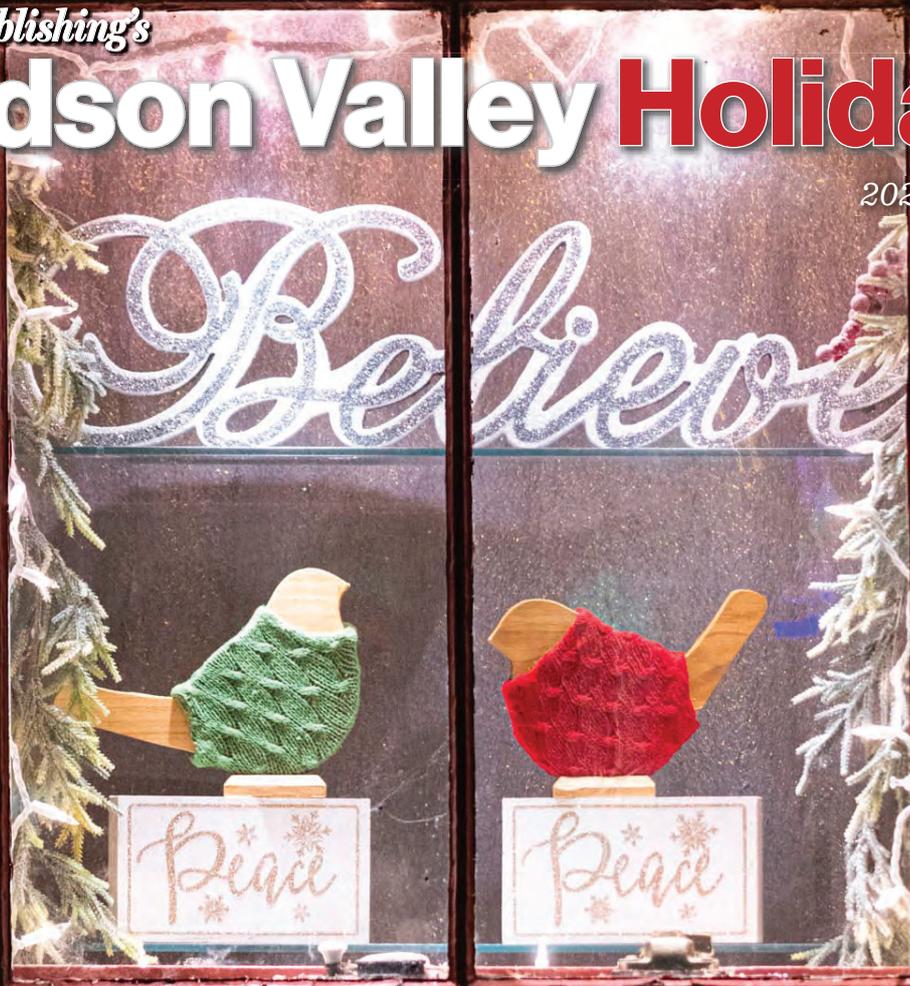


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Once and forever

A Christmas Eve fable

by Brian Hollander

ONCE HALLOWEEN HAS passed, and Thanksgiving has gone through the woods, once the Hanukkah candles have been lit and the prayers are complete, the attentions of a small town such as Woodstock inevitably turn toward the climax of the holiday season, the arrival of old Saint Nick himself on Christmas Eve on the village green.

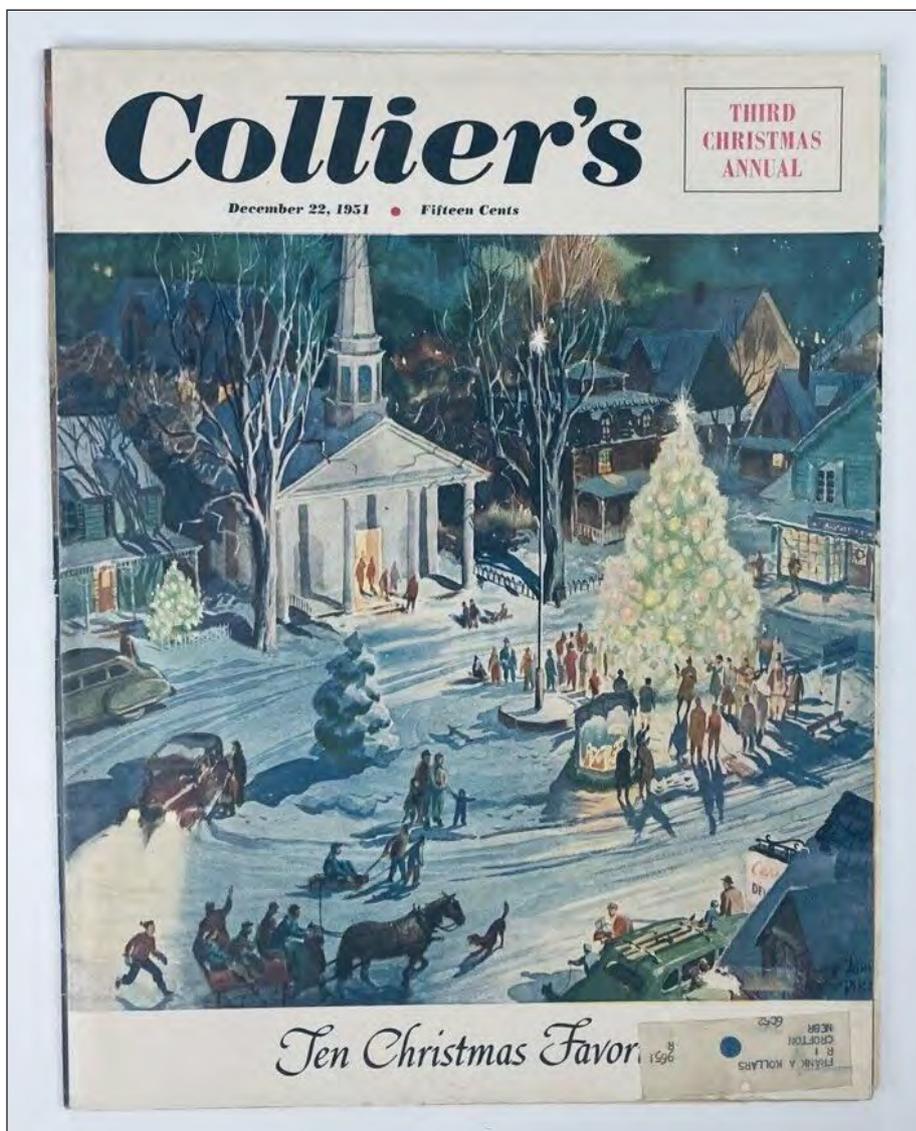
Since the 1930s, it has become a town tradition for Santa Claus to appear, as if by magic, in some form or fashion, even as he plies his worldwide trade, dropping off billions (yes, billions) of presents on this single night! Magic, indeed!

