

Lifestyle

Wednesday Dec. 13, 1989

Community Notebook

Commune with Nature: There will be a bonfire for warmth and apple cider for refreshment at Mountsberg Wildlife Centre's Christmas and Nature event this Saturday from 6-9 p.m. If there's enough snow, horse-drawn sleigh rides will take visitors through the woods and if they're in the mood for singing, there'll be Christmas carolling. This annual event will also include making Christmas decorations using natural ingredients.

Christmas Story: Learn the animal's version of the Christmas story through the puppet show, "Mary had a Little Lamb." The production, sponsored by the Salvation Army, features a children's choir to help tell the story. There is no charge to attend the show, and there will be a free will offering. The event is scheduled for Sunday, Dec. 17 at 2:30 p.m. at E.C. Drury School's auditorium. As seating is limited, tickets will be provided by calling the Salvation Army at 875-1022 or at the door.

Night of Light: The Halton Radial Railway Museum has adopted a new look for the festive season with the addition of colourful Christmas lights. To show off these seasonal decorations, the public is invited to ride the old-fashioned street cars during the Christmas Night Show, Saturday, Dec. 16 between 7-10 p.m. Adults pay \$2 admission and seniors and children are charged \$1.

Free for Seniors: Club 2000 in Norval is paying tribute to senior citizens in the area through an afternoon get-together on Sunday, Dec. 17 from 1-4. The management and staff promise a full range of entertainment and even a visit from Santa Claus to this free event. Club 2000 is located on Highway 7 at Winston Churchill Blvd.

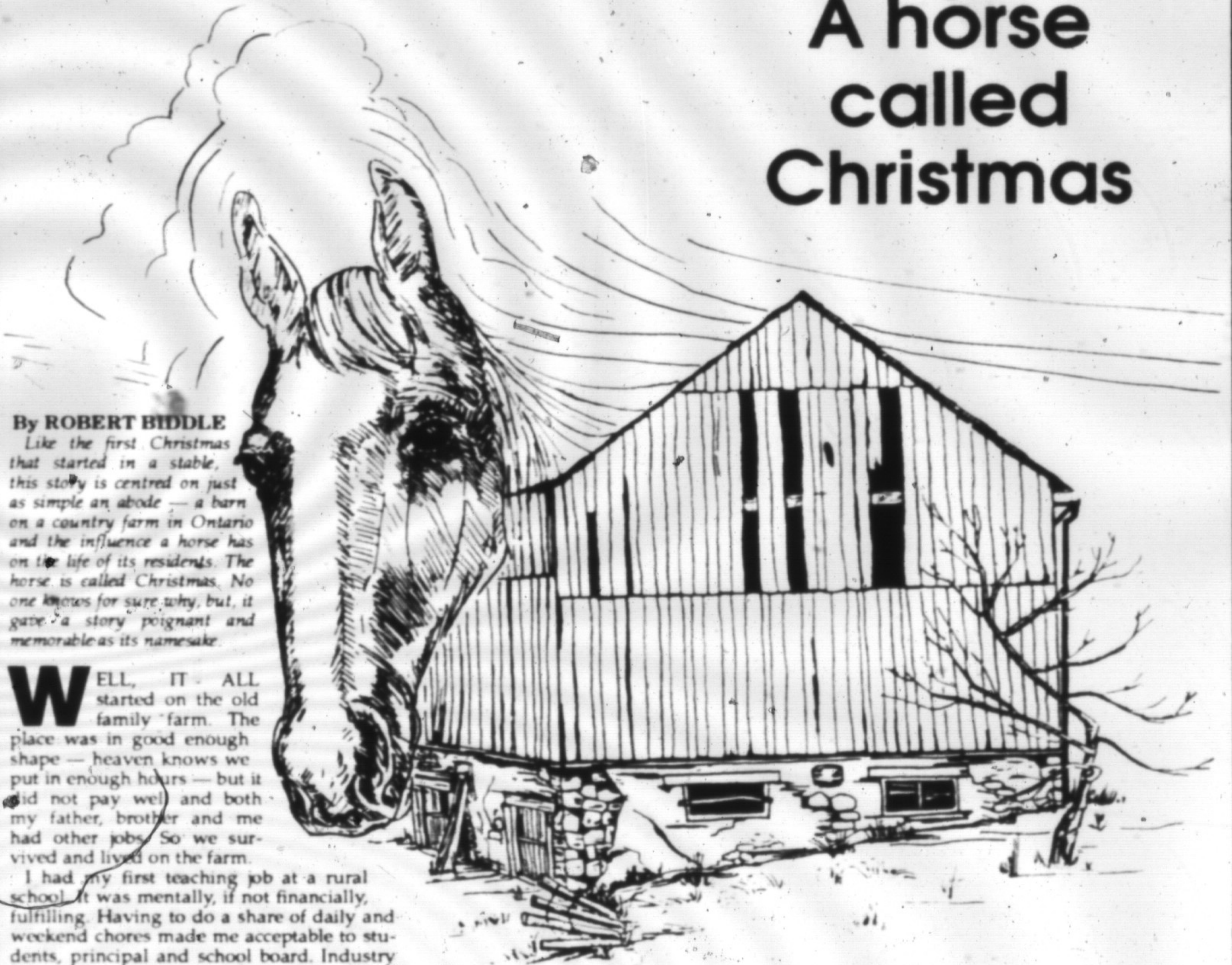
Gift Wrappers: Members of Theta Tau sorority invite Milton Mall shoppers to "come wrap with us" from Dec. 15-23. The women will offer a gift-wrapping service with proceeds going to local charities.

