

Christmas thoughts . . .

Christmas rolls around once each year and it is difficult to write anything new about an event that is observed in all parts of the globe, has been rhapsodized, criticized, celebrated and humbugged over the last 15 centuries.

It is essentially a religious festival but secular meanings have been introduced which are now observed religiously by those who profess no religion.

We think of it as a time to feast, drink and be merry. If chronicles of the past are accurate, the annual celebration has been observed as a time of testimony to the fact Christ was born into a world much like our own.

There was a housing shortage in Bethlehem because the entire house of David gathered to enrol - so they might be taxed. Think of the confusion today if all the Jones' gathered in one place to pay their taxes.

Facilities at least would be taxed and anyone who arrived late in a Volkswagen might very well have to sleep in a stable.

Out in the fields there were shepherds watching their sheep and an angel of the Lord appeared, the story goes.

It would be difficult to find a modern comparison in this part of Canada - at this time of year. We think of shepherds as being earthy, practical men who lived practically their entire lives outdoors.

A farmer might be the modern equivalent. He has the care of livestock entrusted to him and a candid approach to the glossy, tinsel things of the world.

And suddenly the Gospel narrative says there was a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and singing.

Naturally, the shepherds were amazed. Who wouldn't be?

Luke is the only writer of the gospels who fills in the background the birth of Christ had on the neighborhood. He's been accused of padding his account to add emphasis, where other writers of the narrative has skipped.

The best argument against this reasoning, of course, is that the other writers didn't dispute it. Luke stuck to the facts through the rest of his gospel which hardly indicates a fiction writer at work.

The shepherds? Being working men there wasn't much opportunity to exercise their imagination. It is doubtful if they all got the idea of spinning a big yarn at once, unless they had seen something beyond their comprehension.

Focal point of all Luke's story, of course, centres on the baby laying in the manger.

It really doesn't matter whether there were any other marvellous events happening because the Main Event was in the manger.

There is the wonder of the Christmas story.

The simple things of the world are there to confound us. The Christian story is that Christ chose to be born in a stable and die on the cross, the lowest and meanest birth and death a person at that time could suffer.

It strikes a blow at grand pretensions and high birth. It says that circumstances don't really matter, that poverty and other difficulties can be conquered by the human spirit.

So that's our Christmas editorial for this year. Nothing new maybe, but something that needs to be restated each season with the advent of Christmas, because the message gets pretty torn and tatty through the year.



Country Christmas

Sugar and Spice

by Bill Smiley



As the getting-ready-for-Christmas tempo around our house increases from mild panic to wild hysteria, I can't help thinking a long way back to the times when Christmas was an experience to be anticipated with thrilling delight, to be savored when it arrives, rather than the inane, exhausting scramble it has become in these affluent times.

First real indication of Christmas was the buying of the turkey. In my home town, there was an annual Turkey Fair, late in November. Exciting for youngsters. Farmers brought their turkeys to town, fresh-killed and plucked, but with heads, feet and insides still there. Housewives wandered among the turkeys, looking for the perfect bird, pinching, poking, sniffing. Then it was hung in the woodshed, by the feet.

At the right time, it was brought in, the pin-feathers plucked with care, head and feet chopped off and insides removed. Then the scent of home-made dressing filled the air. It was a real turkey.

Today, we elbow and shove our way along the meat counter, gazing at a row of pallid, yellow-white lumps wrapped in plastic, legs neatly tucked in. They all look the same, and they all taste the same (wet paper), but we are secure in the knowledge that we don't have to disembowel them, that they are "eviscerated" and that the giblets are in a nice little bag tucked inside the frozen carcass. I can't quite believe that they have ever been real turkeys that have walked and eaten and fought and mated.

Getting the tree was the next step. You went out into the country with your kid brother, walked half a mile into the bush and selected a beautiful spruce, one cutting, the other watching for the farmer. You dragged and carried it, sometimes two miles, home. There was a great sense of satisfaction.

Today we go down to a Christmas tree lot, fumble through a pile of half-frozen, crumbly Scotch pines, select the least mishapen, take it home, and when it thaws, discover that the frozen side has a

gap the length of your arm in it. This is after forking over a small ransom. There is a great sense of dissatisfaction.

