

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? The origins of Christmas turkey

There are many favourite Christmas traditions.

One of the most popular and beloved traditions is Christmas dinner with all of the trimmings. We all have our own variations and interpretations of the Christmas dinner; however, for many households, the centerpiece of Christmas dinner is the Christmas turkey. It's a tradition we can all remember growing up with, but may not be aware that its origins date back many centuries.

Christmas dinner can vary from country to country around the world. However, in many regions of the world, specifically countries that were former British colonies, Christmas dinner has ties to the English Christmas dinner, which most often consists of roasted meats and pudding of some form.

According to some sources, turkeys were first introduced to Britain more than 500 years ago by Yorkshireman William Strickland who, in 1526, came into possession of six turkeys from American Indian traders during his travels and sold them for two pence each in Bristol. Previous to this, roast goose, beef, boar's head or even peacock was the preferred meat for Christmas dinner. It has been said that Henry VIII was the first English King to dine on turkey; however, Edward VII was responsible for popularizing turkey for Christmas dinner. Turkey also came to replace peacock on the table of the Royal courts.

Some sources credit Queen Victoria for helping to solidify the turkey's place at the Christmas dinner table through her marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha of Germany. It has been said that he brought the tradition of turkey from his homeland to Britain and by the end of the 19th century, most people dined on turkey for their Christmas dinner.

It has also been said that up until the 1950s, dining on turkey for Christmas dinner was considered a luxury, as it was about this time when refrigerators became common in households and turkeys also became more affordable and accessible for families. According to some sources, it would take an entire week's wage in 1930 to purchase a turkey. It's also been said that turkey's popularity as the preferred roasted meat for Christmas dinner may also be attributed to the bird's larger size for a family dinner and its affordability. We all eagerly anticipate Christmas dinner with the Christmas turkey or whatever our favourite Christmas dinner foods may be, as it completes the celebratory nature of the season known for peace, joy, and goodwill. It's the season of giving and is an excellent opportunity for all of us to extend generosity to those who are less fortunate, to ensure everyone shares in the joy and magic of the season, including a delicious Christmas dinner.

I sincerely wish you a very Merry Christmas and that you may enjoy your Christmas dinner (whether it may include the infamous Christmas turkey or not) surrounded by loved ones and that it may be filled with peace and joy!

New Year's Eve fireworks

New Year's Eve is a joyous occasion when we reflect on and say goodbye to the past year and look forward to the New Year with idealism and hope.

It can be full of fun and exciting traditions, such as feasts, parties with family and friends, resolutions and, of course, spectacular fireworks displays. Some of us may venture out to see a fireworks display, while some of us may stay in the comfort of our own home and view a display on our television. Fireworks at New Year's Eve are a tradition that's enjoyed worldwide with origins dating back much further than we may realize.

Many sources attribute the origins of fireworks to ancient China. These sources cite that as early 200 B.C., dried bamboo was thrown on fires and would explode once the air expanded inside the hollow stalks, which would cause a loud sound and the first firecracker emerged. This first, very basic type of firecracker is said to have been used to frighten off evil spirits and encourage good luck.

Somewhere between 600 and 900 A.D., it has been said Chinese alchemists took the next steps to develop firecrackers when they combined sulfur, saltpeter, charcoal, among other ingredients, which unbeknownst to them, became an early form of gunpowder. The Chinese would pack this substance into bamboo stalks and then throw them into fires that would cause loud explosions. Later on, paper tubes came to replace bamboo stalks and the Chinese identified other purposes for using their invention outside of warding off evil spirits and for celebrations, when in the 10th century, firecrackers were incorporated into weapons (i.e. ?crude bombs?) used against enemies during military battles.

It's been said that during the 13th century, gunpowder, as well as samples of firecracker formulas, started to make their way into Europe by explorers, diplomats and Franciscan missionaries. During this time, scientists worked diligently to build upon and improve on gunpowder for the purpose of weaponry, such as cannons and muskets. It was also during this time that fireworks were used to honour military victories, and eventually for public celebrations, as well as religious ceremonies.

According to some sources, during the Renaissance, fireworks continued to advance with the Italians, who launched projectiles and slowly burnt powdered metals, as well as charcoal in open tubes to develop sparklers, eventually creating the colourful bursts of

light and explosions we're used to seeing in fireworks presentations today. The Italians became widely recognized for their advanced displays.

It has been said that by the 1730s, colonists from England brought fireworks and their fondness for them to the Americas where fireworks displays occurred on Independence Day in 1777. The tradition took hold and eventually became a regular occurrence for celebrating events, such as presidential inaugurations and New Year's Eve.

The tradition of fireworks has evolved over the centuries, but the joy and excitement they bring to contemporary New Year's celebrations certainly hasn't. Fireworks displays are a reminder of the renewed hope and optimism we associate with the impending New Year.

As the Member of Parliament for Dufferin-Caledon, I wish you a wonderful New Year's celebration however you may choose to spend the holiday and a very happy and healthy 2017!