In recent years, in the 2000s, we can remember Santa arriving in a flying rainbow-painted VW bus. Another year, it was in a house built atop a fire engine. He's been pulled in carts by several species and ridden in a trolley car. He once appeared clutching the rooftop steeple of the Dutch Reformed Church, and another atop the stores across Tinker street.

You get the picture.

'We were somewhere in the south of France, dropping off presents, when word came through that there was a problem in a small town in the Catskills...'

Back in 1951, while Woodstock's Christmas Eve Committee made its preparations, the national magazine, *Collier's*, a rival of the *Saturday Evening Post*, featured on its cover a John Pike watercolor of Christmas on the Woodstock village green. It was a pastoral Rockwell-like setting, much reduced in population from the street-stuffed crowds that gather today.



Collier's' 1951 Christmas issue with an illustration of the Woodstock Village Green by John Pike.

The method of Santa's arrival has always been a deep secret, known only to a coveted few. What was also not general knowledge — and kids, cover your ears here — was that a Santa surrogate was at work most often, engaged to cover for the real Saint Nick. Through some sort of prestidigitation, an individual could actually become Santa for the ceremony.

One year in the not-too-recent past, it was determined that Santa should arrive riding bareback on an animal. No, not just

any animal. On the back of an elephant! Where they got the eight-foot-tall, 8800-pound Asian *Elephas Maximus* was another of the event's well-kept secrets. You can imagine what it was like trying to keep her hidden in Woodstock.

The elephant (her trainer, who came along with her, called her Sweetheart) dwarfed Old Joe, that year's designated Santa. It didn't help that Sweetheart arrived late to the party, and that Joe didn't have much, or any, experience riding that



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high. When the two parties were introduced to one another at the firehouse staging area, Sweetheart was bemused and Joe, well, he could have been having a nervous breakdown.

About ten minutes before Santa was due at the village green, Joe was in full white-bearded red regalia, waiting for the trainer to help him on board. But he got a little too close to Sweetheart and sneezed, which caused his rather large companion to shuffle her front feet. She stepped close to Joe, who pulled his right foot away. And the weighty animal's foot just barely touched Joe's little toe, which, though barely nipped, painfully swelled up immediately.



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Joe screamed and dropped his beard, ran down the hallway, and wasn't seen again until the following Tuesday, which was New Year's Eve.

(An excerpt follows from an exclusive interview with Santa Claus by a *Woodstock Times* editor, sometime after the holidays, someplace warm.)

WT: So where were you when you heard of the toe business?

Santa: Well, we were somewhere in the south of France, dropping off presents when word came through the ELF (Evolutionary Levitation Fone) network that there was a problem in a small town in

Hudson Valley Holidays

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the Catskills. I had known of the town, of course, because it was famous, and, well, hey, I'm Santa Claus. I always paid attention to Woodstock because it's such a loving ceremony, one that started its traditional ceremonies with my appearances as a way to distribute food to the needy during the depression of the 1930s.

WT: How long have you been doing this

Santa Claus thing?

Santa: Oh, I guess began around 280 A.D. when they called me Saint Nicholas. Somewhere along the way, I became known as the patron saint of children. Over the years my purview stretched out, and we began giving little gifts — tokens, really. Now we've got to carry around big-screen TVs, Ford F-150s, all kinds of crazy

electronic devices...

WT: What do you do when you're not making gifts, or delivering them?

Santa: Well, it's pretty much a year-round thing these days. But I don't mind sitting around for a few days in February to recharge, maybe relax with a good cigar, feed the reindeer. Ms. Claus and I get away for a few days...

WT: What did you do when you heard about Woodstock possibly not having a Santa for the village green event?

Santa: Well what could I do? It threw off the whole schedule, a million presents here, couple of hundred thousand there, calibrating the operation. Thank goodness I have a good crew, with the elves back at the plant, who quickly devised a whole new schedule. I had to go to Woodstock...

The Woodstock town clerk (who was chief of the Christmas Eve Committee that year) picks up the story from there. "When Joe got his toe crushed, I thought we were done for ... no Santa on Christmas Eve. I looked around, saw Sam, thought, no good, too skinny. Same with Rennie. And we had no costume! Joe had run off wearing it. Can't have a Santa wearing overalls.... I thought maybe I could get a hat and become Ms. Santa for a year...

We were getting desperate. Five minutes to departure, no Santa.

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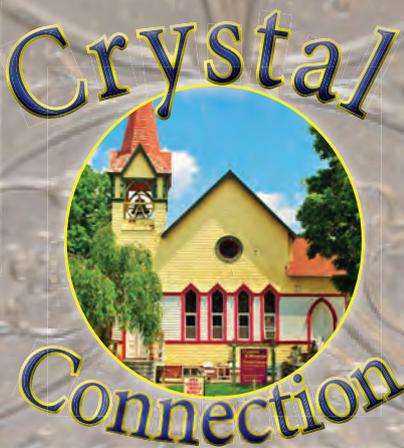
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And then I heard him. 'Ho, Ho, let's go!' I looked up and saw him on top of Sweetheart, looking completely at home, and I thought, oh, great, Joe got it together! Now if he can only hold it together.

