

Canarsie Courier

December 7, 2017 - Page 14

14

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East Flatbush

Wyckoff Farmhouse Welcomes St. Nick

By Tiph Browne

A Dutch Christmas wonderland was opened to the public on Saturday as many kids visited the Wyckoff Farmhouse Museum, 5816 Clarendon Road, anxiously awaiting the arrival of St. Nicholas. Melissa Branfman, executive director of the museum, organized St. Nicholas Day, which the museum has run annually for over 16 years.

"St. Nicholas Day is the Dutch predecessor to Christmas," stated Branfman. "A lot of our Christmas traditions come from this celebration of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of children. His feast is on the 6th of December and we celebrate it on the first Saturday, the closest Saturday."

The children enjoyed games and toys, made pomander, which are cloves in citrus fruits, and decorated Dutch clogs called klompen.

Branfman continued, "As the story goes, Dutch children would put their klompen (shoes) out for St. Nicholas' horse Schimmel, every night, with hay and carrots to feed him, and St. Nicholas would return the favor. If they were good, they'd get a gold coin. If they were bad, they'd get a lump of coal, which has a lot of resonance with our American Christian tradition of putting out a stocking with milk and cookies for St. Nick."

Treats called Oliebollen, also known as Dutch donuts, were made on a hearth by one of the museum's gardeners. The process required the dough to be cooked in tallow, or beef fat, which he was able to use with his experience as a butcher.

The children and their parents gathered later in the event to watch the entrance of St. Nicholas on Schimmel as they sang to him. He dismounted his

horse and asked the kids to sit for a reading of *The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale*. They also signed a red book, signifying if they were naughty or nice, and then received their treats. The day ended with Christmas tree decorating and lighting.

You may see and purchase more photos from the event by visiting www.canarsiecourier.com. Just click on the blue button.



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