

LITCHFIELD

HOLIDAY 2023

MAGAZINE



Holidays *in the* Hills

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE HILLS // litchfieldmagazine.com

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HOLIDAY EVENTS



House Tour

For its 27th year, the Woman's Club of Woodbury hosts their annual Holiday House Tour. The tour has been enjoyed by thousands of local and distant visitors. This year, five festively decorated homes will be open to the public on Saturday, December 9, 2023, from 10 am to 4 pm.

Refreshments and holiday treats will be served throughout the day. A time-honored tradition of holiday baskets, with fresh greenery and bows will also be available for purchase. Advance purchase tickets are \$30. Tickets, including maps, may also be purchased on the day of the tour for \$35 at the Woodbury Senior Center. The Woman's Club of Woodbury, established in 1896, is the oldest, continuously operating GFWC in the state. The club supports scholarships for Nonnewaug High School students and deserving women who are at a crossroads in their careers. In addition, we support the food bank, local arts, community projects and shelters for the homeless and domestically abused. Since 1995, the proceeds from the annual house tour have provided over \$260,000 towards these community causes.

For house tour information, contact co-chair Kris Atwood at 203-313-2639 or co-chair Claudette Volage at 203-419-5208.



THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC

Keeping Traditional Folk Songs Alive

BY ML BALL

➤ In spite of the inevitable frantic preparations, what's really wonderful about the holidays is the way they awaken the senses. The smell of gingerbread cookies. The sight of whimsical shop windows. The taste of spiced mulled wine. The sound of beloved songs and carols.

Folklorist Derek Piotr, based in Litchfield County, is making it his life's work to collect and preserve old-style folk songs and traditional music, not just those focused on the holidays but all types from around the globe.

It all began when Piotr (pronounced Peter) started record-

Folklorist, Derek Piotr visits with his aunt to listen to family songs.

POETRY

December Haiku

Darkness descends early
A foreshortening of days
The delinquent sun

Bleak bones of trees
Hold up the grey shrouded sky
An unfinished storm

Snow falls as sugar
A sweetness and a stillness
Ice snaps and shines

Bells peal, voices sing
Exclaiming wild perfect love
The heart cries joy

A time of festivals
Music, ornaments, angels
Pale gold and silver

Gathering family
To wear the cloak of mercy
Our deepest yearning

Peace, peace we pray peace
We must bear the weight of it
The light of the world

—Karen Silk



ing his grandmother's stories about her life in 2008. "She was 89 when I started and she lived to be 99, so I have ten years of stories," he says. "When she passed, I put them all on an iTunes playlist. Then in 2020, I started researching older folk music and got interested in Lena Turbyfill from western North Carolina, who had been recorded in the 1930s. In Elk Park, I visited her last living daughter, who, despite the fact that she was on oxygen, pulled off her oxygen mask and sang for me. And I just went from there."

Traveling throughout the UK and again to the mountains of North Carolina, Piotr recorded people of all sorts singing traditional folk music. But when he turned his attention to his home state of Connecticut and visited the American Folklore Center at the Library of Congress, he was shocked to find that there were no recordings from Connecticut, save for the Flanders Ballad Collection. "Their filing cabinet went from Colorado to Delaware," he explains. "Connecticut has basically been ignored by field researchers in terms of recordings of traditional music."

Starting in 2021, Piotr set out to change that. He visited libraries, churches, Quaker meetings, and square dances, asking anyone who was interested to come forward and let him record them singing old family songs. He now has hundreds of recordings from Litchfield, Fairfield, and New Haven counties. "My dream would be to have a song from every state," he says. (He currently has recordings from 21 states, as well as British Columbia, Canada,

England, Iceland, Newfoundland and Labrador, Poland, Scotland, and Serbia.) "I'm sure I can get there."

Today, Piotr has over 700 recordings in his collection, prompting him to found the Derek Piotr Fieldwork Archive in 2022. "I really want people to know that this archive of traditional music exists so that anyone interested in these songs can go to my website and hear them, and contact me to add more songs. I want to preserve this incredible art form of folk songs so that all of us can benefit from them."

This festive season of singing and celebrating seems the perfect time to sample some of Piotr's recordings. He suggests three with holiday themes:

Countdown to Christmas (fieldwork-archive.com/370.html)

Cold and Frosty Morning (fieldwork-archive.com/425.html)

The Mistletoe Bough (fieldwork-archive.com/63.html)

If you have songs to share, contact Piotr at piotrmmain@gmail.com or 203-460-0576.

To access his archive of recordings, visit fieldwork-archive.com.