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DECEMBER 2021



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2021



*Christmas
Nostalgia*





Peconic Bay SHOPPER

...preserving North Fork History

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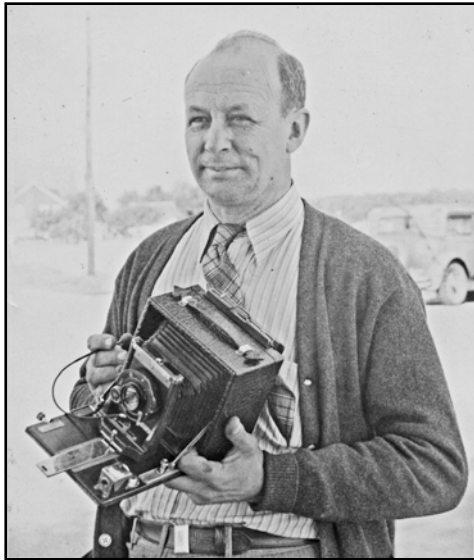
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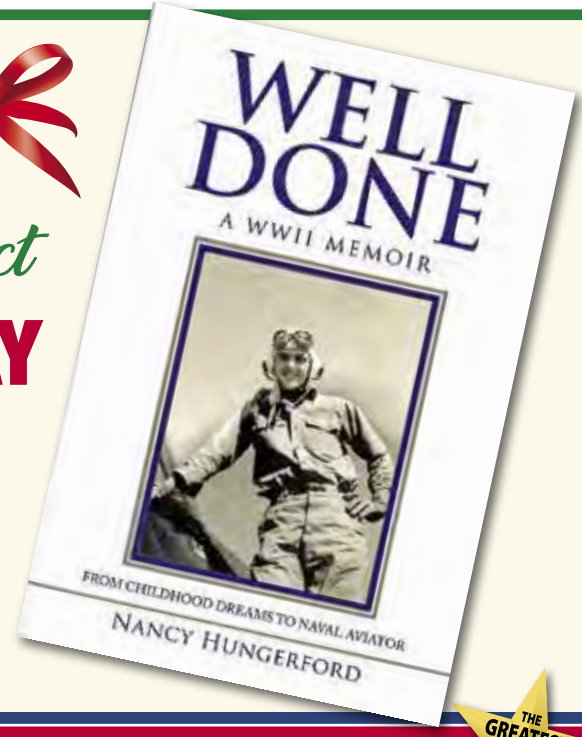
The office of Charles H. Meredith after a substantial snow event. This 1961 shot shows an open field along Cutchogue's Depot Lane. (Insert shows the view today with the not-so-open field.)

Charlie (pictured right) was a well known photographer who captured much of Southold's surroundings as well as many tragic events for the Police Department records.






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With a visit to our own Peconic Bay Shopper past, we take great pleasure in republishing several of Becky Terry's Christmas interviews. Many of these aging local residents are no longer with us, but they do give us an interesting perspective of Christmases at a simpler time.

Christmas Nostalgia DECEMBER 1986

Part of Christmas is the sharing of gifts. This writer is grateful to all who have shared their memories in the true spirit of the holidays.

MARGARET LIGHTFOOT of Greenport was born in Budapest and remembers a beautiful Hungarian Christmas custom. On Christmas Eve, children called Bethlehemites, dressed as shepherds and other creche figures, went from door to door carrying candles and singing folk hymns. They were invited in for refreshments and received money for the poor. Margaret recalls that in her grandfather's village, families walked to and from church on Christmas Eve, carrying lighted candles. Margaret's holiday tree was hung with burnished apples and walnuts, clip on birds and angel hair. She still treasures a pine walnut basket filled with candies which was carved by her father.

