Highway, Arlington, VA 22207 · 703-228-0555 · Mon.-Fri., 10am-3pm



Center Staff

Adriana Carr
Sheila Budoff

Front Desk Volunteers

Roberta Thibodaux
Susie Bachtel
Judy Engebretson

Lee/Madison Advisory Committee

Tom Sipusic
Chair

Tom Curtis
Vice-Chair

Eileen Bogdanoff
Treasurer

Penny Curtis
Secretary

At-large
Caral Bennett
Ira Birnbaum
Inge Ercolano
Fran Field
Jean Jackson
Eileen Kenna
Roberta Thibodaux
Mary Wingo

Waiting for the Sun

In the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice, on December 21, brings the longest night of the year. Due to the tilt of Earth on its axis, the north pole faces away from the sun. While the interminable darkness stretches on, in many cultures this is a time to celebrate the light, and has been for centuries. In fact, the celebration of winter solstice predates the Christmas holiday.

Perhaps the most famous destination for viewing the sun during the winter solstice is at Stonehenge in England. This famous arrangement of massive stones was erected in prehistoric times and is perfectly aligned with sunset on the winter solstice. Scientists have concluded that this was a site of ancient ritual. Less famous is the massive burial mound and passageway at Newgrange in Ireland, dated to be older than the Pyramids. At sunrise on the winter solstice, the sun shines perfectly down the passageway to illuminate the innermost chamber. This is yet another instance where prehistoric peoples heralded the return of the light after the longest period of darkness.

Halfway across the world in Iran, Persians also celebrate the return of the light. On *Shab-e Yalda*, people gather to light fires to protect each other from the evil of the night. They feast and read poetry as they await the sunrise. The return of the sun is equated with the banishment of evil, the arrival of goodness, and the triumph of Mithra, the Sun God, over dark forces.

Japan, too, celebrates the return of the sun. *Toji-sai* marks the start of a new year, and it is when farmers traditionally welcome the sun as the source of their bountiful crops. As in Iran, bonfires are lit during the night to encourage the sun’s return. It is then common to take baths scented with the *yuzu* citrus fruit, which is believed to foster good health and fortune. On the solstice, don’t despair during the long night; instead, think of all those around the world who, perhaps like you, await the return of the sun.

Home for the Holidays

The sweet and spicy smell of gingerbread is a clear indicator that the holiday season is in full swing. By the time Gingerbread House Day arrives on December 12, you may have already indulged in eating this seasonal treat.



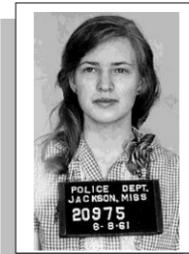
Gingerbread, made with ginger root, is believed to have originated in East Asia, where ginger was originally cultivated. It is believed that ginger and gingerbread were introduced to Europe after the Crusades of the 11th century. Gingerbread was adopted most heartily in Germany, where monks perfected their heart-shaped *lebkuchen* cookies. These cookies were first made as unleavened honey cakes, made in the same fashion as communion wafers. With the introduction of ginger, German bakers transformed *lebkuchen* into their beloved gingerbread. In 1487, Emperor Friedrich III presented the 4,000 children of the city of Nuremberg with gingerbread cookies shaped to his likeness.

The shape of gingerbread was not limited to hearts, faces, and people; miniature houses made of the cookie were also common. This is why a gingerbread house figured so prominently in the tale *Hansel and Gretel*, first published by German folklorists and brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the 19th century. What better way for a witch to lure two children into her home than to build a home out of Germany's favorite cookie? Through this tale, the Brothers Grimm spread the popularity of making gingerbread houses beyond Germany.

It may be surprising that one of the most enduring holiday traditions was popularized by the tale of a witch attempting to eat two children by luring them into her gingerbread house. But the religious significance of gingerbread has deeper roots than *Hansel and Gretel*. Perhaps it stems from the development of gingerbread by German monks. Or the use of gingerbread in religious ceremonies. Whatever the reason, warm, spicy gingerbread has become synonymous with the Christmas season.

