

Meatball Cookies and Shortbread

Tom MacPherson grew up in LeRoy in the 1960s. His mother was Lena O'Geen and his father was Mickey MacPherson, so Tom grew up in two distinct cultures - one that enjoyed Italian meatball cookies at Christmas and the other that savored Scottish Shortbread. Several years ago, Tom contacted the Historical Society, looking for genealogical information. He was embarking on a fascinating project. Tom is on the faculty at SUNY Geneseo and is an artist who paints with egg tempera. For quite a while he had focused on

portraits of his family. These are not ordinary portraits, because they are filled with symbols and details that reflect the personality of the subject. As Tom learned about his family, he gathered stories and notes that he has crafted into a book: "Crossing Cultures: A Sicilian and American Family in Western New York." It is a very interesting story, even if you don't know the people.

"Christmas at Grandma's House - On Christmas Eve, Grandma would start cooking for the feast that followed Midnight Mass. She would

make one of her famous-Sicilian-style pizzas that had a thick homemade crust, that was seasoned just right with a combination of oreganos, garlic, onions, cayenne pepper and her fabulous sweet tomato sauce topped with Romano cheese. There would be homemade pies, apple and pumpkin, plus all of the Italian cookies one could eat, and of course some Asti for toasts. Sometimes Aunt Ida from next door would send over a plate of breaded veal cutlet or her delectable cannolis with little bits of chocolate and almonds in the custard filling that everyone would fight over. But the treat of all treats was Great Uncle Tony Argana's Homemade Italian sausage, both sweet and hot. He would only make his special recipe sausage during the Christmas season, and he always sent Grandma her ration.... As soon as Mass was over, my cousin, my aunts, relatives and friends made their way to Grandma's house, where a fabulous feast would take place. When I got to be a teenager and really understood the value of good food, Christmas with all of its trappings was a real let down. The presents were nice, but Christmas Day couldn't hold a torch to the good cheer and feeling of goodwill that was felt in the house. By 2:00 a.m. the party would be winding down and the dishes would be finished. As people got old and others past on, the tradition was abandoned to the detriment of all. There was a feeling that the Christmas season just wasn't the same anymore, and it wasn't."

p.m. and 7 p.m. each day. Tom will be joining us on Sunday, December 4 for both performances and will be willing to sign copies of his book. He'll be sitting at the 1944 kitchen table playing cards with the other men, enjoying a little homemade wine and some of Aunt Mananna's Meatball Cookies. (The recipe is in Tom's book.) We also have some Italian fig cookies to share with folks on the tours.

If you are partial to Scottish shortbread, some of those treats will be available in the 1918 parlor where you will hear the story of Tom's Aunt, Kitty MacPherson, who served with the Queen Alexandra's Royal Nursing Corps and spent eighteen months with the British Expeditionary Forces in Belgium during World War I. An excerpt from Tom's book: "In retrospect, women like my great-aunt stepped out of their roles preordained by society that kept women as homemakers and second-class citizens. They blazed the trail for women to be considered in a wholly different light. Women had been nurses in previous wars. But they were never part of the military. This war was different. The military provided this avenue for them to break free of societal gender barriers. They were responsible for hundreds of patients and they saw the grim realities of war. Women were patriotic and were encouraged to be tough, and they broke the stereotype of a woman as a delicate mother or housewife."



"The Conversion of Great-Aunt Catherine", 2011 Egg tempera on panel by Thomas McPherson

This is a tribute to Kitty McPherson. The background is a Scottish landscape which represents her proud Highland heritage. The dove and hands represent, in Catholic iconography, the Holy Spirit and God the Father, and were borrowed from a Verrochio painting, entitled "The Baptism of Christ."

Tom's book is available at the Jell-O Gallery shop for \$12. It will make a very good Christmas present. There will also be copies available at LeRoy House during the Candlelight tours on December 3 and 4 at 4

For tickets to the Candlelight tours, call 768-7433, or stop by the Jell-O Museum 10 to 4 Monday through Saturday and Sunday 1 -4. There are 40 tickets for each performance - \$5 for adults \$3.50 for students.