

Over The River and Through The Wood

by Lynne Belluscio

Well it looks like there will be snow on the ground for Thanksgiving, which certainly would have made the folks in 1844 happy. They wouldn't have to slog through axle high mud to get to grandmother's house for dinner.

It was in 1844 that the poem "Thanksgiving Day" - which we know better by "Over the River and Through the Woods" - was written. It's now a popular song for Christmas concerts. But it wasn't a Christmas poem. It's all about traveling to grandfather's house for Thanksgiving.

The author was Lydia Maria Child, a very well-known author in the 1800s. She wrote a number of books, many for children as well as the cookbook "*The American Frugal Housewife*". In 1844 she published a collection of poems in a little book "*Flowers For Children*". The poem Thanksgiving Day is the one that is remembered. (In 1976, Tufts University restored Lydia Child's grandfather's house in Medford, Massachusetts near the Mystic River.)

This week, the third grade students from Wolcott Street School have been coming across the street to participate in our Hands On History program that we call "Over the River and Through the Woods". It is an opportunity for the kids to learn about what it was like to travel to grandfather's house before the automobile. "It's like riding in a convertible with the top down in the winter time. You had to have your long woolen underwear on; your heavy woolen socks; a heavy cape and a long muffler around your face. Ladies put fur muffs on their hands. Men wore gloves of buffalo hide. And don't forget your galashes!" When everyone was in the sleigh, someone would bring out the foot warmers filled with hot coals from the fireplace and then the heavy lap robes would go over the top of everyone.

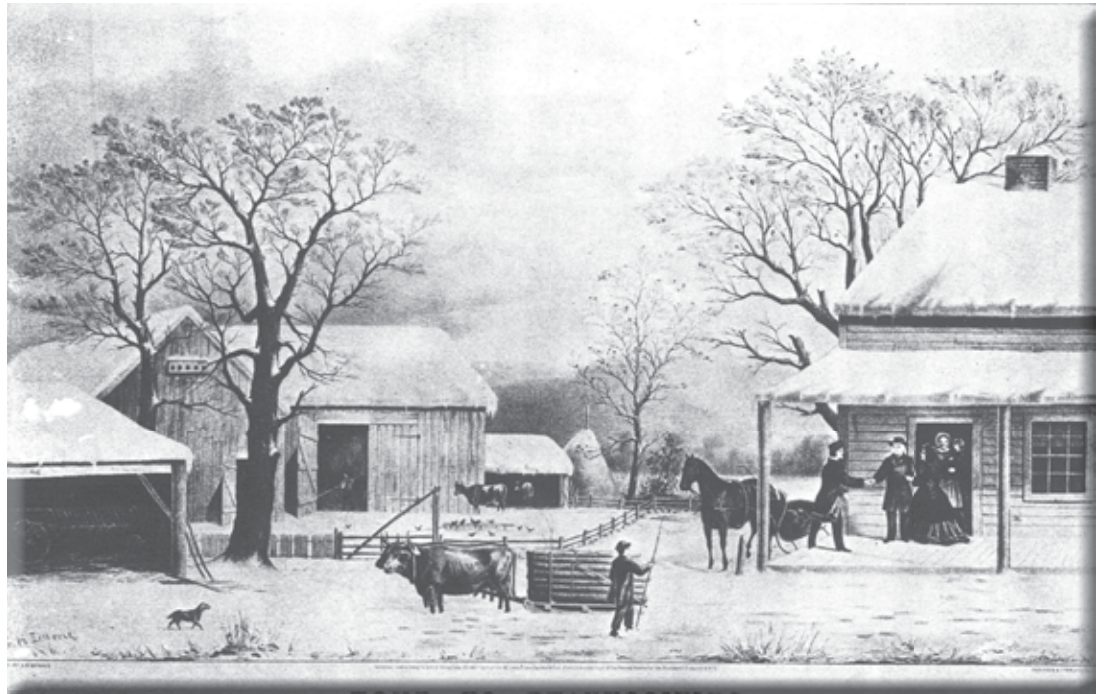
It was important that everyone kept warm or the consequences could be grim, such as the story of the hapless Charlotte, who did not heed her mother's warning and chose to ride to the New

Year's Eve ball without a heavy wool robe. The story of Frozen Charlotte was a famous folk tale that every child remembered before they went outside. "Don't

forget your mittens and put on your winter coat!"

I guess as we get ready to travel to grandfather's house - or whoever's house we are going to for

Thanksgiving, we probably are glad we can jump in the car, turn on the heater and thank the folks that are plowing the roads. So much for the good old days.



Over the river and through the wood,
To grandfather's house we go;
The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh
Through the white and drifted snow.

Over the river and through the wood,
To grandfather's house away!
We would not stop for doll or top,
For 'tis Thanksgiving Day.

Over the river and through the wood --
Oh, how the wind does blow!
It stings the toes, and bites the nose
As over the ground we go.

Over the river and through the wood,
With a clear blue winter sky,
The dogs do bark, and children hark,
As we go jingling by.

Over the river and through the wood,
To have a first-rate play.
Hear the bells ring, "Ting-a-ling-ding!"
Hurray for Thanksgiving Day!

Over the river and through the wood,
No matter for winds that blow;
Or if we get the sleigh upset,
Into a bank of snow.

Over the river and through the wood,
To see little John and Ann;
We will kiss them all, and play snowball,
And stay as long as we can.

Over the river and through the wood,
Trot fast, my dapple gray!
Spring over the ground like a hunting hound!
For this is Thanksgiving Day!

Over the river and through the wood,
And straight through the barnyard gate.
We seem to go extremely slow --
It is so hard to wait!

Over the river and through the wood,
Old Jowler hears our bells;
He shakes his pow with a loud bow-wow,
And thus the news he tells.

Over the river and through the wood,
When grandmother sees us come,
She will say, "Oh, dear, the children are here,
Bring a pie for every one."

Over the river and through the wood -
Now grandmother's cap I spy!
Hurray for the fun! Is the pudding done?
Hurrah for the pumpkin pie!

