

The Possum Drop

My guess is that most of the readers of this column stayed up late on Saturday, December 31, 2005, to watch – on television, of course – the big ball drop in New York’s Times Square, signaling the arrival of 2006. Some of you may also have seen, by the same means, a giant peach in Atlanta herald the debut of the new year.

Well, Lola and I were in the hills of North Georgia where folks there do things a little differently. At Clay’s Corner in Brasstown, folks gather from miles around to witness a possum touch down. Don’t blink those eyes! You read it correctly the first time. None of this big-city, sophisticated stuff for the people in these parts. They welcome Baby New Year the down-home way. The spectacle has drawn crowds ranging from 20 persons in 1991 when it began to 2,000. And that’s a bunch in a town of 240 population.

Clay and Judy Logan, owners of the corner store and gas station and hosts of the annual party, declare: “The most exciting thing that we do in Brasstown, besides going to the John C. Campbell Folk School and dance with the pretty Danish girl, is lowering the opossum on New Year’s Eve. If New York can drop a ball, Georgia can drop a peach, then we can lower the opossum.” And they do, with a flourish.

The Possum Drop at Clay’s Corner always uses a live possum (that’s the Southernized term for the animal) – except for once, two years ago, when roadkill was substituted to fend off a threatened lawsuit by well-meaning animal rights activists. Such concern was foolish, organizers explain. “People think we terrorize ‘em, but if they’re scared, they sulk. It’s like they hibernate, play possum,” said local resident Paul Crisp. “We’ve never had one do that. They’re inquisitive, you know. They like to watch what’s going on around ‘em.”

Here’s how the event proceeds: A possum, housed in a clear Plexiglass cage wreathed with garlands of tinsel, lights and a glittering mirror ball suspended from underneath, is gently lowered from the middle of the canopy overhanging the store’s gas pumps while the crowd shouts out the countdown of the year’s last seconds. How is the possum selected? Each year, organizers find a possum that’s about to be shot for raiding a henhouse or a horse barn. “We rescue ‘em from a certain death,” Crisp said. “We feed

‘em for a couple of weeks – they love that – and then we transplant ‘em to where they won’t be a nuisance.”

Proclaiming itself “Opossum Capital of the South,” Brasstown financed a government survey several years ago to prove it has a high population of the rodents. The town even ran a man for President on the Possum Party ticket in the 1990s. Mercer Scroggs, who ran in 1994, promised voters “a possum in every pot.” He didn’t win.

“We have a lot of opossum thangs and stuff, like canned opossum run over here in front of Clay’s Corner by Mercer Scroggs,” says Judy Logan. “We even have the new Diet Lite for you over-achievers at the supper table.”

Lola and I learned all about these festivities while chatting with local residents gathered around the fireplace at Brasstown Valley Resort. As the clock struck 11 p.m., they invited us to go with them to the Possum Drop.

Umm, maybe next year ...

--Beecher Hunter