

Memories of Holiday Foods

The Taylor-Mesilla Historic Property has been home to the Taylor Family for 67 years. Educator and legislator J. Paul and Mary Daniels Taylor raised their seven children in this adobe home on the plaza in Old Mesilla, New Mexico. Their lives were filled with a passion for the people, history, and culture of New Mexico.

The holidays were an important time for family traditions. In an oral history, J. Paul Taylor recounted some of the traditional foods that were an integral part of the holiday season. He said:



Taylor-Mesilla Historic Property, Sala Grande 2018
Photo by New Mexico Historic Sites

“Here in Mesilla, we always had tamales and enchiladas and a punch of some kind. In the village, a week before Christmas, people would come knocking on our door and ask if we wanted tamales. We did that for years. Local people made the tamales. They used to use a pig’s head but now they use any kind of pork. There are several kinds of tamales. You would have tamales with dried green chile, red tamales, and the sweet tamales, which have anise in them but no chile.

Mary made enchiladas and often bread puddings along with the other Christmas fixings. We would have that for Christmas Eve but then we would have a big dinner on Christmas Day.

We always had the big table in the dining room until we outgrew it. The shape of the table created a problem. The dining room is rectangular and when we would put the four leaves in the table it was a little difficult to get around. We didn’t have room even with that table and we would use another table for two people and a round coffee table in the zaguán would be for the kids. It’s so complicated now that on Christmas Eve food is put out buffet style and they bring it out into the *Sala Grande*. Our food was always buffet style. You’d get your plate and you’d have to go around the Empire table. If some of us had big stomachs, it was like a squeeze.”

Paul’s daughter Mary Helen Taylor-Ratje remembered that, “The dining room was a central place for the family. Christmas Eve was a time for a big family dinner. We also had friends and neighbors that maybe did not have family of their own to celebrate the holidays. We would attend Midnight Mass and then we were sent off to bed. Santa would come to the dining room and place one toy for each of us around the large oval dining room table. In the morning we would come tearing out of our rooms to the table to discover our special gift.”

Paul’s daughter Rosemary Taylor-Stolberg said, “What a wonder Christmastime was at our house. The smells, the decorations, and especially the family all gathered together. So many memories flood my mind. Mama was the best cook in the world and I can remember waking to the smell of ham roasting and *posole* simmering. I remember the feeling of total contentment as we all gathered around the large oval table, standing and giving thanks before sitting and losing ourselves in the aroma and flavor of the meal.”

Oral History, J. Paul Taylor and Family, 2011.