

The Chinese and the Jews

The Chinese

Squibs and firecrackers were used to welcome the New Year and chase away the old year. The sky would light up on New Year's Day as a number of firecrackers were sent hurling in the air by excited celebrants. The Chinese sold these items along with dynamite and gunpowder at their shops. These explosive items were usually kept in large open barrels in the shops. The other races bought these from the Chinese grocery for Christmas as well as New Year's Day celebrations.



Modern Chinese New Year celebration

Later on, there is going to be much opposition from the upper classes about this practice. In British Guiana (Guyana) in particular, the practice is declared illegal after a shop and several other buildings and houses were completely destroyed by fire, three days before Christmas on December 22, 1913. The fire is said to have started by someone accidentally throwing a match or a lit cigarette on one of the barrel of firecrackers or was it gunpowder?



A Chinese firecracker

The Jews

The Jews New Year celebration is known as **Rosh Hashanah**. It is a time of self examination before God. One is expected to remain serious and solemn even though it is also acknowledged as a time for happiness and festivity. I call it the time of the 3R's: rejoicing, reflecting and resolution.



Rosh Hashanah

It is customary to eat apples and twisted loaves dipped in honey to symbolize hope for a pleasant (sweet) New Year. Greeting cards are sent to family and friends with the wish for a year of good success.

Compare this to the European upper class celebrations in the early twentieth century. They would have elaborate and expensive dinners and balls. The **Myrtle Bank Hotel** (Jamaica) was the place to be for many a celebrant of the upper class. Music and dance commenced at about 9:30 p.m. until midnight when the music stopped to allow the air to ring out with the musical voices of those present shouting the traditional 'Happy New Year!!!!' and wishes for a prosperous year to all.

There were others who chose to welcome the New Year by attending Watch Night Service at the various chapels located throughout the island. As the clock struck the midnight hour, the church bells would ring, signaling the start of the New Year. I have no doubt that there would be whispers of gratitude to the Almighty for the gift of another New Year's Day.

The rest of the day would be spent either at home with friends and family watching the children play several ring games or attending one of the many bazaars that were hosted on the hotel grounds. Still there were others who preferred the excitement of the sporting activities.

Here is a list of some of the activities that were available back then. How many of them are still available on New Year's Day in this century?

- Cricket at Sabina Park- from 1892, the New Year cricket carnival was held annually under the patronage of the Governor. The Band of the West India Regiment added to the excitement and air of festivity with their delightful music.
- Rifle shooting competitions at the Norman Range in Kingston
- Horse racing at Race Course
- Football matches
- Hockey matches
- Polo matches

In Antigua, the New Year would be ushered in with feasting and merriment. There would be music, dancing, masquerading clowns and a host of festivities that were designed exclusively for the whites. In fact, the Antiguan white population credits the Scotchmen with bringing merrymaking New Year and Christmas celebration to Antigua.