

Crude conditions in early Halton

Humble Christmas surroundings

By Gwen Clarke
 In Halton's Pages of the Past (1955 (c))
 We have written many times of the crude living conditions of early settlers in Halton County—of the log cabin built on a hastily cleared tract of land; of the lack of neighbors and of transportation. Such conditions were bearable during the summer months, but winter added much to the difficulties of the pioneers and would scarcely be conducive to any form of gaiety.

What then would Christmas be like amid such surroundings? No gay and colorful Christmas cards; no gifts from the home folk; no church bells ringing out their message across the frosty air. Life was still a struggle for survival. Celebrations were impossible; Christmas Day would be marked only as a date on the calendar.

Yet the pioneers would undoubtedly remember it as the day on which the Christ-child was born and it might be to their comfort to recall the humble surroundings of the infant Jesus. In some of the rude log cabins a mother, with her little ones gathered around her, would sit before a pine log fire.

No Santa Claus
 The children would listen eagerly as Mother told them the story of the Nativity. And then she would tell them stories of Christmas as she remembered it in the land of her birth; of the little village church, the Christmas Sunday School concert, the good food and the exchange of family Christmas gifts. Santa Claus would not be a part of her story as she would remember that Santa Claus did not have the children of the pioneers on his Christmas list.

Christmas dinner... what would it be? With luck it might be wild turkey, duck or venison although it was more likely to be the mainstay of the pioneer diet—potatoes, corn, salt pork, flour or bran, Hemlock tea and burned Indian corn would suffice as substitutes for tea and coffee.

Fortunate indeed was the family who owned a cow to provide milk for the children. Letters describing pioneer life refer to "barrelled beef and turnips as luxuries reserved for guests and for such great occasions as Christmas and New Year's day."

By the middle of the 19th century conditions had changed considerably. It was possible for immigrants and second-generation settlers—if they could afford it—to live off the fat of the land. Officers and their families in garrison towns enjoyed comparative luxury. Whiskey flowed freely. In farm families tables at Christmas time groaned with the weight of good food.

Describes fare
 As the years progressed scarcity had been replaced by plenty. The pioneers had learnt ways of drying the wild native fruits for winter use so there was more variety in their diet the year round. Mrs. Anna Jamieson, who, in 1837, visited in the Gore district, of which Halton was a part, speaks well of the food served at that time.

"Our table," she wrote, "is pretty well supplied. Hecf is tolerable but lean. Mutton, bad, scarce, and dearer than pork. Pork is excellent, being fattened principally on Indian corn. Fish is delicious. During the whole winter we have had black bass and whitefish caught in holes in the ice and brought down by the Indians. Venison, game and wild fowl are always to be had; the quails caught in immense numbers near Toronto, are most delicate eating... the higher classes of people are supplied with provisions from their own lands and farms, or by certain persons they know and employ... some raise poultry and vegetables for their own table."

As the years passed the celebration of Christmas took on definite shape and form. Treasured traditions from the land of their

birth became a part of the Canadian Christmas, introduced by incoming immigrants. As the population increased family gatherings became the main feature of the Christmas celebrations.

To grandmother's
 We have been given several first hand accounts of Christmas way back in grandmother's time. Here is one that is typical: "We always went to Grandmother's for Christmas. Grandma, Aunt Mary and Aunt Liz would be busy for weeks past getting ready for Christmas. The table down cellar was really something to see! Jellies, preserves, pickles, honey, mincemeal and shortbread. And then as Christmas drew near, pies, tarts, cakes, biscuits, plum pudding and a crock of dairy butter and home made cheese."

"For meat there was savory-stuffed roast duck, goose, chickens and tender-sweet, home cured ham. As soon as the chores were done Christmas morning each branch of the family would load up the sleigh and head for grandmother's place. Bells would jingle merrily as the prancing horses carried each party swiftly over the glistening snow. Sometimes we had to battle deep snowdrifts, and occasionally there would be an upset and some of us would land in a snowbank.

"But eventually we would all arrive at the farm and grandfather would tell us to hurry and bed the horses before "all them vittles at the house got eaten up." We children were told to keep out of the way and amuse ourselves until we were called. And that wouldn't be long because the women folk had dinner on the table in short order. Grandfather asked God's blessing on the food we were about to eat, and then we all set to.

Homemade presents
 "The days that I recall best there were generally about 25 of us to dinner—some at the long table in the dining room and some in the kitchen. I remember one time 4-year-old brother Jimmy was lost and we hunted everywhere for him. We finally found him asleep under the kitchen table, a spoon in one hand, a bowl in the other. After dinner we opened our presents. They were mostly homemade. Useful things like knitted scarves, mitts and socks. Maybe stuffed rag dolls and basket-cradles for the girls; sleighs and home-made pull-toys for the boys. At supper-time there was another big meal and then everyone went home to their chores."

"During the evening there might be another family gathering at one of the connections. There'd be square dancing and games—and maybe a bit of sparring on the side. I remember how well Cousin George played the harmonica for Myrtle's step-dancing. And, oh brother—could she dance!

Yes, that was one way of spreading Christmas that became increasingly popular with the passing years. And yet, strange to say, in some families Christmas was hardly celebrated at all. We rather suspect this non-observance was handed down as a result of the sparse living conditions that some of the early settlers could never forget.

