

Squirrel Hill Historical Society



Happy New Year! But when exactly does the New Year begin?

Since the Earth continually orbits the Sun every 365 and 1/4 days, people living on the planet had to decide on which day to mark the start of the new year.

Different cultures chose various days to celebrate the New Year. Recurring astronomical phenomena such as solstices, equinoxes and the midpoints between them were among the most easily identified markers of the year and were used to pinpoint when to plant, when to harvest and when to take cattle to summer or winter pastures.

This display takes a look at various New Year's celebrations in Squirrel Hill and tells why they are held on different dates.



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First Night

Forget New Year's Eve. Every year Pittsburgh celebrates Highmark **First Night**. This event in Downtown Pittsburgh attracts around 50,000 people and features live music, art performances and family-friendly activities.

The raising of the Future of Pittsburgh ball and fireworks at midnight are the culmination of the First Night festivities.



Photo of New Year's Eve fireworks by Rich Wilson, c. 1980s.

New Year's Eve

New Year's Eve is celebrated in many ways. Some people go to sleep on December 31 and wake up to find it's January 1. But many people, including those in Squirrel Hill, party either at home, at friends' houses, or at bars and restaurants. The celebrations include eating and drinking, making noise, dancing, and counting down the last seconds of the old year. Traditions abound. People grab brooms to sweep the old year out the door or bang pot lids to scare away bad luck.

COME AND CELEBRATE YOUR NEW YEAR'S EVE AT

THE MORROWFIELD GRILL

2701-03 MURRAY AVENUE



Dine in a Delightful Atmosphere

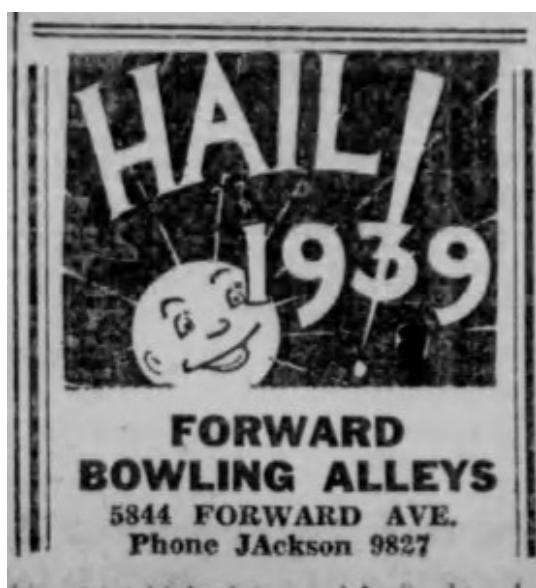
New Year Day Dinner

85¢

We cater to Banquets, Parties and Dinners

Make Your Reservations Now
Jackson 9813

Ads from the Squirrel Hill News in the 1930s



DON'T FAIL TO VISIT

Dave & Len's Drive Inn

BARBECUE AND SODA GRILL

"Where Good Food Makes Good Friends"

- COMPLETELY NEW
- MODERATE PRICES
- PARKING SPACE TO ACCOMMODATE ALL

OPENING . . SATURDAY, DECEMBER 31

FEATURING

"THAT DELICIOUS" HOT BARBECUE SANDWICHES
SPECIAL PLATE LUNCHES FOUNTAIN SERVICE

5609 FORWARD AVENUE (Opposite Streamline Market)

This display was written and designed by Helen Wilson.

New Year's Day

Today **January 1** is the officially recognized beginning of the New Year for most countries worldwide. But why January 1? It can't be pinned to any astronomical phenomenon or earthshaking event.

It turns out the selection of January 1 as New Year's Day has an incredibly long, complicated story. It goes back to the Ancient Romans, who first celebrated the new year on March 1 but ended up deciding on January 1 after inserting extra months to bring the calendar into alignment with the solar year. But that wasn't the end of the story. The calendar was later corrected again to the form used today, but it took a surprisingly long time for January 1 to be accepted as the start of the New Year.

Great Britain, excluding Scotland, didn't accept January 1 until 1752. That means the British colonies in America didn't accept it, either. Only a year later, George Washington came to Western Pennsylvania on Virginia Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie's orders to request that the French leave. The French refused, and the French and Indian War began in 1754. General Braddock suffered his disastrous defeat just a few miles upriver from Squirrel Hill in 1755.

Wikipedia lists when January 1 became the official start of the year for various countries:

1362 Grand Duchy of Lithuania
1522 Republic of Venice
1544 Holy Roman Empire (Germany)
1556 Spain, Portugal
1559 Prussia, Sweden
1564 France
1576 Southern Netherlands
1579 Duchy of Lorraine
1583 Northern Netherlands
1600 Scotland
1700 Russia
1721 Tuscany



The name "January" comes from the two-faced Roman god Janus, patron of beginnings and endings, who looks backward and forward.

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year 5777, is celebrated in autumn at the end of one agricultural cycle and the beginning of the next. Eight days later comes **Yom Kippur**, the solemn Day of Atonement, a time of fasting, reflection and repentance.

During the High Holidays, families share festive meals and eat apples with honey and honeycake to symbolize a sweet year. Children enjoy time off from school, and some businesses are closed.

