

Christmas In Bygone Days -By *Frank Mitchell*-Byway Ambassador & Hubbard County Historian

Christmas has always been a special and exciting time, especially for children growing up in those days.

After the snows of winter and the cold weather had set in, we needed a break and something different to look forward to. Christmas provided not only a vacation from school, but a special day to spend with family and friends. And ok! all that candy and nuts to snack on. The large chocolate drops were a favorite! And a good variety of candy, both boughten and homemade and all kinds of nuts. Christmas dinner was always a special meal.

It was a special and interesting time in our country schools as well. Sometime around the first part of December the teacher would tell us about his or her plans for a Christmas program. We would start rehearsing songs as a group or sometimes a smaller group would be assigned certain songs. Each student would be expected to learn and be able to recite a poem or short story. The whole school would take part in a play. A curtain would be hung on a wire across the front of the room. This would allow the children time to take their position and be ready to perform when the curtain was opened.

One evening the last week before Christmas all the parents would come and fill the school in anticipation for the "big event". The students would have drawn names for a gift exchange, so after the program the gifts were passed out and then with a lot of commotion Santa Claus would come in with a large bag. Each child would get a paper sack filled with candy, nuts, a popcorn ball and an apple. When we would have our Christmas vacation which would last until New Years day.

Church and Sunday schools would also put on a special program for the children to take part in. These would also consist of songs and recitations and of course they were centered around the birth of the Christ Child.

Times were hard and money was scarce so many of our



family gifts were homemade. Some times these were appreciated more than the boughten gifts. As an example when I was very young my older brothers cut small trees and sawed and carved them into skies for me and my three sisters. One year small wooden chairs were made, painted red and green with our initials painted on the back. I remember on year when I was pretty young, I knew my parents were going to get me a steel runnered sled. The sled had been ordered from a mail order catalog. I was real disappointed, as it hadn't arrived before Christmas. But to my surprise and delight the mail actually came on Christmas morning! And there was my sled!

We always cut a live spruce or balsam tree and decorated it. Most decorations except tinsel were homemade. We made ropes of popcorn and cut narrow strips of red and green paper and glued them to make links and put them together for long chains. Before electricity, we had metal candle holders that clipped on the tree branches and used small candles that were inserted in the holder. These were only lit for a short time, with the lamps turned down low while we were sitting close to the tree opening presents on Christmas Eve. This was a time to sing Silent Night or other Christmas songs.

So, Christmas has always been a special time, not only for the religious aspects, but a time to get together with family and friends, which it still is.

The Animals of Itasca-By *Frank Mitchell*-Byway Ambassador & Hubbard County Historian

Much has been written about the people in Itasca Park, Many articles were written about Schoolcraft, Brower, Mary Gibbs as well as the loggers, fur traders, railroad men and Native Americans. They all played a part in getting the park established.

But how about the animals that played an important and interesting part of the parks development?

Most information for this article is taken from the Park Rapids Enterprise and the Hubbard Co. Clipper.

Northern MN. Had a large population of bear, deer, beaver, muskrats, coyotes, raccoon, mink, otter and timber wolves as well as an occasional sighting of elk and moose. Most species of fish were abundant in the many lakes and streams in the park. With the coming of the white man many of these animals were killed both for meat and fur. Fur trading was a great industry, with furs used by natives and also shipped overseas.

By 1901 the beaver were completely exterminated in this section of the state. Being interested in wild

animals, Gov. John Lind learned that beaver could be obtained in Ontario. Gov. Lind started a momentum that resulted in the two females and one male being shipped to Park Rapids then taken to the park and put in Lake Itasca in the spring of 1901. Beaver from other areas were also released in the park. Since beaver are such prolific animals, in less than 20 years they had become so numerous that the lake was over populated and they were destroying many trees on the lake shore.

Headlines in the Park Rapids Enterprise of April 1920 read **Beaver in Itasca Park to be Trapped.** Ex-Gov. John Lind, State Forester Cox and Professor Wentling of the Forestry School came to the park to witness the trapping of beaver. Since it was through the efforts of Governor. Lind that beaver were obtained he wanted to witness the trapping. It is not known how many beaver were trapped.

Elk were also introduced to the park. 640 acres near Douglas Lodge was fenced with as 8 ft.high woven wire enclosure for the elk. A load of elk was brought in from Jackson Hole in Yellowstone Park in Wyoming. In

the fall of 1914 this load of elk was placed in this pen. In January 1915 it was reported that most of the calves and one large elk had been killed by wolves. It was discovered that there were wolves inside the pen when it was fenced. It was reported that there were 11 females, 2 males and 2 calves left in the pen. James J. Hill the great railroad builder, also donated his herd of 23 elk to the park, Superintendent, McNeil in the 1926 counted 44 elk but said there probably were over 50 elk in the pen. In April 1928, 10 elk were caught and crated for shipment to Ely to be released in the Superior National Forest.



Eventually all the elk were removed and taken to northern Minnesota and released.

Deer also were getting very numerous and were destroying most of the new pine seedlings, so the park was opened for deer hunting in the early 50's.

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*Happy Holidays
&
A Prosperous New Year*

**Is wished to you and
your family!**

from the
Lake Country Scenic
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