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HOLIDAY  
PROJECTS

# CHRISTMAS

## Early American Life

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with Santa

Celebrating a  
Catskill Solstice

Sharing a  
Yule Feast

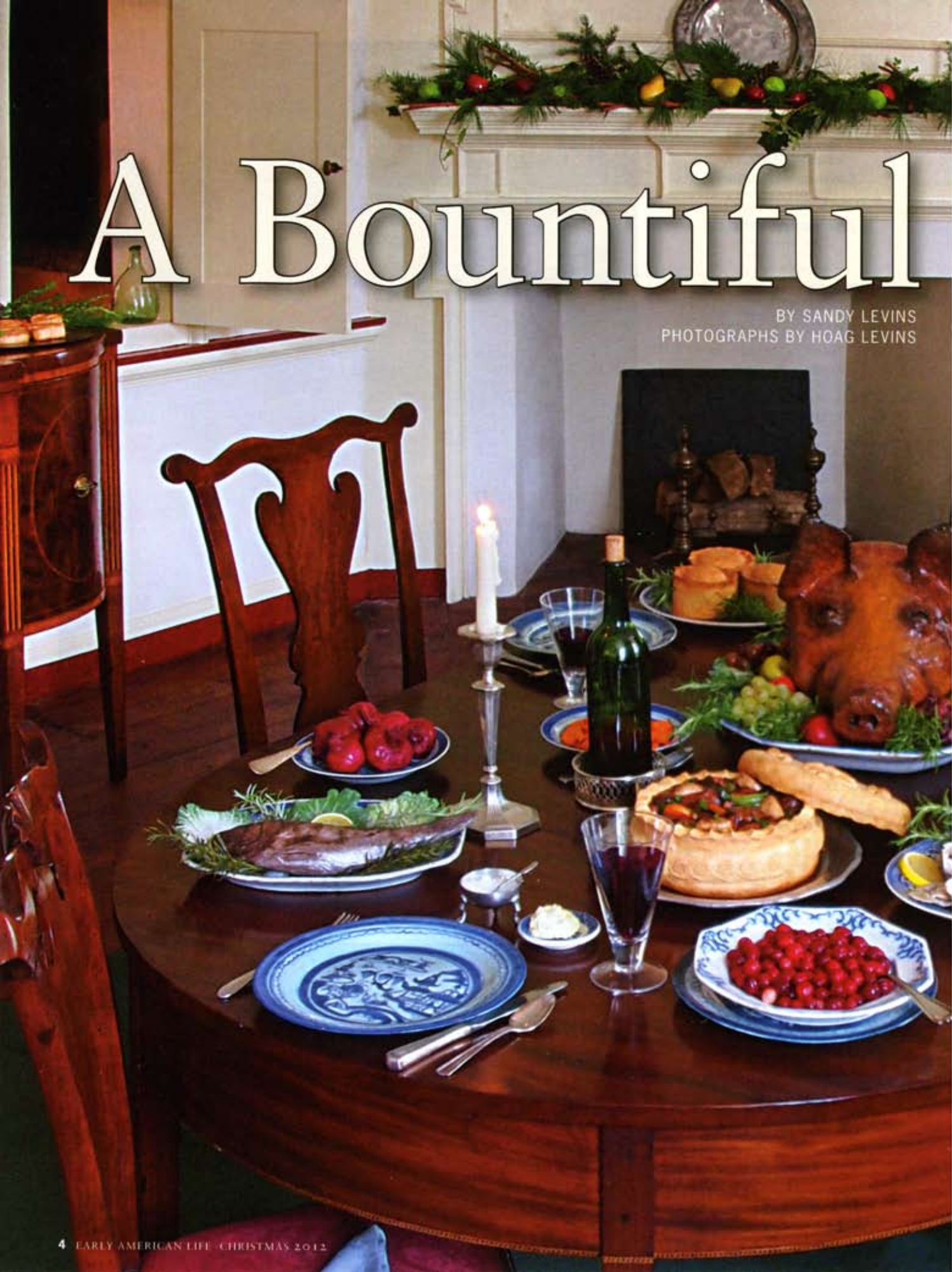
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CHRISTMAS 2012  
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# A Bountiful

BY SANDY LEVINS  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY HOAG LEVINS





# Table

The mouth-watering aroma of roasted meats combines with the holiday scent of fresh-cut evergreens from the surrounding woodlands during the annual holiday feast at Pomona Hall in Camden, New Jersey.