A busy day
 Thus in a diary written by the grandmother of Mrs. Robert Lyons, Nelson Township, we find the following entry for December 25, 1869. "Mopped floors, baked in morning, made bread, fried cakes, churned, went over to John's on a visit. Worked on my dress trimming and had eight for breakfast."

But, whether we observe it or not, there is one celebration common to us all, from the pioneers to the present day—the anniversary of the Birth of Christ.



BEADED BEAVER and watchbands are held by Margaret Brillinger and son Joey, who will be three in January.

Cree Indian crafts in town

The handicrafts of Canadian Indians have an outlet in Acton. But the store is simply a big carton at a home in town. When Margaret Brillinger, 4 Park Ave., read in the Free Press about Oxfam trade goods, she decided she had better let the people know about what she has, too.

Mrs. Brillinger lives in Guelph before moving with her family to the former Parker home. There, friends knew to drop over to their house when they needed gifts.

Relatives
 It all began when the Brillingers had two Indian girls live with them while they went to school. The girls' Cree relatives on two reserves near Hudson's Bay were making handicrafts which found their way down south and were sold here. Although the girls are gone, Mrs. Brillinger still receives orders of crafts which she sells to help the artists.

Send pattern
 A specialty is hand-made, bead-embroidered moccasins, and for these she prefers to send a foot pattern up north. Here, right now, she has a supply of leather purses,

small handbags, necklaces, headbands and watchbands. The watchbands are an innovation just being made recently. A regular watch fits inside the beaded leather band.

She has a beaver made of

muskat skin with blue eyes, ears and feet that is very unique.

By plane
 The Brillingers have kept a small stock of crafts for about three years now. They send the money to the reserve, or

else medicine and groceries as requested. The only way into the reserves is by bush plane.

Mrs. Brillinger suggests anyone interested might phone first, 853-2297.

Education offices to stay on Guelph Line

Plans for one central government facility that would house Halton Board of Education, Halton Region Government and Halton Region Conservation Authority vanished Thursday night when the Board of Education announced plans for a \$1,000,000 expansion to its head office in Burlington. The board agreed to expand the present facilities by 22,500 square feet rather than wait and move into a central facility. The board offices are on the Guelph Line, Burlington.

Trustee Fred Armitage explained the decision to stay

was predicated on economic and other factors. He noted the advantage of having a central facility was overriden by economic considerations.

To be discussed
 Halton Regional Council is expected to discuss its own accommodation problem at a meeting this afternoon (Wednesday). A report was filed at the board meeting indicating the areas in the building that were in need of additional space.

Halton Region Conservation Authority hasn't offered a definite no to a proposal that would see that group share office facilities with the Regional Government. IHCA has, however, indicated its preference to stay in Milton. None of the sites currently being considered by the Region are in the centre of the region.

Good news

Family reunions are a special part of the holiday season. Please let us know of interesting items for this "Family" page. Phone 853-2010 or drop in to the office.

FARMER JACKS

BOXING DAY 12-6

OPEN SUNDAY 12:00 - 5:00

WEEKDAYS 10 to 9 SATURDAY 10 to 6

878-2373 826-5371

HWY No. 25—JUST NORTH OF HWY 401

NO PAYMENTS 'TILL FEB. 1975

★★★★ NO MONEY DOWN—FAST FREE DELIVERY★★★★



DEEP FRYER



TOASTER



MICKEY MOUSE WATCH



G.E. STEAM & DRY IRON



KETTLE

A BOXING DAY SALE WITH A PUNCH

COLOR T.V. "CLEAROUTS"

19" Color Portable (ONE ONLY) Only **299⁰⁰**

26" Color Console (ONE ONLY) Only **399⁰⁰**

20" Modular 4 Phillips (3 ONLY) Only **479⁰⁰**

26" Modular 4 Phillips Console 100% SOLID STATE **559⁰⁰**

26" Panasonic 100% Solid State Console to the floor **699⁰⁰**

STEREO "CLEAROUTS" COMPONENT PACKAGE

•Am Fm Receiver •2 Speakers •Record Changer •Tape Deck •Head Phones Only **\$139⁵⁰**

QUADRAPHONIC 4 CHANNEL

•Am Fm Stereo Receiver •Built in 2 4 Channel Tape Deck •4 Matching 2 way speakers •Full size Changer •Lined Dust Cover •Headphones •3 Quad Tape **ALL THIS FOR ONLY 2 ONLY \$359⁵⁰**

LOTS OF ODD SPEAKERS •1 way •2 way CLEARANCE FROM \$10⁰⁰ UP

FURNITURE "CLEAROUTS"

★ DINETTE SET • 4 matching chairs • 1 Dinette Table • Matching Leaf 5 Only **\$69⁵⁰** each set

★ LIVING ROOM CHESTERFIELD SET • Large Full size sofa chesterfield 1 Matching Chair 2 Only **\$189⁵⁰**

★ LIVING ROOM TABLE SET • Cocktail or Coffee Tables • End Tables • Square or Hextables **All for clearance**

★ BEDDING for BEDROOM • 54" Mattress & Boxspring **\$49⁵⁰** • 39" Mattress & Boxspring **\$39⁵⁰**

★ BEDROOM SETS • Over 12 Different Styles to Choose from **All to be Cleared off the floor**

★ DINING ROOM SETS • Vanier or Solid Wood to Choose from **All to be cleared**



We wish you a Merry Christmas

All year long, we're grateful for our fine friends and customers. At Christmas, we're especially happy to express our greetings, thanks and good wishes.

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

I.G.A. FOODS