But there was something different about him. His beard was whiter and longer, and he was calm and confident, where Joe had been on the verge of cracking up.

And Sweetheart was completely at ease, and enjoying herself, too. A sack overflowing with wrapped presents accompanied Santa. I wondered where that had come from.

Anyhow, the show went off beautifully. The crowds packed the streets. They were awed, but respectfully moved over when Sweetheart came through, Santa perched up high on her back, laughing, mugging for the people, throwing out gifts.

I thought, 'Bravo, Joe, you're our guy.'

It took Santa another hour to give out stockings to all the children, as the crowds, some nipping from flasks, stayed warm on a pretty cold night. They drifted off. Santa, somehow back up on Sweetheart, whispering in her ears, rode the lovely elephant back to the firehouse.

And he somehow appeared next to me there, though I didn't see him climb down. He called me by my name, though he clearly wasn't Joe, and said how much he had enjoyed the evening.



DION OGUST

We (the whole committee) were going to The Pub after seeing Sweetheart securely taken care of, and I asked Santa if he'd like to come along. He said no, mumbling something about miles to go before he could sleep. He smiled deeply, and tapped the side of his nose with his index finger. And then was gone! I couldn't tell if I'd imagined it or not, but I've never forgotten it."

WT: So how'd you accomplish that, spending all that time here and still get to the rest of the world?

Santa: Well, you know, we have our ways.

I mean, how do we get a billion packages distributed worldwide in one night? You gotta have faith, and a lot of help.

WT: Will you ever come back to Woodstock?

Santa: There's an old legend that says if you spend three nights in the shadow of Overlook Mountain, you will always return to Woodstock. I have spent my three nights and more there (even saw Mingus at the Lake in '77).

Truth is, I return to Woodstock once every year. See you on the green!



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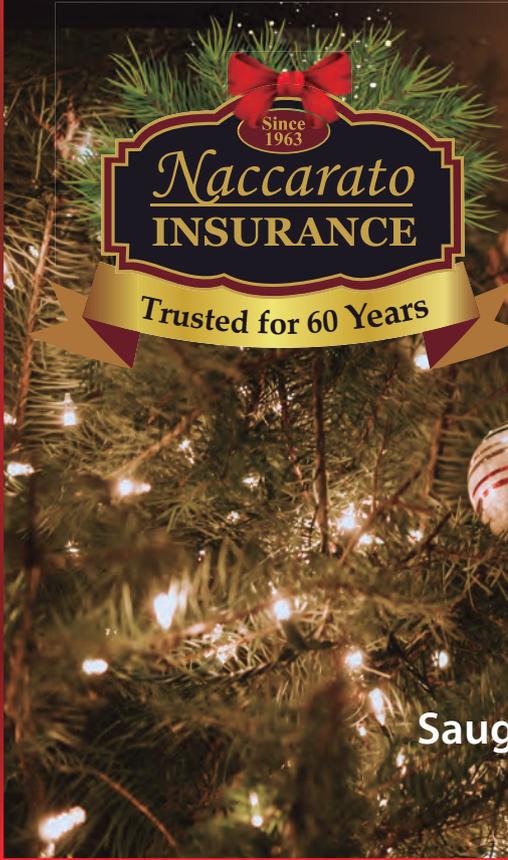
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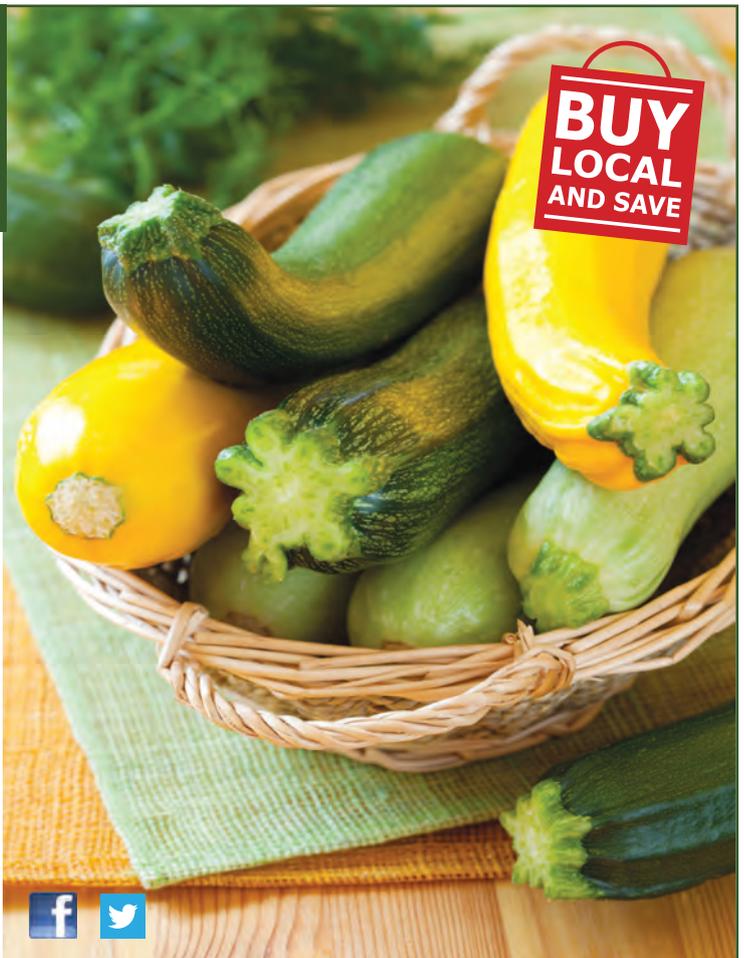
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LAUREN THOMAS

Members of the New Paltz Jewish community brought their family menorahs to the community center for the last night of Hanukkah.