Squirrel Hill became a Jewish neighborhood when German Jews from Allegheny City (North Side) began moving to Squirrel Hill in the late 1800s and early 1900s. At the time, there were no temples or synagogues in Squirrel Hill. A group of Jews began meeting in the Orpheum Theater on the corner of Forbes and Murray Avenues in 1917, renting a “large airy hall” for Rosh Hashanah services. As more Jews moved to Squirrel Hill and the congregation increased, property was acquired at the corner of Shady Avenue and Beacon Street, and Beth Shalom was built. It was the first synagogue to be erected in Squirrel Hill.

SQUIRREL HILL MINYAN HOLDS SUCCESSFUL SERVICES.

Orthodox residents of Squirrel Hill observed Rosh Hashana services under most pleasant and favorable conditions. Several young men realizing the need of a convenient place to worship rented a large airy hall in the Orpheum Theater Building. Forbes street and Murray avenue, engaged a Chazan and assistant, completed all other plans and at the initial services Sunday evening, over one hundred worshippers assembled. The Hall was tastily decorated with palms and ferns and every requirement was arranged for the convenience and comfort of those who attended.

Services were conducted by Mr. M. Ruben assisted by Mr. S. Cohen. Favorable comment was expressed by all which resulted in a move to establish permanent quarters for Sabbath services.

The arrangement committee included Messrs. Meyer Osoff, J. L. Rosengold, William Bluestone, E. C. Portno and M. J. Molans.



This picture was taken in 1926, after the Orpheum Theater closed, but the marquee was still in place. Uncle Sam's Gourmet Subs is now located there.

Hogmanay

Squirrel Hill's original holiday celebrations followed Scots-Irish traditions because most of the early settlers were from Northern Ireland. Their strict Presbyterianism caused them to observe Christmas Day as a solemn religious holiday, so their big celebration was **Hogmanay** on New Year's Eve. People shot off guns, lit bonfires, toasted the New Year and let loose without ruining the solemnity of Christmas.

Hogmanay is kept alive at the Oliver Miller Homestead in South Park, where visitors can experience how the holiday was celebrated in the late 1700s and early 1800s on the frontier, which included Squirrel Hill. This year's celebration is on December 6 from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Many traditions, such as first-footing, a few highland games, the boiling of a haggis, shooing out the old and a toast to welcome the new will take place. The keeping room table will be set for a Scots' tea. Visitors can join the Scottish Country Dancers in the barn. For more information about the Oliver Miller Homestead, go to olivermillerhomestead.org.



Hallowe'en

Nowadays **Halloween** is a secular holiday celebrated by almost everyone. Some kids go trick-or-treating, and some grown-ups as well as kids dress up in costumes and attend parties.

But a long, long time ago in a place far, far away--the pre-Christian British Isles--Hallowe'en might have once been New Year's Eve. October 31 was a Celtic and Gaelic festival called *Samhain*, which had astronomical roots. The day falls six weeks after the fall equinox and six weeks before the winter solstice. It was when herds were brought down to winter pasture and people prepared for the cold weather ahead.

Samhain was believed to be a time when the wall between the living and the "otherworld" weakened, and fairies and spirits wandered the earth. Rituals such as bonfires, masks, costumes and partying became part of the festival.

In time, Halloween was Christianized to be the night before All Saints Day. *Samhain* became "All Hallows Eve."

WILL SQUIRREL HILL HAVE OWN HALLOWE'EN CELEBRATION?

One question is sure to come up at the Directors meeting of the Board of Trade. That meeting is scheduled for Monday evening. The question which will arise is to determine whether Squirrel Hill will join the City of Pittsburgh's mammoth Hallowe'en celebration, or whether Squirrel Hill will stage a celebration of its own.

President Frank Youngk is trying to secure a private place for the Directors meeting. There is entirely too much noise for the meet of that group in the regular meeting place beneath the bank.

Sol S. Goldstein and I. J. "Pop" Mittleberger started the idea of this district's holding their own celebration. No arrangements have been made yet, and it seems as though the embryo of this idea was formed too late in the season.

Great amounts of work would be necessary for the success of such an affair. Plenty of money would be needed to stage a mammoth project such as a Hallowe'en parade or gathering. These are the two necessities that would be lacking, it is feared.

The entire matter however, will be straightened out at the Directors meeting of the Board of Trade, Monday evening. The regular monthly gathering will be held immediately after the affair.

First Sunday of Advent

Most people might not associate Christmas with a new year, but the Christian liturgical year begins on the first Sunday of **Advent**, four Sundays before Christmas. Advent is a solemn time of preparation for the coming of Christ. Churches set up Advent wreathes with three purple candles and one pink one, lighting one more candle each Sunday until on the last Sunday before Christmas, all burn brightly.

