

Ontario Women's Institutes Feature Christmas Programs

More and more the Women's Institutes seem to recognize the meaning of Christmas in their programs and their activities at this season. In common with other organizations they have a good deal of carol singing at their December meetings and demonstrations of gift wrapping and Christmas decorations. Several branches have reported the reading of "The Christmas Carol" and at Jubilee Institute the members acted "The Christmas Carol". Often there is an upsurge of friendliness at this time. The December meeting may take the form of a party to which all the women of the community are invited. Frequently there is special entertainment for children.

But the Institutes' observance of the season goes deeper than this. In reports of last year's December meetings we find such items as these: Bernice had a talk on the motto "Let's Not Leave Christ Out of Christmas" and a paper on the Christmas story. At South River a clergyman spoke on "Putting Christ Back Into Christmas". Several programs included the reading of Van Dyke's Story "The Other Wise Man". The Salem Niles town women felt that the Christmas season was a good time to have a Salvation Army officer tell them about his work with delinquents, and their own responsibility for the unfortunate. And the Lakefield report says: "For our December meeting one member from each Church denomination was asked to contribute a number to the program. This consisted of solos, readings and the Christmas story. The denominations taking part were Anglican, United Church, Presbyterian, Baptist, Roman Catholic and Gospel Hall. Everyone came away feeling that unity was an essential part of the Christmas spirit."

Women's Institutes have varied ways of creating what we call "the Christmas Spirit". Willoughby reports: "We each bring something to put in boxes for the needy in the community and something for a soldier in hospital. It brings out the Christmas spirit and we usually have a

good turnout." Rockwood says: "We packed a seventy-five pound box for a needy family who had recently lost their mother. In contrast to other meetings which were mostly for our own entertainment we felt that we were expressing the true aims of the Institute." Harvie Settlement secretary wrote: "Our Christmas party for the members' families did a lot for all of us because our children were a part of it." Cowal entertained preschool children and the attendance of mothers was much larger than usual. Often the Institute joins with other groups in providing a Christmas tree for the children of the community. The South Mountain women made a Santa Claus outfit for community use. So sociability and friendliness have a special place in the Institute's observance of Christmas.

Friendliness is expressed in very tangible ways, too. In many Institutes the members answer the roll call by bringing gifts for children, to be distributed at Children's Shelters and Hospitals or through a family welfare agency. This practice is followed, too, with gifts for the residents of old People's Homes. A number of branches take a Christmas party to their county home for the aged; others bring the residents of the Home to the Institute's party. Heepeler last year packed ninety-six Christmas Cheer baskets for the sick, the aged and the shut-in of the community. Institutes in the neighbourhood of hospitals and sanitariums usually try to remember the friendliness of needy patients at Christmas time.

Occasionally an Institute reports having a special Christmas meeting just for its own members, but from such meetings a donation usually goes to some outside need. For example, at Shirley's December meeting last year the women had a party for themselves and their own children and others. A member told the Christmas story, the children were given balloons and candy, then the members measured their waists and gave a penny for each inch to provide a treat for the children in the Shelter. They report that they had quite a sizeable contribution.




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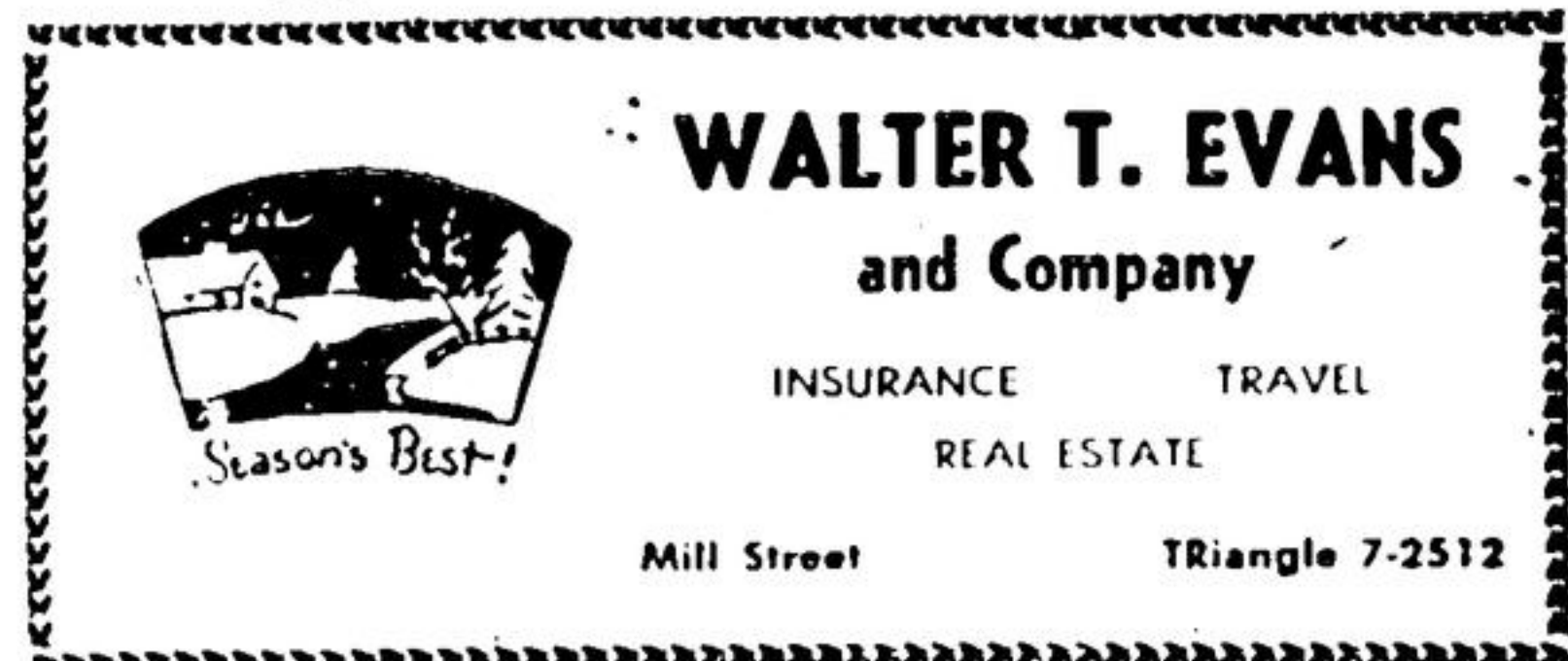
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SANTA CLAUS REAL FAMED EDITORIAL

The most widely read editorial ever written appeared 51 years ago in the New York Sun, has been reprinted by the Sun annually at Christmas time ever since, has been quoted in a score of languages the world over. The world-famous "Santa Claus editorial" was an answer to the following letter:

Dear Editor:
I am eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus, please tell me the truth.

Virginia O'Hanion.

The editorial writer who was assigned to reply to Virginia at first disdained the task, as trivial, then found himself warming up to a real opportunity and finally wrote the words that millions since then have warmed to read.

"Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except what they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensive to their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men or children's are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect in intellect as compared with the boundless world about him as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole truth.

Yes, Virginia, there IS a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exists, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! . . . how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginia. There would be child-like faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerant this existence. We should have no enjoyment except in sense and sight. The eternal light which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not to believe in Santa Claus; you might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch all chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus but that is not a sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest men that ever lived could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, love, poetry, romance, can push aside the curtain and view the supernal beauty beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all the world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus? Thank God! He lives and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

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