

"Christmas in 1942"

Carroll County Times article for 20 December 1998

By Jay A. Graybeal

Although Carroll's holiday traditions mirrored national trends, local residents observed the season with some regional variations. J. Leland Jordan, late editor of this paper, reminisced about a Christmas season from his childhood in his December 11, 1942 "Time Flies" column:

"It's Christmas time again. There's shopping to be done. There are cakes and cookies to be baked, and candies to be made. Yes, there is a hustle and a bustle in preparation for the great season ahead. Church choirs are rehearsing their cantatas, schools are preparing their entertainments and the Sunday schools are ordering their Christmas treats of a box of candy and an orange. Folks are expected for the holidays, and the guest room must be straightened up a bit. Extra wood must be brought in for the long evenings, a new coal bucket has been placed along side the stove; ma is making lamp lighters; sis is trimming the wick in that big red hanging lamp in the hall—yes it's hustle and bustle in preparation for the big season.

There were no movies or autos then for I am thinking back to 1903 and 1904. The events of the yuletide season centered principally in the home. The singing of songs, the playing of games, and the passing of cakes and nuts and pretty French candies, were the chief diversion. And speaking of cakes—the good provider usually baked from six to ten cakes—plus. And they were delicious too.

Yes, shopping must be done so we scan the local press and find that Charles E. Hering's department store advertised the 'largest line of Christmas cards in the county'; Wilson's Art studio offered 'pure platinum prints' as gifts; Keefer and Sullivan claim that their 'fancy candies, fruits and nuts are the freshest in town'; and James Cassell, the jeweler, offers 'Limoges and Haviland China as gifts for the Christmas bride'. Christmas weddings were very popular then.

Scanning the sheet further we find that the proprietor of Hyder's jewelry store has the poetic urge. Here is his contribution:

The cheapest watches that ever were sold
Made of pure metal, both silver and gold;
Gold necklace, chains and beautiful charms,
and handsome bracelets to wear on the arms.

Harry Gosnell states that his line of holiday groceries and choice liquors are the 'best in town'; T. W. Mather and Sons offer 5 1/2 tons of golden rod candy (that was 38 years ago, so please don't rush down now). Reading further into their 'ad' we find that 'Red parlor lamps are the newest things, and we have some beauties.' They were priced from 98¢ to \$5.00 with wick included.

Miller's Grocery offered the 'largest line of toys in Carroll county', and John D. Bowers in all honesty stated that his 'chocolates were the choicest'. And would the holidays be complete without a purchase from Mary Wilson's—that emporium to which all us youngsters looked upon as just a 'little bit of heaven.'

The big event along Main street occurred on the afternoon before Christmas day. Miller Bros. held open house for hundreds of children. It was gift day, and how they 'thronged into the 'men's side', through the arch and out the 'ladies' side'. With the help of Harry Cootes, 'Dad' Reaver, Bailly Morelock, Oliver M.

Crouse and the proprietors—Fred D. and Frank Z. Miller, every child was assured of a horn, a rattler, or a whistle or whatever the gift may be.

They were the days of masquerading parties—(and costumes sometimes became very elaborate); of sledding and sleighing parties, and cutter racing—yes sir, many a new cutter appeared on Christmas day if there was sufficient snow; and many a family was jubilant over Santa's gift of a new runabout, or a ten plat stove, or a toilet set—(those with two mugs). Pillow shams were popular and there were Japanese vases (can you imagine that) and trays made of cigar bands; knit underskirts, bloomers, and woolen underwear, toboggans, autograph pillow tops, and those bulky picture albums.

Why in those days merchants would say 'If we only have snow during the holidays, we will have plenty of business'. And that was true—for then roads were almost impassable at this season of that year. It was difficult to get to town with horse and buggy—but with the sleigh and sled it was different. Can you picture the line of 'Parked' vehicles along Main street—yes sir, every hitching post was taken.

Hunting was always good at this season of the year—and now we find our men are out with their guns again—yes gunning, that we a free and happy people may continue the spirit of the yuletide through each day of the coming years.

Christmas of 1942 will be different from those past years. It find our boys fighting on the seven seas, and on every battle front of the globe; 'Sis' is making high explosive shells; dad is building warships, and instead of ma making bloomers for the girls, she is making bombers for the boys.

Yes—time flies."

As Jordan observed, Christmas in 1942 found Americans occupied with World War II; there would be two more such annual holidays before the war ended.

Photo caption: The intersection of Westminster's W. Main and Liberty Streets was photographed after a heavy turn-of-the-century snowfall. It was the kind of weather that gladdened Main Street merchants because customers could easily travel by sleigh to do their holiday shopping. Historical Society of Carroll County, J. Leland Jordan Collection, gift of the Commissioners of Carroll County.