

# The Squire's Christmas party

This first-hand account of a Christmas event at the turn of the century was written by Gilbert English who lives at Speyside, Ontario. Mr. English was born in Torquay, Devon, England, in 1891. He moved to Speyside from Erin Mills in 1921 where he continues to write his memories. With his kind permission, this one is presented for our Yuletide enjoyment just as he wrote it.

Allan Scully  
**A CHRISTMAS PARTY HELD AT "FOLEX" THE ESTATE OF E. A. LEE ESQUIRE LIPHOOK HAMPSHIRE ENGLAND IN THE YEARS 1898 - 1904.**

It was the Squire's custom to give a party at Christmas to workers on the estate and their families. It was held in the main hall at the big house. Then a big supper served by the cook and kitchen staff of the big house, in a large building at the back. It was the estate carpenters workshop. A few days before the event, old Teddy Evans the carpenter was given the help of little Benny Harwood, the estate Jack of all Trades, to clean out the room. Work benches, heavy equipment and tools were moved outside, dust chips and sawdust were swept up and burned, and long trestle tables and benches put together. Some of the maid servants from the big house would put up some decorations and streamers later, not forgetting a big bunch of mistletoe.

For several weeks we used to look forward to the main event of the year (for us) The Christmas party up at the Big House, thinking of the good things we would have to eat and speculating on what kind of toy Father Christmas would give us this year. The Squire gave a party every year to all employees on the estate.

On the afternoon of the occasion, about three o'clock all the families on the estate gathered in the main hall at the big house where the Christmas tree was set up, and were entertained for an hour or so by the Squire's family and house guests, with songs, stories, piano music and little comic skits. One year, the Squire engaged a conjurer and ventriloquist for a change. Just when the younger children were beginning to get restless, the Squire who was built like a real Santa Claus without any padding came HO HO HOing down the wide staircase carrying a sack, saying he couldn't get down the chimney, so he got in a window. Then with help from the family and house guests, gave to each child under 14 a bag of sweets, an orange and a toy and to the men a jacket or a cardigan and those who worked outdoors, like the gamekeeper and his assistant, a thick muffler and mitts, and to the women, the younger ones got a fancy blouse, the older ones a good woolen shawl and scarf. When everyone had received something we all sang "God Save the Queen," and then went outside to the workshop for the feast which was all prepared in the big house kitchen, and there were plenty of helpers to carry it out.

Then the feast, and what a feast it was, hot roast beef with potatoes browned in the gravy plus other vegetables, followed by plum pudding and sauce, mince pies, several different coloured jellies, blanc mange, iced cakes, and biscuits, ginger beer for the children and ale for the adults. We didn't have stomachs big enough to eat all we liked. When everyone was satisfied and were able to move what was left of the cakes, pies and biscuits were set aside for later in the evening. All the remains and dishes were taken back to the house kitchen and some stayed to wash up. The trestle tables were dismantled and put outside, the benches pushed to the sides of the room, in preparation for dancing. Wax candles were shaved on the floor and we boys were given the job of scuffing and sliding it into the boards.

When all was ready, word was sent to the house and the whole house party came out to start the

dance. Sid Merritt the cow man and George Woods (locally pronounced Jarge "Oods") a gardener had their accordions ready. The Squire led off the Grand March with the cook, the butler took the Lady of the House, the gentlemen of the house took the house maids, the kitchen maids, the parlour maids, and the single men from the gardens and the grooms to the ladies of the house party, the married men were left with their wives, and they all circled around the room several times to the music of Sid and Jarge. Some attempted to dance, but appeared too awkward. The Squire and the cook were both too portly, so they just walked. That being over, the house party went back to the house and their own dinner and celebrations.

Sid Merritt took charge of the evenings' entertainment in the workshop, which consisted of dances, mostly waltz's and polkas interspersed with songs and stories. Anyone could contribute what they liked. Old Bill Helder sang "Good King Wenceslas" in a jerky hollow tuneless voice. He sang the same song in the same way every year.

Benny Harwood sang a song in which the chorus came, "O, she promised for to marry me upon the first of May and she left me with a bunch of water creeses," (meaning water cresses). One of the house maids sang a song and the way she pronounced some words she must have come from London, it was certainly not the Hampshire dialect.

"Are we to part like this Bill, Are we to part this w'y Who's it to be, 'er or me don't be afride to s'y Which ever your choose between us, don't ever pass me by For you and me still friends can be,

For the side of the d'ys gone by." All unattached persons were allowed to invite a friend and one of the maids brought in her boyfriend who turned out to be an Irishman in the Navy and undertook to sing, and us boys got a few more giggles out of his strange speech as we did of the London girl. His song went like this,

"Ailaine my Quane I drame of you noight and day, You're always wid me though thousands of moils away." We laughed about the Irishman for some time after.

By ten o'clock most of the babies and younger children were either asleep or getting cranky, so the party began to break up. They all had to walk to their different homes on the estate, and the unmarried ones did not live on estate and had a walk of a couple of miles to the village. Eleven o'clock at night was LATE for country people to be out.

AND SO ENDED ANOTHER CHRISTMAS PARTY.



HANGING A STOCKING almost as big as he is, this lad, according to the drawing's humorous caption, is capitalizing on "a chance to test Santa Claus's generosity." By the renowned illustrator, Thomas Nast, the drawing is one of many which he created for Harper's Weekly in the latter half of the 19th century.

## Home for Christmas

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS  
 I want to go home for Christmas  
 I have been away so long  
 When I left home from my family  
 I was young and full of song.

I came with my Uncle to this country  
 Over ten years or so ago  
 A tradesman, we built a business  
 Which grew very, very slow.

I would like to return to my family  
 For a real Christmas surprise  
 To tell them of this great country  
 And wonders I've seen with my eyes.

When I got home to my family  
 I met a girl I used to know  
 Her eyes held beauty and adventure  
 Love at first sight, it was so.

As bride and groom they travelled  
 Oh what a great trip to share  
 It was his very best Christmas  
 With his family all merrily there.

No Christmas will ever be lonely  
 My bride is loved by my side  
 We now find progress and friendship  
 As we travel the world over wide.

by Albert Brooks,  
 Limehouse.

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