The table reflects the bounty of the Delaware Valley and the bustling port of Philadelphia—a major trade center with access to foodstuffs from around the world.

Located directly across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, and completed two years before that city became the new nation's capital, Pomona Hall was both the home of one of the region's wealthiest families and the main house of a 412-acre northern plantation worked by indentured servants and enslaved Africans.

Its owner, Marmaduke Cooper, moved in the highest levels of Delaware Valley society, where food was as much visual entertainment and status symbol as it was savory nourishment. Yuletide, from Christmas to Twelfth Night, was the period of the year's most sumptuous feasts for the Coopers and their guests.

Today Pomona Hall, a notable example of a late-18th-Century Georgian residence, is the centerpiece structure of the Camden County Historical Society. Each Christmas, employing period-authentic *faux* foods, the Society re-creates what would have been a typical Yuletide feast of a well-to-do urban family of British descent celebrating the holidays in 1788. ★

Sandy Levins researches foodways to transform plaster, papier-mâché, and acrylic paints into historically accurate *faux* dishes for numerous museum sites including Philadelphia's Independence National Historical Park and George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens in Virginia. A resident of Haddonfield, New Jersey, she is president of the Camden County Historical Society.

The British tradition of the boar's head, as celebrated in the medieval "Boar's Head Carol," dominates the dining room table at Pomona Hall in the form of a domesticated pig.

## Dinner Menu

Boar's Head	Raw Oysters
Roast Leg of Lamb	Roasted Whole
Roasted Fish	Beets
Savory Meat Pie in "Coffin" Pastry	Peas
Individual Meat Pies	Carrots
Stewed Duck	Whole Cranberries

## Dessert Menu

Twelfth Night Cake	Sugared Apricot
Sugared Grape	Knots
Cone	Mincemeat
Peale Tea Cakes	Kaleidoscope Pie
Marzipan Hedgehog	Wafers and Rolled
Syllabubs	Cornets

Medieval scholars note that the boar's head came to be considered so standard for the Yule feast that if a real one could not be acquired, a *faux* presentation made of cake or other foods was more than acceptable.

The tradition of pasties (*pass' tees*), little meat pies designed to be easily carried, came to North America with the English colonists.



## RECIPES

*The faux foods shown here are based on the following period receipts.*

### How to Cook a Wild Boar's Head, also How to Prepare a Sauce for It

A wild boar's head should be boiled well in water and, when it is done, laid on a grate and basted with wine, then it will be thought to have been cooked in wine. Afterwards make a black or yellow sauce with it. First, when you would make a black sauce, you should heat up a little fat and brown a small spoonful of wheat flour in the fat and after that put good wine into it and good cherry syrup, so that it becomes black, and sugar, ginger, pepper, cloves and cinnamon, grapes, raisins and finely chopped almonds. And taste it, however it seems good to you, make it so.

*From The Cookbook of Sabina Welserin, 1553; version by David Friedman*

### To Dress Ducks with Onions [Stewed Duck]

Stuff the ducks, cut the roots off small onions, blanch them in scalding water, then pick and put them in a stew pan with a little gravy. Set them over a gentle fire and let them simmer. When they are done, thicken them with cream and

flour, and when they are roasted, dish them and pour a ragout of onions over them, and serve them up hot.

From *The Virginia House-wife*, by Mary Randolph, 1824

### To Make a Lamb Pasty [Small Meat Pies]

Bone the Lamb, cut it in pieces: lay Beef-suet at the Bottom of your Pasty, season the Lamb with Salt, Pepper, minc'd thyme, Nutmeg, Cloves, and Mace, and lay it upon the Suet, making a high Border about it; then turn over your Sheet of Paste, close it up and bake it; when it is bak'd, put in some Vin-egar, the Yolks of Eggs well beaten and some Sugar; or you may, if you please, omit the Sugar and put in good Gravy, or the baking of the Bones in Claret.

From *The Cooks and Confectioners Dictionary*, by John Nott, 1723

### To Make a Lumber Pie [Lumber "Coffin" Pie]

Take some grated bread, and beef-suet cut into bits like great dice, and some cloves and mace, then some veal or capon minced small with beef suet, sweet herbs, fair sugar, the yolks of six eggs boild hard and cut in quarters, put them to the other ingredients, with some barberries, some yolks of raw eggs, and a little cream, work up all together and put it in the caul of veal like little sausages; then bake them in a dish, and being half baked have a pie made and dried in the oven; put these puddings into it with some butter, ver-juyce sugar, some dates on them, large mace, grapes, or barberries, and marrow – being baked, serve it with a cut cover on it, and scrape sugar on it.

