



Keeping Christmas: Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land

Kathleen Stokker

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The modern Norwegian-American Christmas—celebrated with family feasts of lutefisk, lefse, rømmegröt, rull, and fruit soup, observed in homes where trees are decorated with straw ornaments, flags, and heart-shaped baskets—is a warm and regenerative family holiday for millions of Americans whose ancestors came from Norway. It is the time to carry on customs whose origins have been lost in the past.

Kathleen Stokker's *Keeping Christmas: Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land* brings home the stories of Christmas customs in Norway and America. With fascinating details, with scores of accounts of ancient and modern Christmases, with recipes and photographs, this book reminds Norwegians and Norwegian Americans of their connections to each other and explains how their celebrations differ on this most holy of Christian holidays. In telling readers about Norwegian folklore, she illuminates for them the cultural history of both countries.

Stories about the customs:

Lutefisk, the smelly, gelatinous fish loved by some Norwegian Americans and valued by many more, is a reminder of fasting during Advent and of the difficulties overcome by immigrants.

To the surprise of modern Norwegians, julebukking—Christmas mumming—was widely practiced in the midwestern United States, where it is still enjoyed in a few communities.

The marzipan Christmas pig is a reminder that the season of festive consumption began with the fall slaughter, which provided the rare chance to eat fresh meat.

Norwegian flags hanging on a American tree do more than commemorate the Old Land; they were first used on Norwegian trees as the country gained independence.

Well into the nineteenth century, rural Norwegians feared the terrible oskorei, spirits who stole horses and kidnapped people who did not have special protection on Christmas Eve.

The nisse, the benevolent farm spirit, was given a bowl of porridge at Christmas time to thank him for his protection during preceding year and to ensure its continuation in the year to come.

In medieval times, Norwegian peasants were required to brew beer at Christmas time on pain of a fine or confiscation of property.

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