Meanwhile, the days preceding Christmas are also filled with holiday banquets, parties, concerts, shopping and decorating. It is a hectic time.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1941

Community Club Active With Xmas Affairs

The House Committee has brightened up the Club House in preparation for holiday activities of the Squirrel Hill Community Club. This committee consists of Mrs. William Simpson, chairman; Mrs. William Smith, Jr., vice chairman; Mrs. J. A. Sutch, Mrs. Lois Woodruff, Mrs. W. C. Girty, Mrs. D. C. Young, Mrs. G. M. Meigs, Mrs. Paul Clydesdale, Mrs. W. J. Weir and Mrs. Jas. Allison.

A Christmas Cantata will be presented today by the Choral group under the direction of Mrs. Morris Moxley. Vocal solos will be given Mrs. K. L. Riddle and Mrs. George A. MacMillen.

Aides for the day will be Mrs. Harry McKinley, chairman; Mrs. Harry Connell, Mrs. Edward McNamara, Mrs. R. L. Ertzman and Mrs. F. W. Cloud.

Last night the annual party at the Tuberculosis hospital was held. Refreshments for this party were furnished by the Senior Club and the Junior Club furnished the entertainment. This committee was composed of Mrs. Edward Newmeyer, Jr. chairman; Mrs. Thomas H. Piper, Mrs. Jos. G. Mattern, Mrs. Edward Snyder and Mrs. C. P. Logeman, junior president.



Christmas greetings in the *Squirrel Hill News* in 1943 reflected the fact that World War II was raging.

The Squirrel Hill Community Club was organized in 1919 by Mrs. W. Scott Miller. Its motto was "Hoping, Aspiring, Achieving." The club concentrated its activities on community work such as "twice-monthly sewings for the Industrial Home for Crippled Children," and handing out awards at Roosevelt School. The club met in a remodeled church building on Hazelwood Avenue near the intersection with Saline Street.

Chinese New Year

Because the Chinese population is increasing in Squirrel Hill, the Chinese New Year was celebrated in February 2016 with Pittsburgh's inaugural Lunar New Year Parade on Murray Avenue and a vibrant program at the Jewish Community Center, including lion dances, martial arts demonstrations, cultural performances, Asian arts and crafts demonstrations and musical ensembles.

The celebration was a joint venture of Squirrel Hill and the Chinese American Community of greater Pittsburgh.

The traditional Chinese year is lunar. The two-week-long Chinese New Year celebration usually begins on the second new moon after the winter solstice, sometime between January 21 and February 20.

Years are named for elements of Chinese astrology:

2016—Fire Monkey

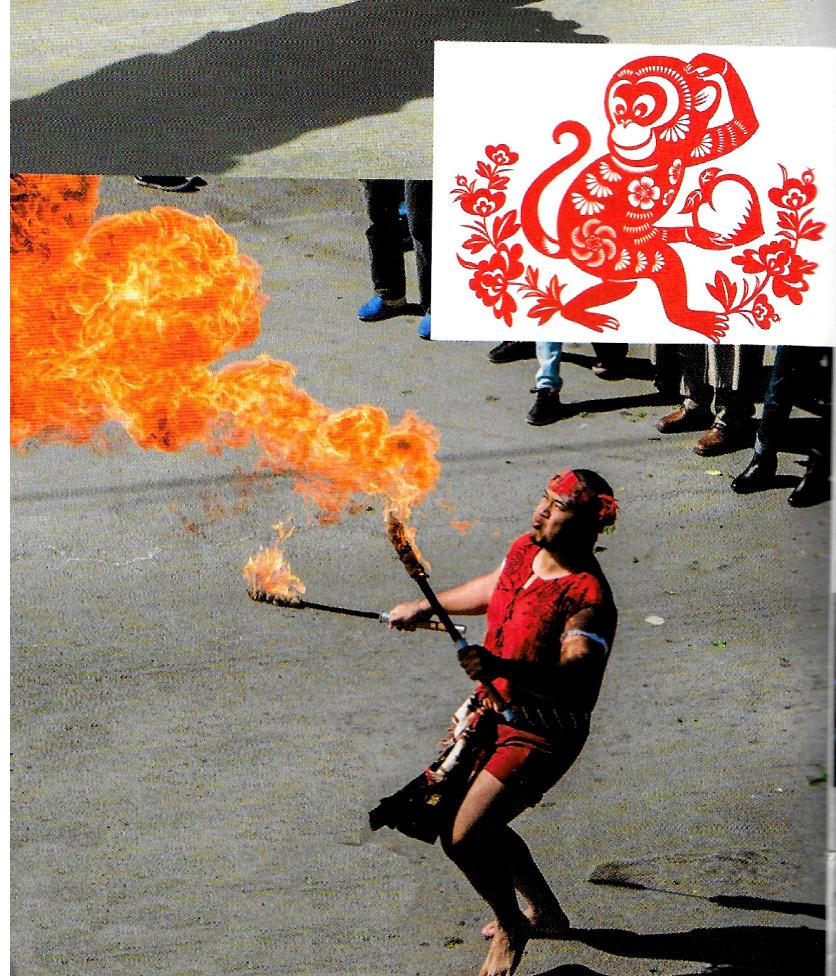
2017—Rooster

2018—Dog

2019—Pig



Red Chinese lanterns decorated the Murray Avenue during the two-week celebration.



This illustration appeared in *Squirrel Hill Magazine*, Spring 2016.