



Thanksgiving Decorating Suggestions and a Party Trick from a Century Ago

By Vic Bary

After scouring old Cranford newspapers for information about how residents of our town celebrated Thanksgiving a century ago, I had to admit defeat. While I learned that a Presidential proclamation, business closings, and high school football games were the order of the day, I found little else documenting how Thanksgiving was observed here in those bygone days. Along the way, however, I did find several articles with decorating tips, and a party trick which you can trot out while your guests digest the main course.

Decorating Suggestions

In a Timely Suggestions that Will Help the Hostess article entitled “A Thanksgiving Tea”, the November 17, 1910 *Cranford Citizen* offered the following suggestions. (Personally, I would keep the stain remover and fire extinguisher close at hand if you decide to act on these suggestions.)

“A reception of tea on this festival day is distinguished chiefly by appropriate decorations, costumes and refreshments. The rooms may be completely transformed by taking down all the portieres and other draperies and replacing them with others made of cranberries strung on stout red thread. Popcorn strung and alternating with cranberries makes a pleasing effect. Strings of cranberries are very pretty festooned over white window curtains.”

“Cover lamps and all gas and electric lights with shades made of red, white, and blue crepe tissue paper and for stools and divans have large pumpkins; they are very comfortable and are admirably adapted for the purpose....”

Three years later the November 2, 1913 *Cranford Citizen* carried a brief entry entitled “Thanksgiving Decorations”, which offered risk-free decorating suggestions.

“Tiny paper pumpkins make attractive place cards, or if one is skilled in the use of water colors a clever one may be made from water color board decorated with fruits or flowers. Tiny canoes of birch bark to hold the boutonniere make acceptable souvenirs. If one has not the time or talent to make place card favors very clever little papier mache bonbon boxes may be bought, representing

roast turkey, mince pies, pumpkin or other designs appropriate to the season. Tiny wishbones polished with sandpaper and tied to a card are very satisfactory and suggest the kindly thought of the hostess.”

A Thanksgiving Day Party Trick

If you find the Thanksgiving festivities beginning to flag, you might try “A Thanksgiving Dinner Trick” offered by the November 26, 1908 *Cranford Citizen*.

“This is a curious little experiment which will interest everybody at the dinner table, for it calls for nothing except what you will likely find on the table.”

“Cut an orange into halves and ... remove the pulp, leaving the peel entire in the form of a hollow hemisphere or cup. With a pocketknife or toothpick bore two holes in the bottom of this cup and put it into a tumbler, forcing it down about half way.”

“The tumbler should be a little smaller than the cup used so that you will have to squeeze the peel-cup a little in order to get it in. Then it will press firmly against the glass and stay where you put it instead of dropping to the bottom. Put the cup in right side up, that is, with the yellow peel below and pour red wine into it. The wine will run through the holes and you must keep pouring until the level of the wine in the glass just touches the bottom of the cup. Now fill the rest of the glass above the orange cup with water and await the results.”

“Soon you will see a thin red jet of wine rising like a fountain through the water from one of the holes. At the same time, though you cannot see it so well, a colorless stream of water flows downward through the other hole.”

“The two liquids do much mix much, but merely exchange places so that in a few minutes the lower part of the glass, below the cup, will contain the water, and the upper part will be filled wine.”

“This is as it should be, because water is heavier than wine and naturally goes to the bottom. The curious thing is that the water and the wine do not mix, but each selects a hole for itself....”

Sources:

1. *Cranford Citizen*, “Timely Suggestions that Will Help the Hostess: A Thanksgiving Tea”, 11/17/1910, page 2.
2. *Cranford Citizen*, “Thanksgiving Decorations”, 11/02/1913, p. 3
3. *Cranford Citizen*, “A Thanksgiving Dinner Trick”, 11/26/1908, p. 3