“There’s so much light and joy”

The New Paltz annual Hanukkah celebration

by Cloey Callahan

NEW PALTZ CELEBRATES its Hanukkah holiday traditions. Tobi Watson remembers latkes, dreidel, and holiday parties.

Growing up, Watson and her entire family – sisters, brothers, grandparents, parents and cousins – would get together every year to celebrate Hanukkah. Her favorite part? Eating tons of fried food,

latkes and apple sauce.

She grew up going to The Jewish Congregation of New Paltz, which had the same rabbi for 38 years, Bill Strongin. In August of last year rabbi Adam Cerino-Jones took over.

“We’d light the menorah each night, eat tons of fried food, and get a gift each day,” said Watson.

Hanukkah traditions are celebrated all over the world, including here in the Hudson Valley.

“Hanukkah was derived by ancient rabbis over 2000 years ago,” said Cerino-Jones. “It doesn’t have the same level of seriousness and precedence as Rosh Hashanah or Passover, which are ordained in the torah. But it became important because it’s in the same part of the calendar year as a lot of other holidays.”

According to Jewish tradition, after the Maccabees’ victory over the Greeks, there was only enough oil to burn for one day in the temple.

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PHOTOS BY LAUREN THOMAS

Serving up homemade latkes at the New Paltz Jewish Community Center's annual Hanukkah party in 2018.

Lighting the menorah commemorates a miracle. The eight candles symbolize the number of days that the temple lantern blazed. The ninth, the shamash, is a helper candle used to light the others.

“Traditionally speaking, you’re supposed to use oil rather than candles if you can,” said Cerino-Jones. “The vast majority use candles instead, adding them from right to left, but lighting them from left to right. The shamash is elevated to distinguish it from the rest.”

Once the menorah is lit, Cerino-Jones explains, the light off it shouldn’t be used for anything other than to celebrate the miracle. That means people shouldn’t read or eat by it.

Some people decide to promote the miracle by making the menorah visible in a win-



Josie Quinn lights a menorah at the New Paltz Jewish Community Center's Hanukkah party in 2017.

dowsill.

Oil is also why it is traditional to eat fried things. For Eastern European Jews, it's latkes or potato pancakes. In other parts of the world it's jelly donuts.

Congregations across the world cel-

ebtrate all these things in their own way, creating their own traditions as well. Despite having only spent one Hanukkah with this congregation, Cerino-Jones has joined in its traditions, which the congregants look forward to every year.

The biggest tradition in New Paltz? The annual Hanukkah party, jointly produced by the general membership and the Hebrew school, brings about 100 community members together.

Cerino-Jones describes it as "a won-

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LAUREN THOMAS

Ron Simon and Amie Adams, photographed here during the 2018 annual Hanukkah celebration, ran the Judaica Shop at the New Paltz Jewish Community Center.

derful, multigenerational experience for everyone.”

“The elders get to eat latkes with our youngest kids, sing songs and light menorahs all together,” said Cerino-Jones. A group of about ten men, known as the latketiers, make giant piles of latkes for the holiday in the kitchen of their community

center, where the party is held. They eat their potato pancakes with sour cream and apple sauce.

Also out of the kitchen are beverages, of course. Watson remembers Manischewitz wine every year.

At about the same time as the holiday party is a holiday sale where people buy me-

norahs and other Jewish accoutrements.

Like last year, Cerino-Jones will lead the group in singing songs like Ma’oz Tzur, sung

on Hanukkah after the lighting. The party is on December 10 at 4 p.m. this year. The building will be filled with community members who are ready to eat well, drink, and play games like the dreidel.

What part is Cerino-Jones looking forward to the most?

“As the rabbi of the community, it’s seeing all of my congregants get this chance to spend meaningful, significant time together,” he said. “It’s hearing the kids running around, making noise, maybe being told to quiet down a little bit. Having members that have been part of the community for 60 years see their old friends and enjoy fried potatoes. There’s so much light and joy. We don’t focus on the military victory part of it, even the miracle part, it’s just the chance in the lovely winter season to do this ritual and enjoy company.”

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by Sparrow

HAVE A FEW personal connections with Zoroastrianism. To begin with, there was a guy in my high school, I will call him Vladimir, who sent me long, intricate letters in tiny handwriting after I graduated. He was a very intellectual person who ended up teaching ancient religions at Princeton.

It took me months to realize that Vladimir was in love with me. Years later, I

visited him in his apartment in Queens, and noticed he had a burner on the stove lit, with no pot on it.

“Why is that burner on?” I idly asked.

“I am a Zoroastrian,” Vladimir explained. “We worship fire.”

I had a feeling he wasn’t kidding.

In 1987, I visited India for the first time. I flew from Athens to Mumbai and bought a train ticket to Calcutta for the next day. This was my first night in India!

I walked around my neighborhood. I’d

found a surreal hotel near the train station with twelve beds in one room – and discovered that I was in a Zoroastrian community. I passed a temple with statues of winged lions with human faces guarding the entrance. It was like the set of an Indiana Jones movie.

There are currently 47,000 Parsis – Indian Zoroastrians – in Mumbai.

When the editor of *Hudson Valley One* asked me to write about holidays, I immediately suggested Zoroastrian solstice observance.

Friedrich Nietzsche shared my fascination with Zoroastrianism, and wrote a whole book “channeling” Zoroaster, its founder. Here is a free excerpt from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*:

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lated name of Zoroaster. But did the Zoroastrians actually celebrate a winter holiday? I went online and discovered ... the Zoroastrians invented Christmas!

First of all, what's Zoroastrianism? It's an ancient monotheist religion – perhaps the oldest – originating in Iran around the seventh century B.C. Its mysterious prophet, who gave his name to the religion, wrote 17 hymns known as the *Gathas* which function as scriptures.

The holiday Christians celebrate on December 25, of course, is not in the bible. And there is zero evidence that Jesus' birth took place in winter. In fact, it's quite likely Jesus was born in the spring – the same season in which he died – because the Gospel of Luke recounts: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" while Jesus was born. Shepherds stay up all night during lambing season, in springtime, to keep an eye on birthing sheep."

