

Christmas On The Farm

(By Ford W. Moynes)

Ford Moynes recalls the happy days of Christmas experienced on a farm several decades ago, when the snow lay deep on the roadways and cutters bounced through the snow drifts

There were three boys in the family and one of the greatest thrills was the train from Lindsay to Victoria Road several decades ago. It was Christmas time in the days when snow fell to a depth of several feet and when the mercury sank down below zero on a thermometer which hung at the back kitchen door. Great preparations had been

going on in the terrace home for weeks by a kind, thoughtful, hardworking mother. There was no father in the home. Finally the old suit case and a number of strong bags were placed in the hall to await the coming of the cabman.

The trip south on William Street to the Grand Trunk depot was exciting as the cutter-cab bounced up and down in the deep snow drifts. The train was wheezing at the depot, tall puffs of smoke shooting up from the smoke stack on the old steam locomotive. It was dark and the station platform was lighted by one flick-

ering lantern.

Finally the burly conductor cried "All aboard" and we three boys had to be helped up the high steps of the coach. It was dark inside the old coach but a ray of light shone through the door of the pot belly stove and there we huddled until the brakeman entered. He lit a long taper which he held up to a lamp in the ceiling of the coach. Soon we were on our way and it was like fairyland to look out of the frost-coated windows where we had scratched away the frost with a thumb-nail — to see the lights shining out of the many homes in the town.

Soon the train was snorting and puffing its way out in the country and the cold air seemed to creep in the windows and roars of the old swaying coach. Mother tucked our coats around our bodies and we slid down on the seat close to one another to keep warm.

It seemed like an endless journey but it was also exciting. Once in awhile we could see a light in a frame house and occasionally a farm hand swinging a lantern as he apparently was walking to the barn. The snow glistened with frozen whiteness and as the night grew on us we could see thousands of brilliant stars and the big dipper in the sky.

Finally the engine whistle sounded clear and strong and the train slowed down to a halt amidst screeching brakes and the hissing of much steam from the engine. Peering into the darkness we saw the old station at Victoria Road and after gathering up all our parcels we hurried down the aisle and into the open where we had to jump into someone's arms, as the coach steps seemed to be many feet from the platform.

With joy and greetings we met Uncle Henry. He hugged us all. He looked so big, like a big bear, in his bulky coon skin coat and fur mitts.

We were hustled into a box sleigh filled with straw and we sat down on the floor where we discovered warm bricks wrapped in paper. It was fun being tucked in with large buffalo robes and a horse blanket. Then with a cheery "get up" to the horses we were whisked out of the station yard, down a short street lined with small stores and away out into the country. It was a beautiful night, clear, cold and crisp. It was fun to have the odd ball of snow from the horses' hoof fall in our lap and what a merry tune the sleighbells played. Soon the horses were steaming but they seemed to enjoy the sleigh drive as much as we did.

The excitement was too much and the three of us fell into a heavenly sleep to be awakened as the sleigh halted at the farm house door.

What a welcome from little, old and kind Grandmother and others in the household. The big kitchen, spotlessly clean, was a welcome haven. Soon we were out of heavy coats, mufflers, ear laps and mittens and we snuggled around the big stove. The oven doors were opened and we toasted our toes and soon were thoroughly warm. Hot

milk and bread was almost ravenously consumed and we were then hustled off to bed. It seemed like we'd never get to sleep as we nestled down into a deep feather tick and were piled with warm blankets. It was a night of nights now, as we dreamed of the train journey, the long ride in the open sleigh and the warmth of the old fashioned kitchen.

Christmas eve on the farm! It was another night long to be remembered as we hung up our long stockings around the chimney where Santa Claus was to arrive. Bouncing out of bed bright and early it was fun to be with the older folks and I remember how they laughed and chatted as we dug down into those long stockings.

There was a lovely red and white peppermint candy cane and a candy sawlog, a small mouthorgan and jew's harp, nuts of all kinds, a toy horn, an apple and at the very bottom, the toe of the stocking bulged with a large orange. Then we were handed other gifts; like a pair of mittens, a knitted toque, story and picture books and a home-made muffler.

Then it was time for break-

fast with Uncle Henry at the head of the table. Always he asked Grace, a lovely meaningful Grace uttered with reverence, that I never will forget.

It was Sunday morning and the entire household dressed up in their best Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. It was the custom for the entire household to go to church. Again we piled into the sleigh box and drove to the little red school house at Long Point. Neighbours welcomed each other, chatted about the weather and hoped the Minister would arrive in time, as the snow drifts were high and it was a long way from the parsonage at Victoria Road. Everybody got as close as possible to the old box stove which was crammed with long sticks of hardwood. One of the elbows eaked a puff or two of smoke and the pipes nearest the stove were just about red hot.

The minister's horse and cutter could be heard coming down the road and soon his hearty and loud "Whoa" could be heard. He was assisted out of his buffalo robes and his horse taken to the shed.

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The minister was a kindly middle-aged man with a moustache and he had a welcome for everyone as he made the rounds shaking hands and calling people by their first names. His eyes twinkled as he called "Merry Christmas" to the children and he took special time to welcome three boys from Lindsay

It was a good service and the old hymns were sung with gusto and the minister preached a timely sermon about the Three Wise Men and the birth of the child Jesus

City and town folk who have never had the experience of spending a Sunday night on the farm many years ago, missed a thrilling experience. Neighbours gathered in the big old fashioned front room. Mother, who played the organ well, and was once the organist in the Woodville Methodist Church, took her place on the organ stool, and placed lamps on the little platforms at each end of the keyboard, and the organ which had beautiful tones, was equipped with foot pedals and side knee pedals which added greatly to the volume when they were pumped. It was a masterful effort to play one of these organs and to play well

What an angelic choir. Everybody loved to sing, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and the hired man and neighbours. Some sang deep bass and others tackled the high tenor, while the women handled the soprano and the alto. They loved singing and the hymns were beautiful. This continued for a couple of hours and the break up seemed to come too soon for many. Then came lunch
the bit of something of every-

thing.

These days have long been forgotten. What a comparison to the days of today to the shame of modern church going, and Sunday night fellowship of today. It was a religious duty to go to church and to be neighbourly and to observe the Sabbath as The Lord's Day.

It was fun on the farm in the wintertime. It was fun to sleigh ride, fun to roll up huge snow balls two and three feet high, fun to build a castle of snow, and to wander down to the earth-floored cellar and enjoy all kinds of apples, Russets, McIntosh Reds, Talman Sweets, Red Astruchans, Snows and Spies. It was fun to have a warm bowl of bread and milk every night before going to bed, fun going to the barn at nights to watch the men bed down the animals, fun to watch the family playing games such as parchesi, crokinole, lost heir, tiddly-winks and other games.

Then came the morning to leave the farm for home. The train left in the morning and once again, we three boys were tucked on the bottom of the straw laden sleigh with warm bricks at our feet. It was pitch dark, cold and frosty. The horses were keen to get going and the steam rose from their perspiring bodies, sleigh bells rang and it was exciting dipping in and out of the pitch-holes. We were on time, the old engine and coach, the same conductor were waiting.

Reluctantly we said goodbye to Uncle Henry, as we knew we would not see him for several months. Mother cried as she bid her older brother goodbye and we were soon on our way back to Lindsay. It was a wonderful never-to-be forgotten experience, an experience the town and city boys and girls of the country never have in this day and age.