

# Westford Recollections

By JUNE W. KENNEDY

## Memories of Christmas past

How old-fashioned, we exclaim, as the electric candles glow in the village windows or when we receive a particularly quaint Christmas card that catches our fancy. But it wasn't always so, here in our town. The dipping and moulding of candles was often a chore, and the burning of them was done sparingly. Even the sending of cards by way of friendly greeting and remembrance is a relatively new custom. It was the middle of the 19th century when Louis Prang first designed the Christmas card. His earlier ones featured flowers and birds rather than his later traditional holiday motifs which are currently so popular. Also, the presence of individual trees in one's home was not common practice. And yet, . . . hearts were aglow, and there was some celebrating during the Christmas season in the villages of Westford. Let's turn back the calendar, poke through diaries and records of the old families of the town to catch a glimpse of Christmas past.

Kate Hamlin - 1850's: The two great days of the year were the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving

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Day. Christmas was not celebrated to the extent it is now - (1930's). To be sure, we hung up stockings and had a few presents. At school, we could choose whether we would have Christmas or New Year's Day for a holiday - we could not have both, so we usually chose Christmas, because that came first.

Emma M. Day - Her Diary Dec. 24, 1868: W.S. & I & Ada went up to the Christmas tree (Congregational Church, now Parish Hall of First Parish Church United of Westford). W. got 2 nice Handkerchiefs & 1.50 to get a Testament. Ada had a work Basket and & bag candy & a horn candy she got a little basket and some sugar animals, peanuts & five cents Aunt P gave her and Quincy both - F. & Mother both had a Spec Case.

Dec. 25, 1868: Fair S. went up in town when F. & W. went to work and staid till night. I worked on my Bonnet that W. (Warren, her husband) gave me. I was very much pleased with it - it was black velvet.

May E. Day (granddaughter of Emma Day) - Her Diary - Dec. 25, 1905: Hung up my stocking last night. Got half a dozen handkerchiefs from Grandma, penwiper from Addie, collar from Mamma. Papa gave me 10 cents orange, dates

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chocolates peanuts and candy in my stocking. Went to the Christmas tree in town in the evening. Mrs. Osgood gave each in her class a box of writing paper. I have plenty of that already.

Allister MacDougall - Turn-of-the-Century: About 2 or 3 times a year we took a trip to Lowell in the carriage. We'd put the "hoss" in a stable on Church Street. For children it was quite a treat, especially during the Christmas season with the windows decorated with all the toys. We'd return 9, 10 or 11 o'clock over the road to Westford. I always remember it was when we hit Princeton Boulevard that we'd hear the first clank of hoof of our trotting "hoss." 'Til we reached that point in our journey, all the roads were dirt.

Elizabeth Cushing Taylor (Teacher at Tad-muck District School No.) - 1906: At Christmas time Aaron Tuttle carried me in his pung down to the Depot where he chopped two trees which were later decorated with popcorn and cranberries. (One tree was for upstairs; the other was for downstairs.) The children - and she had 35 - brought her numerous gifts.

Lucinda Prescott - Turn-of-the-Century at Stony Brook School No. 2.: The teacher's desk was on the raised platform, but was taken down for the Christmas tree. The teacher took care of the "boughten" things; we had to make the decorations - sometimes strings of cranberries, but usually strings of corn (popcorn) from our place. There was some scrappin' amongst stringing at our place, but if we said we'd do it, Mother made sure we did.

George Perkins - Turn-of-the-Century at Stony Brook School No. 2. We'd celebrate Christmas with little pieces to say. You thought you were something saying those pieces.

Frank Jarvis - Parkerville School No. 5 - 1915-1920: Students always looked forward to skating. At this time February or mid-winter vacations were unheard of. Christmas and April were the only weeks off from school. We worked hard in those days.

Minnie Perkins - Turn-of-the-Century at Minot's Corner District School No. 6: At Christmas we decorated the tree with paper chains, popcorn and cranberries. The teacher gave a box of candy to everyone; we were tickled to death. I remember one time I brought a pretty hanky to the teacher for a gift. At the Christmas party we all had to recite pieces on the platform.

Still more memories are shared from the Lyon School, District No. 9. Mrs. Harry Inez Ingalls came to this school in 1884 right after her 5th birthday. When she was still in her eighties she remembered the piece for school which she had memorized from her grandmother's almanac:

"A Merry Christmas  
To crown the closing year,  
With peace and goodwill to mortals  
And words of holy cheer.  
What though the dreary landscape  
Be clothed in purest white,  
If bright the fire and cheerful  
Light up our Christmas night."

. . . And many there are who remember the days when Gordon Seavey played the part of Santa Claus at the Unitarian Church, and Billy Prescott was the Santa who annually appeared at the belfry door of the Congregational Church. It was at the latter, commonly called the "brown church," as opposed to the white Meetinghouse across the street, that Clarence Burne was selected to buy the Christmas tree for the Sunday School back in the 1930's. When the festivities were over, picture if you will Clarence and his children dragging the tree down the middle of Boston Rd. - (there was little traffic in those days), lopping off the top, and carrying that special Church School evergreen into their own home for their own celebration. It's memories like these that make one a wee bit nostalgic.

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!

This is No. 3 in a continuing series of 250th Anniversary Westford Recollections articles.