Early Protestants hated Christmas, denouncing it as a pagan feast. In Boston, its celebration was outlawed.

And for good reason! According to an essay by Cyrus Kar:

Before it was Christmas, December 25th marked the celebration of Yule, a contraction of the ancient Iranian word *Yalda*. That's because classical Romans, Celts, Sachs and Saxons had adopted the pagan religion of their ancient Iranian ancestors, known as 'Mithraism'...

Another researcher, Keli Shroff, writes: "... It is interesting to note that the three wise men, the Magi, who heralded the birth of Christ, were Zoroastrians."

Frankincense and myrrh, which the Magi brought, are used in Zoroastrian temples around the globe.

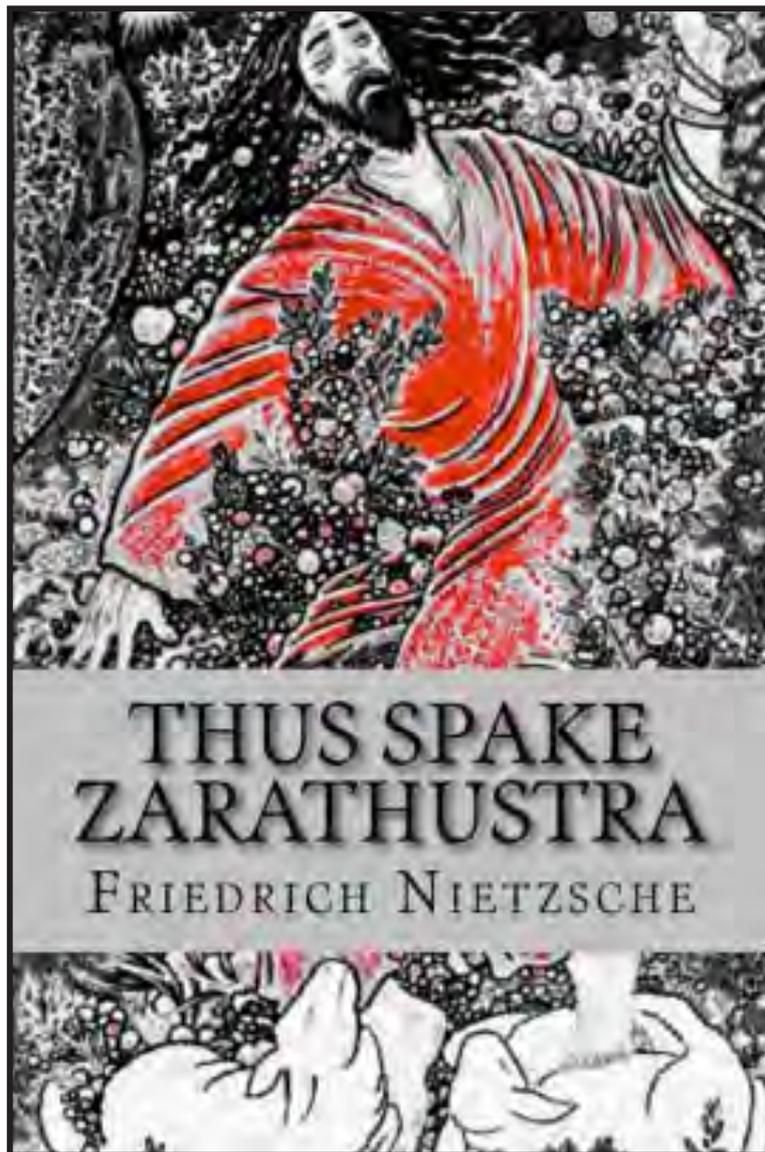
The Christmas tree is also Iranian in origin: In ancient Persia, Yalda festivities were symbolized by the evergreen tree. Young girls wrapped their wishes in silk cloth and hung them on the tree.

Eventually, it became a custom to place gifts under the evergreen tree.

As late as the 18th century, a German learnt of the Yalda tree and created



"I am Zoroastrian... we worship fire."



what we now know as the Christmas tree.

Of course, all winter celebrations derive from the astronomical fact that December 21 is the shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. Each subsequent day is longer until the summer solstice. The "light" has returned, which in Mithraism signified the birthday of Mithras, a god of the rising sun, contracts, friendship and war.

This information comes from the World Zoroastrian Organization website. But does the rest of the world accept this theory?

Well, a little. The December 25 holiday seems to be an attempt by early Christians to coopt both Mithraism, which was a semi-secret "mystery cult" often celebrated in underground tunnels, and the Saturnalia, a much more popular Roman holiday lasting from December 17 to December 23, with lots of partying, banqueting, drinking, gift-giving, and equality between masters and slaves – plus a sacrifice at the Temple of Saturn.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* hasn't heard of the Yalda theory of the Yule

celebration, but admits that Yule's roots "are complicated and difficult to trace." One of the first mentions of the holiday is by the Venerable Bede, who documents it among the Norse and Anglo-Saxons in the early eighth century. (Whenever possible, I like to mention St. Bede the Venerable, who died in Jarrow, England in 735 - but had to wait another 1164 years to be canonized!)

The Christmas tree *did* originate among German Protestants in the 16th century, but no one knows exactly why. Legend has it that Martin Luther himself was the first to add candles to the tree.

As for the Magi, Wikipedia tells us the word *magi* is the plural of Latin *magus* ... derived from Old Persian *magu* , i.e., the religious caste into which Zoroaster was born. The term refers to the Persian priestly caste of Zoroastrianism.

So maybe the followers of Zoroaster are right, and we should all wish each other "Merry Yalda" throughout late December!

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The winter solstice

December holidays invite the light

by Susan DeMark

“AND YOU, MY father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”
— Dylan Thomas

A library will host a winter's evening of activities like storytelling and crafting paper lanterns. Local Native tribes and a community farm will host a gathering to give thanks and honor winter's slower rhythms that foster renewal for the coming seasons. A temple will hold its annual community lighting of the Hanukkah menorah. A Kwanzaa festival will feature the lighting of the kinara symbolizing the seven principles. A parishioner at a church will light an Advent candle for the new week as Christmas draws near.