A Grimm Tale Turned White

The history of Disney's success with feature-length animated films began on December 21, 1937, when it released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Many versions of this Grimm brother's fairy tale existed before Walt Disney put his hand to it. The first film version of *Snow White* hit theaters in 1902, but it was the Disney film that was considered groundbreaking. Indeed, the film won a specially designed Academy Award: one regular-sized Oscar statue with seven miniature Oscar statuettes. No less impactful was Disney's transformation of the story from a wicked tale of murder into a magical cartoon. The original unknown dwarfs were given funny personalities (not including the rejected names of Blabby, Jaunty, and Hoppy-Jumpy). Also forgotten was the evil Queen's fate of dancing to death in hot iron shoes. But this has always been the magic of Disney, providing the most exceptional and enduring family entertainment. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* has not lost any of its original luster.



Joan Trumpauer Mulholland: A Real-Life Hero

Meet Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, a civil rights icon and Arlingtonian, who as a young white woman joined the Freedom Riders and participated in countless sit-ins, demonstrations and marches for racial equality in the 1960s. Ms. Mulholland was disowned by her family, shot at, hunted by the Ku Klux Klan, and imprisoned on death row at the notorious Parchman Penitentiary. We'll view *An Ordinary Hero: The True Story of Joan Trumpauer Mulholland*, a documentary film about her amazing life, courage and fortitude. After the film, Ms. Mulholland will speak about her experiences and answer questions. The program will be held on Thursday, January 17 from 11:30-12:30. Don't miss this opportunity to meet and learn about a living legend who risked everything to fight for equal rights for all!

First in Flight

On December 17, 1903, Orville and Wilbur Wright made history on the sand dunes of Kill Devil Hills near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, when they achieved flight in a self-propelled, heavier-than-air aircraft.



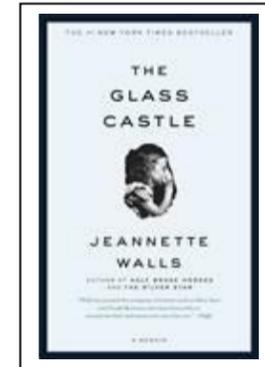
Orville and Wilbur Wright did not attend college like their older brothers, but they displayed both an aptitude and passion for mechanical design. They became builders of printing presses and opened a bicycle repair shop. But after learning of the manned glider experiments by German engineer Otto Lilienthal in the 1890s, they turned their full focus to aviation.

The Wright brothers were not alone in their efforts to develop an airplane. Astronomer Samuel Langley had developed an increasing curiosity in aerodynamics. In 1887, he became secretary of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., where he continued his research and won the attention of President McKinley. McKinley's War Department granted him \$50,000 to develop an engine powerful enough to achieve flight. In December of 1903, just a few days before the Wright brothers' successful flight, Langley mounted a flight attempt that crashed in a river.

The Wright brothers not only mastered non-powered flight with their own engineered gliders but they invented their own lightweight engine and propeller. On December 17, they ventured out on a windy day to the dunes of the coast, where they achieved their long-sought dream. The brothers flew four times that day, with their last flight soaring 852 feet in 59 seconds. The Wright brothers had soared into the history books as the world's first flyers. Yet their achievement is not without controversy, for a Connecticut newspaper article dated August 18, 1901, describes a half-mile flight that took place on August 14 by inventor Gustave Whitehead. But while there are photographs of Whitehead with his flying machine, there are no credible accounts of him achieving flight. The Wright brothers' place in aviation history is safe.

Westover Library Corner

Reel Page Turners Movie Book Club



Join your fellow book and movie lovers! Lee Senior Center and Westover Library have partnered to bring a new movie-themed book club to our community. Reel Page Turners meets monthly.

Our next book and movie will be *The Glass Castle*, by Jeannette Walls. The book discussion will take place on December 5 at 1:30pm at Lee Senior Center and the film screening will take place on December 12 at 1pm at Westover Library in the Longfellow Room.

Take a look at our upcoming schedule. See something interesting? Join us by registering! Here's what we have in store:

January 2019 - *1984* by George Orwell
February 2019 - *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand
March 2019 - *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

Registration required. For more information, please visit the library events page at <https://library.arlingtonva.us/events>, and click "book clubs" or call Peg at the Westover branch at (703) 228-6327.