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 ploneers and would scarcely be conducive to any form of gal-

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 n date on the calendar.

Yet the pioneers would undoubtedly remember it as the day on which the Christchild was born and it might be to their com-fort 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

No Santa Claux

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 pos-sible 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Describes fare As the years progressed scarity had been replaced by plenty.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. Beef is tolerable but lean. Mutton, bad, scarce, and dearer than pork. Pork is excellent, being fattened principally on In-dian 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. Vension, 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 Canadlan 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. Hero 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, mincomeat and shortbread. And then as Christmas drow near, ples, tarts, cakes, biscuits, plum pud-ding and a crock of dairy butter and home

made cheese. "For meat there was savory-stuffed roast duck, goose, chickens and tendersweet, 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 buttle 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

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- yearold 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

"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 sparking on the side. I remember how well Cousin George played the harmonica for Myrtle's stepdancing. And, oh brother-could she

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 for-

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

Cree Indian crafts in town

The handerafts of Canadian Indians have an outlet in Acton. But the store is simply a hig curton at a home in town. When Margaret Brillinger, 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 lived 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.

Helatives 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 handerafts which found their way down south and were sold here. Although the girls are gone, Mrs. Brillinger still receives eartons of crafts which she sells to help the artists.

Send pattern A specialty is hand-made, bead-embroidered moceasins, and for these she prefers

Here, right now, she has a

The watchbands are an in- que. novation just being made recently. A regular watch fits

band. She has a beaver made of the money to the reserve, or

small handbags, necklaces, muskrat skin with blue eyes, else medicine and grocories headbands and watchbands. cars and feet that is very unt-

Hy plane The Brillingers have kept a inside the freaded leather small stock of crafts for about three years now. They send

as requested. The only way into the reserves is by bush

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

Education offices to stay on Guelph Line

Plans for one central was predicated on economic Education, Halton Region central facility Region Conservation considerations. Authority vanished Thursday night when the Board of Education announced plans its head office in Burlington.

The board agreed to expand the present facilities by 22,500 square feet rather than walt and move into a central facility. The board offices are to send a foot pattern up on the Guelph Line, Burlington.

government facility that and other factors. He noted would house Halton Board of the advantage of having a Government and Halton overridden by economic

To be discussed Halton Regional Council Is expected to discuss its own for a \$1,000,000 expansion to 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 Balton Region Con-

proposal that would see that group share office facilities with the Regional Government. HRCA has, however, indicated its preference to slay in Milton. None of the sites currently being conaddered by the Region are in the centre of the region.

Good news

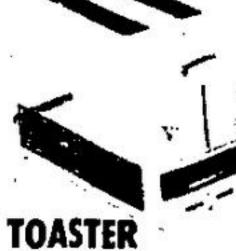
Family reunions are a special part of the holiday season. Please lel us know of interesting items for this "Family" page. Phone 853-

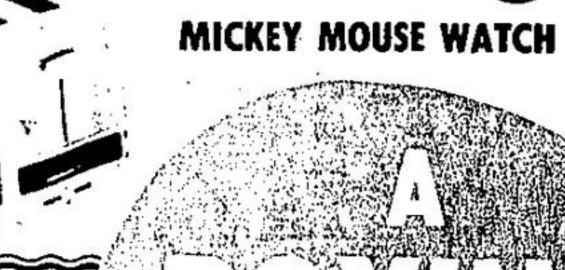






DEEP FRYER





DRY IRON



19" Color Portable

26" Color Console (ONE ONLY)

20" Modular 4 Phillips (3 ONLY)

26" Panasonic 100% Solid State Console to the floor

* DINETTE SET.

4 matching chairs* | Dinette Table* Matching Leaf

CLEAROUTS" eRecord Changer eTape Deck oliese phones

QUADRAPHONIC 4 CHANNEL

• Am Em Stereo Receiver • Built in 2.4 Channel Tape Deck •4 Matching 2 way speakers, . Full size Changer . Inted Dust Cover . Headphones . 3 Quad Tape ALL THIS FOR ONLY

2 ONLY

·LOTS OF ODD SPEAKERS el way e2 way

CLEARANCE FROM \$1000 UP

* LIVING ROOM CHESTERFIELD SET - Lary Foll site sets destruction

Cocktail or Coffee Tables

* LIVING ROOM TABLE SET. End Tables • Square or Hextables

All for clearance

* BEDDING for BEDROOM * BEDROOM SETS Over 12 Different Styles to Choose from

& Boxspring

All to be Cleared off the floor

* DINING ROOM SETS

Vanier or Solid Wood to Choose from

Al to be detail



and customers. At Christmas, we're especially happy to express our greetings, thanks and good wishes.

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF

I.G.A. FOODS