PROVIDED

Rabbi Yael Romer leads a prior Community Candle Lighting of the hanukkiyah (the Hanukkah menorah) outside of the Congregation Emanuel of the Hudson Valley. On Dec. 10, the congregation's annual event will conclude with the lighting of the outdoor hanukkiyah.

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Make no mistake. It's the time of winter solstice and the December holy days and festivals. While each celebration is different, all highlight what is so precious, powerful and sustaining at this time of year. During mankind's dark, challenging times, people in the Hudson Valley are going to gather at solstice ceremonies and events.

December's holy days and festivals of varied spiritual and cultural traditions will incorporate lighting rituals for healing, rebirth, resilience, and community.

The essence of taking notice, calling upon, honoring, and celebrating light, is embedded in the winter solstice, the day

of shortest daylight that humans have observed since ancient times. Daylight in mid- to late December lasts just over nine hours daily, while June days give those of us in the northeastern United States some 15 hours of daylight.

Amid December's days of tingling cold, snowflakes that promise more to come, and long nights with stunning moon shadows shaped by tree silhouettes, a day arrives when darkness reaches its pinnacle, after which the planetary cycle for the northern hemisphere will head toward gaining daylight. After the winter solstice, the hours of daylight begin to lengthen, by minutes per day.

The winter solstice, like the summer solstice and the fall and spring equinoxes, connects us to the natural world and its rhythms. The Earth is alive. In times of mankind's strife, turbulence, wars, and a sense among many that we are living in



SUSAN DEMARK

The winter sunlight casts long shadows on a marsh in New Paltz. In winter, the North Pole is tilted away from the sun. In the Northern Hemisphere, the sun traces a lower arc across the sky, hence longer shadows.

dark days, the winter solstice represents a simple, profound comfort, peace and solidity. We take note of cycles that are around us in the natural world.

Our ancestors in ancient times were acutely aware of the days of shortest daylight. People may have observed the winter solstice as early as the last part of the Stone Age, about 10,200 B.C. Indigenous peoples held ceremonies that lasted for weeks and honored deities of death and rebirth. Various societies had

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PHYLLIS McCABE

The tribal Winter Solstice ceremony in Kingston last year closed with an offering of tobacco for the release of what people do not want to take into the long night and winter. This year, the Native tribes' Winter Solstice ceremony, to be held at Seed Song Farm and Center on Dec. 21, will again have a tobacco offering.

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their own ways of paying homage to it. In Scandinavia, the Norse had a pagan festival for weeks to months. They brought home long oak logs, which they set afire on one end, the Yule log, at times feasting until it burned to the other end.

This year, the winter solstice occurs on Thursday, December 21, at 10:27 p.m. EST. Pagan festivals and indigenous ceremonies in the northern hemisphere will mark the event. In Ulster County, a Native American ceremony will take place at Seed Song Farm in Kingston on December 21 at 4:30 p.m.

“We celebrate the solstice and the equinox. It’s important to connect with the changing of the seasons and what those seasons mean,” said the Rev. Nick

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Miles, Tecumseh Red Cloud, Pamunkey Tribe. "While it is still being finalized, the winter-solstice ceremony will begin with the Haudenosaunee nations' Thanksgiving prayer, referred to as words spoken before all others. In a tobacco offering, those participating will be invited to think about what they want to discard from their lives, and as the tobacco is set afire, the smoke conveys this to the Creator."

Coming after the autumn harvest, the beginning of the winter season represents a quieter time – one to go inside oneself, to reflect, listen, watch, and think about planting the seeds not just in the Earth but in one's being, according to Miles. If we liken this to the progression of the seasons and how the ground rests during the winter, the slower rhythms offer a time of feeding the spirit and renewing the soul.

The longest night of the year surely beckons many of us – as do many December days when the sun sets so early – to want to stay indoors and not head out into a dark night. Esopus Library is holding an event

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for people to do just that: The longest night of the year will be celebrated there on December 21 from 6 to 8 p.m. The library is inviting people to join in a program of reading stories, making an "enlightening" craft – paper lanterns – and closing out the evening "by creating our own perfect hot cocoas." (Talk about a delicious reward for braving the longest night.)

Shannon Powell, the children's program coordinator, explained that the winter solstice is something that everyone could enjoy together. She is fascinated by how people feel the effects of the change from Daylight Savings Time. By gathering on the date of shortest daylight, she said, "You're creating your own light and coming together as a community."

December's spiritual services and cultural festivities in Ulster County vary, but have in common the expression of values and community through candle-lighting ceremonies. On December 30 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Dr. Margaret Wade-Lewis Center will hold its third annual Kwanzaa celebration at Redeemer Lutheran Church in New Paltz.

The lighting of the candles on the kinara, the candleholder, is an important component of this secular holiday. The seven candles, one of black and three each of red and green, represent Kwanzaa's seven foundational principles of Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose and resolve), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). The candle-lighting provides an opportunity to share lessons and inspirations about the principles. There will also be drumming, dance, and refreshments.

This year, Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, occurs from sundown on December 7 until sundown on December 15. Those observing this holiday place and light another candle on the hanukkah (the Hanukkah menorah) each evening. Congregation Emanuel of the Hudson Valley in Kingston is holding two candle-lighting events.

On December 8, the lighting of the hanukkah occurs before the Shabbat candles. The teaching that evening will incorporate the theme of bringing light to the Ugandan Jewish community, specifically the LGBTQ individuals who are enduring the targeting of that country's harsh anti-gay legislation.