Foot Care Clinic: A new service is being offered to local senior citizens by the Victorian Order of Nurses in co-operation with Milton Community Information Services. Foot care clinics will be provided at MCIS, 311 Commercial St. (Optimist Centre) on a regular basis beginning Thursday (Dec. 14) from 9 a.m. to noon. For information and to arrange an appointment call MCIS at 875-4636. Cost is \$15.

Deals on Meals: Discount coupon books which provide savings on dining, sports activities, entertainment and merchandise are available from Information Milton. At \$35 at book, it could make a great Christmas gift and proceeds go toward the town's information service. Toronto books are also available at a cost of \$40. For more call 875-INFO (4636).

Piece of the Amazon: Give someone an acre of Amazon rainforest for Christmas through the World Wildlife Fund's "Guardian of the Amazon" program. It costs \$25 to buy an acre and the purchaser receives a certificate representing the one acre and is enlisted as a Guardian of the Amazon. Those interested in becoming a "guardian" or buying an acre as a gift, should call the World Wildlife Fund toll-free at 1-800-387-8660.

A horse called Christmas



By ROBERT BIDDLE

Like the first Christmas that started in a stable, this story is centred on just as simple an abode — a barn on a country farm in Ontario and the influence a horse has on the life of its residents. The horse is called Christmas. No one knows for sure why, but it gave a story poignant and memorable as its namesake.

WELL, IT ALL started on the old family farm. The place was in good enough shape — heaven knows we put in enough hours — but it did not pay well and both my father, brother and me had other jobs. So we survived and lived on the farm.

I had my first teaching job at a rural school. It was mentally, if not financially, fulfilling. Having to do a share of daily and weekend chores made me acceptable to students, principal and school board. Industry was recognized in those days. Personally, I don't think we knew any better. Everyone accepted you had to work hard to get anywhere, although in the 1930s I was not too sure of which direction we were working towards.

It was the late summer of 1938 on a Saturday evening. The air was hot and still and there wasn't a trace of a breeze. I was living at the farm with my folks. They had got a lift into town with a neighbour and I was just finishing cleaning the barn. We had gotten rid of the cattle and the only livestock around at the time was a couple of pigs, some geese and chicken.

From the dust

I heard some horses hooves and out of the dust of the sideroad came a man leading a horse.

"Can I help you?" I said.

"No you can't help me a lot," he said, "but you can the horse and I'd thank you kindly if you would."

"Is something wrong with it?"

"No, he's sound and well natured."

"So, how am I supposed to help?" I asked.

"I'd like you to take him and keep him for me. All he's got is this bridle and halter. I had to sell the harness and the saddle. He needs feed and we've walked as far as we can together. I have to go on and you're the only living person I've seen for a while. I'm joining the army, so it's a long walk yet to the Armories in Toronto and Christmas here won't make it."

"But I can't afford to buy a horse."

"Take him. If you can look after him for a while I know I'll be back for him. I'll repay you. You're our only hope. He's all I got. Look after him."

"Well, um, anyway there's oats and water here. No animal need go hungry. Bring him round the barn."

He handed me the halter.

"Then come over the house and I'll make some tea."

I led the horse to where I feed the pigs. There was a pail of fresh water and he

started to drink. I scooped out some oats and put them in the trough. I walked out front and the man was gone.

I then continued to walk part way down the drive where I could see the sideroad. He was nowhere to be seen. I thought I saw a silhouette at the end of the concession. It was saluting and then it was gone.

The horse was with us all year. How its name got to be Christmas, I don't know, but it answered to it every time I called. It stayed healthy, and I got attached to it in a way, not having had a horse before.

On to Europe

That September war broke out. I had been doing some instructing with the militia. Communications they called it, me a teacher and all. Well, I signed up and a month later I was on my way to Europe, assigned to a British signals unit to train for intelligence.

My folks took on the farm and it was me who had to say goodbye to Christmas. I remember I said, "I know I'll be back, look after him." And I can still feel his warm nuzzle when I bedded him down for the last time. Roughly one year to the day of the strange circumstances that brought him to the farm.

I was sent to France with the British Expeditionary Force. We had a signal group close to the front in some farm buildings on the edge of a village. It was Christmas Eve 1939. There was shelling and an air raid, if a German plane flying over and drops some bombs constitutes an air raid. It was our

• see HORSE on page L10

ROBERT BIDDLE



Robert Biddle is a retired school principal ("those miserable kids forced me into early retirement") a character full of yarns and stories about this country life. Time is taking its toll on old man Biddle and the family farm, but not before he related this — a Christmas story.

© Copyright 1984 by Jack Carpenter, all rights reserved.

**MILTON
MALL**

55 ONTARIO STREET
MILTON, ONTARIO

We've Got It All!
Extended Christmas Hours
OPEN SATURDAY NIGHT
FROM 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM
Take advantage of some incredible
Christmas Savings

878-3900