From *The Accomplisht Cook*, by Robert May, 1660

**NOTE:** The coffin pie shown here represents a more modern version of Robert May's Lumber Pie with its "cut lid." According to British food expert Ivan Day, the name is a corruption of Lombard Pie.

### To Make Minc'd Pies [Kaleidoscope Pie]

Take up to 4 pounds of the flesh of a leg of veal, or neats tongues, 4 pounds of beef suet, 2 pound of raisins, stoned and shredded, 3 pounds of currants, half a pound or more of sugar, 3 quarters of an ounce of cloves, mace, nutmeg and cinnamon, beaten, half a dozen apples shredded, some rosewater, a quarter



Rich, savory stew ingredients are presented in a decorative pastry "coffin."

of a pint of muscadine or sack, some candied orange, lemon and citron peel minced. Shread your meat and suet very fine and mingle all together.

From *Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery*, c. 1799, edited by Karen Hess

### To Make Pastry Crust [Kaleidoscope Pie]

Take a quarter of a Peck of dry'd Flour, rub a Pound of Butter well into it, then put to it half a Pint of Milk, a quarter of a Pint of Brandy, and a Spoonful and half of Ale Yeast; mix these into your Flour, and, if it be not wet enough, add more Milk: break and beat it with a Rolling-pin, but do not knead it; make it very light, and take care it does not

curdle, which you may prevent by mingling a little and a little at a time.

From *The Cooks and Confectioners Dictionary*, by John Nott, 1723

### Grape Cone

Pyramid and cone shapes added height and drama to an otherwise flat table setting. The fussiness indicated a talented and deep kitchen staff, proclaiming the host's wealth and refinement. Period arrangements were built on base cones of metal or ceramic. Lacking these, you can use a Styro-foam form covered in royal icing.

A kaleidoscope pie harkens back to the English sweet meat pie, a tradition that survives in our Christmas mince pies.





The little tea cakes that inspired **Raphaelle Peale** to paint a still life might well have been rich seed cakes as described by **Elizabeth Raffald**.

- Grapes (or other stackable fruit)
- Egg white, lightly beaten to froth until proteins are mixed
- Royal icing (use any recipe or see ours on our web site)
- Styrofoam cone and toothpicks

Begin by frosting, or sugaring, the individual grapes. The most interesting effect is obtained by using different colored grapes in a pattern, or you can add cinnamon to the sugar for a contrasting look. You can use any other fruit you can coerce to adhere to the cone, larger items on the bottom, of course.

Dip grapes individually into beaten egg whites and shake off excess. Roll in sugar. Let stand for a couple of minutes and coat in sugar again.

After the grapes have dried, arrange them in rows (beginning at the bottom) around a cone covered in wet royal icing. You can secure them by inserting a toothpick into the cone where you want to position the grape and impale the grape, making sure the toothpick doesn't come through the front. Make sure it is well secured in the icing. As royal icing starts to dry quite quickly, it is best to work a section at a time, letting the bottom rows dry securely before piling on.

**NOTE:** Raw egg white might contain salmonella, so grapes should not be eaten.

The recipes for a Twelfth Night Cake appeared in our December 2009 issue. The Pudding recipe is available on our web site.

### To Make a Rich Seed Cake [Peale Cakes]

Take a pound of flour well dried, a pound of butter, a pound of loaf sugar beat and sifted, eight eggs, two ounces of carriway seeds, one nutmeg grated, and its weight of cinnamon. First beat your butter to a cream, then put in your sugar, beat the whites of your eggs half an hour, mix them with your

A sugared grape cone and pudding add height to the dessert course. The Twelfth Night cake is adorned with seven swans a-swimming from the "Twelve Days of Christmas" carol first published in England in 1780.



A lavish dessert spread graces the sideboard.



This disarming little marzipan hedgehog was a delicacy for those who could afford it.

**RIGHT** Apricot knots reflect the family's access to both fresh fruits and sugar.

sugar and butter, then beat the yolks half an hour. Put it to the whites, beat in your flour, spices and seeds. A little before it goes to the oven, put it in the hoop and bake it two hours in a quick oven and let it stand two hours. It will take two hours beating.

From *The Experienced English House-keeper*, by Elizabeth Raffald, 1769