Decorations in those days were simple, inexpensive, but just right. Strings of red paper bells, venerable but cheery. Strings of red and green curled crepe paper all over the house. The tree itself had "icicles" and some colored balls. A few wealthy people had colored lights. On top was a home-made angel.

Today, on decorations alone, some people spend what would have fed a family in those days for two months. Fancy candles; store-bought wreaths of ersatz holly; colored lights everywhere, inside and out; trees that are almost hidden from the naked eye by festoons of fribbery.

Buying gifts in those days was simple, compared to the frenetic business it is today. There was scarcely any money then, and everybody needed something. So it was long underwear, or a hand-knit sweater, socks or gloves, maybe a few real luxuries, like a 59-cent game of snakes and ladders, or a book. Ten dollars didn't go far, even then.

Today people almost go around the bend trying to find something for other people who have everything, or can buy it. Nobody makes a gift. They buy them. They haven't time, because of the "Christmas rush." Clothes that don't fit. Eight-dollar toys that last five minutes. A hundred dollars worth of ski equipment that isn't the right kind.

Christmas Eve then was carols around the piano, mother stuffing the turkey, kids to bed early quivering with excitement. Stocking-stuffing time for the adults. A quiet chat, with a little despair that there wasn't money for skates and new winter coats, and things like that.

Today it's frantic last-minute shopping and wrapping of gifts, entertaining people who have managed to finish their rat-race (we got to bed at 4 a.m. last year after receiving carollers and others, and believe it or not, we had frozen chicken pies for Christmas dinner.)

Hope I'm not getting maudlin, but Christmas used to be merry. Now, it's just hairy.

Salt and Pepper



There are some strange occupations these days but probably the weirdest job I've ever run across comes from the newspaper profession, which is keeping abreast of the 20th century in a manner which defies description.

A reporter for the Argus Champion over in Newport, New Hampshire, dared to interview a member of this new breed of person. Here is the unabridged version.

What's your occupation, young man?

I'm a navel obliterator.

You say you are a gunner with the Navy?

No, I obliterate women's navels for the New York Times Sunday magazine you know. Playboy for the intellectuals.

You are making joke about the preponderance of ladies' undergarment advertisements in the august journal of contemporary thought?

You've hit it right on the button.

Well, how do you do this - whatever it is that you do?

It takes a brush and ink and iron nerves. Iron nerves?

Yes. I have to brush out every navel and some weeks there are scads of them.

Don't the girls get tickled?

No, no. I do it to their photographs.

But why do you have to do it at all?

Navels are obscene!

Navels are obscene? But everybody has a navel. They're born with them, you might say.

Yes, I know that, and you know that. Even advertising executives know everybody has a navel. But these ad guys are always full of guilt. I guess they figure that if they're revealing certain sections of anatomy, they've got to conceal something else to even up the score and keep the critics and the Court off their backs. I'm certainly not going to argue with them. Obliterating navels keeps my stomach filled.

Very interesting. Hmmm. Why don't

they just pop a little putty in the cavity, so to speak?

Obviously, sir, you don't know the ins and outs of the female form divine.

You mean . . .

Exactly. Not all navels are concave.

Well, I must say, young man that yours is a challenging as well as a stimulating occupation. Is this your first job?

No, I started as a sex remover.

A sex remover?

Yes, down in the movie department. I spent a whole summer removing sex from movie ads and replacing it with three question marks you know: "???" and the Single Girl. "The Third ????" "World without ????"

And now you obliterate navels.

That's it, mister.

Tell me. Do you like your present work?

Frankly, I've had a belly full of it.

It would seem from the foregoing that there might be an opening for someone soon in the navel profession, which is only one of the many exciting possibilities for job hunters.

Strange about your own job, isn't it? One day there is nothing like it - You wouldn't trade it for anyone else's. Next day you'd hand it to the first person who came along.

Read recently where a New York store posted a guard at the escalator to prevent people wearing the new maxi coat from mangling themselves. Others have posted signs warning maxi-wearing shoppers to hush their hems.

Apparently, the maxi scarves are just as treacherous, as anyone who has experienced that breakneck jar when you step on the end of your scarf tied round your throat, will agree.

So if you end up with a maxi under the Yule tree, watch yourself by all means.

