

"Christmas in 1900"

Carroll County Times article for 24 December 2000

By Jay A. Graybeal

The 1900 holiday season was observed with special religious services, entertainments, parties and other social gatherings. The December 29th issue of the American Sentinel newspaper included an article entitled, Christmas in This City:

"Christmas was generally heartily enjoyed by the residents of this city and vicinity.

One of the marked features of the holiday season here was the immense trade enjoyed by the merchants. For several days the town was thronged with shoppers from the surrounding country, and up to midnight on Monday night the streets were filled with vehicles and the stores were crowded with purchasers. Without doubt, the expenditure of money in the purchase of holiday goods surpassed any previous season, indicating that Carroll county is fully sharing in the prosperity which marks the closing year of the nineteenth century.

The children of Westminster probably never enjoyed a happier Christmas than that just past, a fact for which many of them were largely indebted to Mr. Charles C. Gorsuch, of the firm of N. I. Gorsuch & Son, leading business men of the place, through whose generosity they were entertained at Odd Fellows' Hall on Christmas afternoon at 3 o'clock with a Punch and Judy show, an exhibition of chest expansion and other remarkable physical feats by Harry T. Burtch, of Baltimore, and music by a mock band of boys. The hall was densely packed with people, about seven hundred having been present, of whom about 150 were adults. After the performance 550 children were treated to packages of confectionery. Mr. Gorsuch was assisted in the distribution and in the management of the affair by a number of friends. The occasion was thoroughly enjoyed by all and Mr. Gorsuch's kindness was thoroughly appreciated.

Early Christmas morning services were held in St. John's Catholic Church, St. Paul's Reformed Church, and Ascension Episcopal Church, at each of which there was a large attendance. The music rendered at all was of a high order.

At St. Paul's Reformed Church the Sunday School held appropriate Christmas exercises at 6:30 p.m., after which gifts of oranges, confectionery, &c., were distributed to the scholars.

At Grace Lutheran Church an entertainment consisting of singing, recitations, an exercise entitled The Christmas Pilgrim, &c., was given by the Sunday school at 7:30 o'clock, and was largely attended. Gifts were distributed at the close of the program.

At the M. P. Church on Christmas night, the Sunday School, under the direction of Dr. J. W. Hering, superintendent, rendered an interesting exercise entitled "The Voice of Rejoicing," in the presence of a large and highly interested audience. The program, which was interspersed with singing, by the school, of a number of admirable Christmas selections, was as follows: Prayer, by Rev. Wm. A. Crouse; exercise, "Peace on Earth," by Gladys Stem, Kate Brown and Henrietta Roop; solo, by Isabel Roop; recitation, by Nannie Turfle; address of welcome, by Rev. Dr. W. R. Graham; recitation "Giving," by Blanche Williamson, recitation, "Christmas Customs," by Lillian Zahn; exercise, "The Crowning of Christmas," by

Byrle Buckingham, Mary Lynch, Isabel Roop, Edwin Zahn, Riley Williamson and Eloise Miller; exercise, "The Star, Crown and Scepter," by Meta Stonesifer, Katharine Lynch and Mamie Buckingham; Christmas Offerings; song, Angels Singing, by infant class; responsive reading, led by Dr. Charles Billingslea; distribution of the Christmas treat; benediction, by the pastor.

The day was marked by the presence of several parties of masqueraders on the streets. One of these, from the neighborhoods of Winfield, Sams Creek, Dennings and elsewhere, drove through the town in a large wagon, with a trailer in the shape of a dog cart in the rear. The horses and vehicles were decorated in a fantastic manner and the affair was, as designed, a unique burlesque on free rural delivery.

The newspaper also included stories about Christmas observances in many of Carroll's communities including one from Silver Run:

"Christmas passed off very quietly in this place. There were services at the Reformed Church in the forenoon and in the afternoon the little folks dressed themselves in unique costumes and paraded the streets. Nine persons came from near Westminster, on horseback, dressed in all kinds of fashions and went masquerading back and forth creating some excitement."

Carroll's merry masqueraders were up on current events as evidenced by the reference to the "unique burlesque on Rural Free Delivery." The new service had begun in December 1899 and was highly unpopular in many areas of the county. I want to wish you Happy Holidays from the Board and Staff of the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Westminster businessman Charles C. Gorsuch (with his granddaughter Mary Gorsuch Caldwell in 1915) provided an entertainment for local children in 1900. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection, gift of Henry B. Kimmey, 1993.