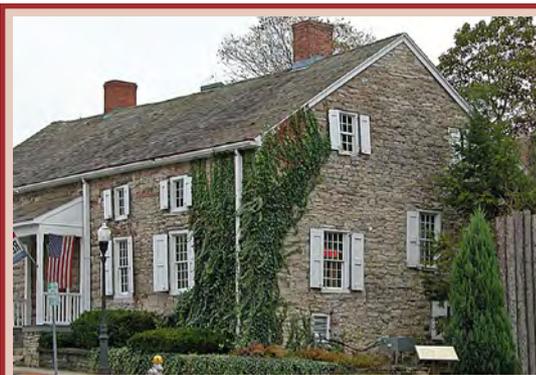
On December 10 from 4 to 5 p.m., Congregation Emanuel will hold its annual community candle-lighting. The program will include a short play, storytelling with rabbi Yael Romer, congregational lighting for those who bring their hanukkahs, and

gathering in the social hall for donuts. It will conclude at 5 p.m. with the lighting of the outdoor hanukiah.

Said rabbi Romer said, "We all need light, especially when the daylight is shorter. In the world today, there is so much pain and darkness, to increase the light - bringing light, awareness, and healing - is so important.... In light we see, in light we are seen."

Throughout my life, I have held a special place for the winter solstice. I have honored it by sharing a meal with my dearest ones before a fireplace, reading stories and essays, saying prayers of gratitude, and taking long walks to watch the sunset that day. (I am an avid reader of sunrise and sunset charts.) The sun's arc, at its lowest of the year around the days of this solstice, causes incredibly long, beautiful shadows in the landscape. This year, I plan to make a wreath of evergreen boughs, twigs, pine cones, dried grasses, berries, and other natural elements, inspired in part by Mari Silva's book *Yule*.

Here's to the winter solstice! The December holidays feature the precious hours of sunlight that the heavens provide and that we fashion in our lives and communities. Just as the day of longest night comes, there is the sureness of daylight's return in coming days.



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My childhood Christmas

Trimming the tree was my favorite part, aside from the presents.

by Violet Snow

“WAKE UP! It’s midnight! Santa Claus was here.”

At first it’s hard to process my mother’s hand on my shoulder, but her words pierce the haze of sleep. I sit up, rub my eyes once, and then I’m wide awake. I jump out of bed, jam my feet into slippers, and run into the hallway. My brother appears at his bedroom door, and we charge down the steps to the living room, where the tree glistens with lights and tinsel, presiding over piles of wrapped packages.

Our parents watch fondly as we grab and tear, grab and tear, holding up the bounty Santa has brought us. Then we read the little tags to hand out the gifts we all bought each other.

After the gifts are opened and organized into their respective piles and the paper carnage is cleared, the four of us go back to bed. When my brother and I wake at six the next morning, we play happily with our new toys while Mom and Dad happily sleep in.

I assumed all kids woke at midnight on Christmas Eve, but I discovered, once I was old enough to compare notes, that my friends had to wait to open their presents until their parents woke up on Christmas morning.

How tantalizing for them! I felt lucky to observe a custom that gave us the thrill of waking when children were normally asleep, and then having the instant gratification of enjoying our toys as soon as we popped out of bed in the morning.



The author and her mom.

I don’t know what inspired my parents to follow the midnight gift-giving tradition. Apparently the custom of opening gifts on Christmas Eve comes from Europe, specifically Scandinavia and some central and Eastern European countries. Maybe it was handed down by my grandfather’s Swiss-German ancestors.

ALTHOUGH MY FATHER OCCASIONALLY attended church, my mother was not religious. Our Christmas habits were

pretty secular. We did have a nativity set, with a wooden stable and statues of all the major characters, including an ox and a donkey. I liked to set up the scene and bring the wise men in to gather around, with about as much religious fervor as when I played with figures in a dollhouse.

Trimming the tree was my favorite part of Christmas, aside from the presents. On a weekend afternoon in early December, we’d set a ladder on the staircase and climb into the attic. I’d help my mother push a huge square cardboard carton to the attic door, and we’d lever it down to my father.

In the living room, we’d take out the lights and untangle the cords before plugging them in and replacing any burned-out bulbs. Once the lights were placed on the tree, my father dissolved into the background, while the rest of us pulled out the myriads of boxes filled with fragile ornaments nestled among interlocking sheets of cardboard — like boxes of olive oil or wine.

A lot of effort went into creating a balance of different ornament styles among

the branches. We made sure the pink and white balls with scalloped indentations weren't all clustered together. I loved clipping on the metallic birds with sprays of plastic filaments for tails.

An Italian-American neighbor of ours was one of nine singing LaFalce Brothers, and we had their Christmas album, which we listened to over and over while trimming the tree. The record had all the standard carols, as well as some I didn't usually hear elsewhere — "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" and "Loo-Lay, Thou Little Tiny Child."

By the time it was getting dark, we had run out of ornaments. We replaced the empty boxes in the big square carton, to be hoisted back to the attic until January. Then we'd break out the eggnog, turn the tree lights on and the lamps off, and sit on the couch, sipping the creamy sweetness and admiring our sparkly tree while the LaFalce Brothers crooned on.



It was fun to get up and scuff my feet on the carpet, then reach toward a strand of hanging tinsel and watch it sway towards the static charge of my finger. A tiny shock would follow, as tinsel and finger met. Do all kids know about tinsel?

MY MOM AND I BAKED CHRISTMAS cookies together. We made only one kind, butter cookies that we rolled out with a rolling pin. I cut out shapes with cookie cutters: stars, snowmen, Santas, reindeer. I decorated the shapes with sprinkles and with colorful lines of sugary gel, squeezed out of a tube. I collected the scraps left over from around the shapes and rolled them out into smaller and smaller circles, cutting shapes each time, until there was so little left over, I was allowed to eat the rest of the dough raw.

On Christmas afternoon, we had a turkey dinner in the dining room, but this meal lacked the festivity of Thanksgiving, despite the similar menu. It was simply overshadowed by the gifts and the other customs, so specific to the winter holiday,

while Thanksgiving was all about the dinner.

I wasn't sure why my mom bothered with Christmas dinner, but she seemed to feel it was important. By the time I was in my teens, the dinner faded away, as did much of the magic of the other traditions.