Speaking of Christmas, I hope you all have a merry one, stick to your diets, and wind up the holiday season two pounds lighter.

Free Press Editorial Page

Good ideas gone wrong . . .

The Company of Young Canadians, a brainchild of Lester Pearson when he was prime minister, has fallen on evil days.

Conceived as a way to encourage young people in isolated communities to better themselves and in this way make a better Canada, and to rehabilitate some whose potential is not being fully realized, it was theoretically sound, but didn't work out.

Sunday the CBC public affairs television program revealed just how bad things have become. A young American in a position of responsibility, revealed that he is a Lenin communist follower, that he joined the CYC because this was the best place for him to operate and that he has no particular interest in the CYC program as such. He was followed by a lady head, a member of the governing committee, who observed that the young radicals

are the real part of the group, and the 'establishment' is at fault for not giving them their head. Saner voices on the directorate have asked that the government take over.

We think the group should be immediately disbanded, written off as an experiment gone wrong. Monday the daily press informs us that the CYC has been fostering a group of oddballs living in a communal set-up on one of the Toronto islands, helping an underground publication in the city to spread obscenities through the mail, etc., etc.

Were this being done with private funds, we would not condone it.

The fact that tax money is being used brings our blood to a boiling point.

Now that our federal government knows what is going on, we should expect an immediate termination to such foolishness. -The Georgetown Herald.



Photos from the past



O.M.A. INTERMEDIATE "B" champions 1938-1939, and executive are pictured at the door of the old arena. Front row left to right: Elio Marzo, Frank Terry, Norm Morrison, Frank Holmes, Herb Woods, Bus Morton, Ben Baylis, Russ Brush, second row, Bill Talbot president; Johnny Brush, Elio Marzo, George Molozzi, Jack Kestner, Vic Rumley manager; Doug Dawkins, Lorne "Minute" Walters, Frank

Gibbons, Eli Masters, G. A. Dills editor; Ed Ryers arena secretary; back row W. G. Middleton secretary; Johnny Robson, Jack Creighton, W. H. Clayton; second vice-president; Hilt Elliott, Bill Coon, 1st vice-president; Bill Corry, Wes Beatty, Dr. E. J. Nelson, Bud McDonald, W. K. Graham treasurer; Fred McDutcheon reeve.

Free Press back issues

20 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press, Thursday, December 22, 1949.

Coal gas almost proved fatal around midnight Monday when Mr. and Mrs. Wilfred Robertson were almost completely overcome in their home on Peel St.

Six Acton young people had a miraculous escape from serious injury or fatality early Sunday morning in a car collision on the Queen Elizabeth Way. Mrs. Dirk Van Goozen was the most seriously injured suffering lacerations of the knee and all the others were badly bruised. Dirk Van Goozen, Mr. and Mrs. Elwood Johnston, Miss Jean Harris and Mr. Kerwin McPhail.

On Saturday evening the Junior Band were hosts to their parents at a party and concert in the town hall. Main item on the program was the concert by the band which, it is hoped, will gradually fill the places vacated in the Senior Acton Boys and Girls band. On the program the five-year-old daughter of Alex McIsaac played a baritone solo, Emmerson Baxter gave a cornet solo and Blair Hotchen gave a cornet solo.

In the Hit and Miss gym tournaments at the Y there are 34 participating in the Midget and Junior classes. Leading scorers are Wayne Currie, Emmerson Baxter, Garry Dawkins, Helen Luxton, Marilyn Sigworth, Marilyn Woods, Lorraine Tyler, John Cunningham, Russell Arbie, Bill McColl, Wayne Arbie, Peggy Oakes, Joan Hodge, Betty Mae Lambert.

First skating in the arena last week. Resident of Churchill district for over 50 years Mrs. Margaret Sophia Watson died in St. Joseph's hospital, Guelph, in her 82nd year. A life-long resident of Nassagaweya Miss Pearl C. Bell died in Guelph hospital at 64 years of age.

Rain and miserable weather are the chief topics of conversation.

50 years ago

Taken from the issue of the Free Press, Thursday, December 25, 1919.

The Beardmore Company's treat to the children of the employees has for years been a feature of Christmastide which has brought gladness and comfort to the hundreds of girls and boys who have been fortunate enough to have their names on the company's lists. On Tuesday afternoon

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