

Annual Christmas Fair celebrated 100 years in 2008

In the summer of 1908 four Protestant churches – Congregational, Baptist, Methodist and Episcopal – were asked to join together with the Unitarian Church to present a Bazaar from an idea started by Mrs. Adelaide Webster from the Unitarian Church. Mrs. Gertrude Holden, wife of the pastor from the Unitarian Church, asked for representatives from each of these five churches to meet her at their church vestry where this plan was presented, uniting their efforts and holding the first Union Church Fair. Four of these five churches agreed to join in on the efforts. The Episcopal Church joined at the third meeting. This event consisted of President and Vice President of the Ladies' Society of each church.

The first fair was held all day in November and the event was held in the Town Hall Building. There were tables featuring fancy, aprons, candy, fruits and vegetables, mysteries and remembrances. The Fair was known as the Dutch Shop and the committee attractively costumed in Dutch caps and aprons. That evening a turkey supper was served and then there was the entertainment. There were separate committees for each of these activities made up of one lady from each church and appointed by the General Committee. Proceeds were divided in several ways. If all the societies provided equally, the proceeds were equally divided. But in other instances such as with fancy or apron tables, the members of each committee were provided with a price tag and a private mark and each Society received the money for all their articles sold. The story as been told that a lady from one of the churches discovered her church's private mark and shouted out, "Ladies, buy 'E', Ladies, buy 'E'" to all her fellow parishioners. The profits from the first fair in 1908 were \$567.05. By 1923 profits grew to \$1,232.69 and we know in 1923 "The Country Minister" play was the entertainment and was very pleasantly presented – for the custom of serving supper was dropped, some tables were discontinued while the food tables and Christmas greens became far more successful.

Each year the Chairmanship of the Fair passed to a different church. The first year, the Unitarian Church was the chair, the second year the Congregational Church was chair, and so forth. On the completion of the five year cycle it was voted to continue with the same general plan.

In 1951, two new electric stoves replaced the old iron stove in the Banquet Hall in the Town Hall. A turkey dinner was served during the Union Fair that year.

This had continued as an annual event until 1964 when the Unitarian ladies dropped out. In 1966 the Catholic Church ladies joined the group for the first time. The Union Church Fair then continued on until 1979. There was no Fair in 1980 as times had changed and churches dropped out. The Congregational church started their own fair called the "Holly Berry Fair" in 1981. They also served lunch downstairs in their parish hall and it was a very successful and profitable event. As time went on, other organizations and groups joined in on their own with vendors selling crafts, foods, and dinners being served in several churches.

This annual event is now held the first Saturday in December and encompasses so many fairs that a bus is used to take shoppers on a regular route from fair to fair around town – Congregational Church, Jacques School, Unitarian Church, Town Hall, Catholic Church, along with the Methodist Church and Baptist Church, who have moved out of the downtown area. This has become an immensely popular day in Milford drawing hundreds and hundreds of people into town and also to the fairs held in the surrounding towns.

So, as you enjoy ... “Fair Day” remember that it ... grew out of one lady’s novel idea of uniting the efforts of all the churches into close acquaintance with each other in the Town of Milford.

Sources: 1923 Calendar “Fifteenth Anniversary of the Union Church Fair,” Granite Town History