But when I was little, the tree and the

cookies and the eggnog and the LaFalce Brothers all merged into a splendid Christmas high that I recall, now that I'm in my sixties, much more clearly than the coveted piles of presents. I still crave eggnog every December, although it doesn't taste nearly as good as it did back then.

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When: Saturday, December 16 at 7 pm, Sunday, December 17 at 2 pm
Where: The Woodstock Playhouse, 103 Mill Hill Road, Woodstock
More info: www.woodstockplayhouse.org/charlie-brown-and-frosty

Into the Light. The Vanaver Caravan, in collaboration with Arm-of-the-Sea Theater, will usher in the holiday season with a family-friendly performance. All the magic of Arm-of-the-Sea Theater's giant puppets with the celebratory vision of the Vanaver Caravan's world dance repertoire. The fairytale-like story follows a young girl as she seeks to find joy and hope in the face of the waning winter light. The performance celebrates many of the world's traditions; bringing light, joy and beauty into the darkest time of the year. *Into the Light* honors such holidays as Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa, Yule, Winter Solstice, Sankta Lucia (Sweden) and Diwali (India) through dance and music

When: Saturday, December 9 and Sunday, December 10 at 2 & 4 pm
Where: The Rosendale Theater, 408 Main Street, Rosendale
More info: www.vanavercaravan.org

The Holly Berry Trail. The Junior League event has been going for two decades. Six Kingston homes decked out for the holiday make a trail of holiday cheer and splendor. It is sure to inspire your own decorating spirit.

When: December 9, 10 am-2 pm
Where: Trail-goers will pick up their wrist bands and maps at Halter Realty, 89 N. Front Street, Kingston. More info and to purchase tickets: www.Kingston.jl.org or call Kristen (845) 943-0922

Barnwood2023: A Pop-Up Queer Art Show & Sale.

When: Friday, December 8- Sunday, December 10.
Where: Camp Kingston, 36 St. James Street, Kingston.
More info: <https://www.pinkstallionevents.com/barnwood/>

Holiday Swing Dance with ClubSwing and Dance Lesson with Got2Lindy. All are welcome! No partner or experience needed to attend. Join the fun!

When: Saturday, December 9, beginner lesson 7:30-8:00 pm, dancing until 10:30 pm
Where: White Eagle Hall, 487 Delaware Ave, Kingston

Yummy!!!
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More info: www.got2lindy.com

Holiday Craft & Book Faire. Handmade Crafts. Children's Book Sale. Make your own broom or tin/blacksmith project. Hot food & drinks. Free to attend.

When: Sunday, December 10, 10 am-2 pm

Where: the Ashokan Center, 477 Beaverkill Road, Olivebridge

More info: <http://ashokancenter.org>

Wreaths Across America Wreath Day. Ceremony followed by laying of remembrance wreaths on Veterans graves. All are welcome to attend and/or volunteer to place wreaths.

When: December 16 @ 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm

When: New Paltz Rural Cemetary, 81 Plains Rd, New Paltz

More info: www.wreathscrossamerica.org/NY0270

Belleayre Holiday Bazaar. Give the gift of the Catskills to your friends & loved ones! Get your holiday shopping done on the Mezzanine level of the Discovery Lodge with tons of unique gifts, handmade items, and more from local artisans in the region.

When: Saturday and Sunday, December 16 and 17, 10 am-3 pm.

Where: Belleayre Mountain, 181 Galli Curci Rd. Highmount

More info: 845-254-5600 or <https://www.belleayre.com/event/holiday-bazaar/>

Theater on the Road performances of A Christmas Carol. You've seen Scrooge, Tiny Tim and the Ghosts of Christmas from a theater seat. This season be a part of the story during Theatre On The Road's interactive dinner-theatre performance of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol. This event features a three-course meal following a reception where guests meet Ebenezer Scrooge, Tiny Tim, Nephew Fred and carolers in authentic Victorian costume. Audience members are encouraged to interact with the Dickens' characters throughout the performance. Adapted from Charles Dickens' classic, the production is a tribute to the spirit of a traditional holiday, with script written by Theatre On The Road founders Frank and Kristen Marquette.

When: from now through December 20.

Where: Locations throughout the Hudson Valley

More info: www.murdercafe.net; for information call 845-475-7973.

Historic Holiday Market Fair. The Historical Society of Woodstock (HSW) will hold its annual Holiday Market Fair HSW's exhibition space will be transformed into a Holiday Fair reminiscent of earlier times including the work of local artists, potters, weavers, jewelry makers, treats, wreaths and more -- all on sale.

When: Saturday & Sunday, December 9 & 10, 10 am-3 pm.

Where: Historical Society of Woodstock, 20 Comeau Drive, Woodstock

More info: www.historicalsofwoodstock.org



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ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS

at the FDR Presidential Library and Museum
Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site

FREE FAMILY-FRIENDLY EVENTS

Saturday, December 9, 2023

Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center
FDR Presidential Library and Home of FDR National Historic Site

CHILDREN'S READING FESTIVAL
1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Presented by the FDR Presidential Library and Museum and the Friends of the Poughkeepsie Public Library District

This year's authors include:

Barbara Ann Mojica
LITTLE MISS HISTORY TRAVELS TO HYDE PARK, HOME OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT: PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM
and
Barbara Guerriero-Flites
THE MEMOIR OF A WHITE HOUSE DOG: MY LIFE WITH PRESIDENT FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT; 1940-1945

HOLIDAY CARDS FOR SAILORS
Noon to 4:00 p.m.

Children and their parents are invited to come to the Henry A. Wallace Center and make holiday cards to send to the men and women serving on the USS *Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt*, a U.S. Navy missile destroyer.

PICTURE TIME WITH SANTA
1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

REFRESHMENTS
Noon to 4:00 p.m.
Provided by the FDR Presidential Library and Museum

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

December 9, 2023

9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Free Admission to the FDR Presidential Library and Museum

9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Free Admission to the Home of FDR National Historic Site

www.fdrlibrary.org
www.nps.gov/hofr

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