DR. NINA KELGREN SCUDDER of Southold described the years 1912-16 when she was 6 to 10 years old. Her London home featured Swedish customs at Christmas because her mother, a Russian aristocrat, married a Swedish doctor who practised in London. The week before Christmas, the children trimmed an enormous tree which reached the ceiling of their Eaton Square dining room. Ornaments were hand-made with a star on top. Early on the day before Christmas the whole family put on their national Swedish costumes. At noon they lunched in the basement kitchen with all the servants, eating pigs head and baked brown beans. Later there was tea in the drawing room with nuts and sweets. Then the door was opened upon the candle-lighted tree, and all joined hands and danced around the tree singing Swedish songs of the season. A knock on the door and Father Christmas called from outside. "Are there any good children here?" There was a loud answering "Yes" and Father Christmas entered carrying a laundry basket filled with gifts. When his name was called, each child went up and received his gifts which were then arranged in a little pile. The grownups received practical joke presents with verses. The evening meal was salted cod and rice pudding. (Whoever got the almond in the pudding would be a spinster or bachelor.) The exciting holiday ended with a singing game as children and adults joined hands and marched all through the house.

Winter Memories from Mattituck:

GERTRUDE REEVE RAYNOR recalled the Sunday School entertainment on Christmas Eve where her class sat in the row of the Presbyterian Church, and as sometimes happens with children, one little girl had to go to the bathroom which was a dark outside privy. It was a cold, snowy night and her feet were so frozen, she came back down the aisle in her stockings, leaving her icy shoes by the door. She was just in time to get her box of hard candy and orange from Santa. This was all the Christmas she would have except for the kindness of a Mill Lane farmer who took her home after the party and gave her parents, who were very poor, a gift of home-grown produce.

EDITH HORTON YOUNG told how Mattituck men would hold their Lodge meetings in Mechanics Hall (formerly a Methodist Church, now North Fork Community Theatre). Once a year they held a banquet to which the ladies and children were invited for supper and dancing, with tutti-frutti ice cream as a special treat. Once in 1916 it snowed so hard that 26 people stayed all night in the hall until the storm let up. Jan. 4, 1918 was the coldest local weather recorded by the Weather Bureau up to that time, with the thermometer at 13 degrees below zero.

ELBERTA HUDSON REEVE reminisced: "In those days oranges were very scarce, and always at the Presbyterian Sunday School when pieces and gift giving was done, this great big crate of lovely oranges was brought in and every kid got one. There was always a tree lighted with candles and Will Duryea was on guard with a pail of water and a sponge on a long pole."

DONALD GILDERSLEEVE also recalled this same scene at the Presbyterian Church: "The real thrill of the evening was the Christmas tree. A few days before, a crew of husky men located a huge and perfect cedar tree, lugged it to the church and mounted it in the right wing where its tip touched the ceiling. Then the ladies of the parish took over. Three or four of the fussiest women aided by three or four of the meekest men put every candle and ornament in exactly the right spot. When the candles were lighted there was great applause. Every now and then a small fire was noticed, but there was never any worry, for the men were prepared with pails of water on long poles tipped with sponges. Rev. Charles E. Craven was the minister at that time, Henry J. Reeve, the Sunday School Supt. Sunday School teachers and children always exchanged presents and it was said that no teacher ever needed to buy a handkerchief after Christmas!

Many thanks to Kay Lascelle and Mattituck Free Library



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Christmas Nostalgia  DECEMBER 1985

At the Christmas season it's pleasant to hear the memories of those who "remember when".

HAROLD TUTHILL described the hand-cut cedar tree from "up-lot" and the beautiful holiday table laden with home-grown foods, but he also remembered the excitement of a boyhood trip to his uncle's home in Brooklyn, accompanied by cousins Miriam and Florence. They took gifts of farm sausage, chicken and pork loins. There was a trolley ride to visit the zoo. His city cousin said, "Don't stare at the tall buildings – they'll know you come from the country." Harold Tuthill will celebrate his 96th birthday on Dec. 28.

EV GOLDSMITH lived two miles from the Methodist Church, on South Harbor Rd. He remembers as a young boy walking the distance with his mother in bitter cold and snow. If they were lucky, they would catch a ride in their Presbyterian neighbor's sleigh. But the glowing candle-lit tree at church made the trip worthwhile.

HELEN SAYRE YOUNG lived on Peconic Lane and her family used to make the trip to the Universalist Christmas services in Southold by stage driven by Bill Turner. The holiday family dinner was held at noon and featured roast goose and steamed plum pudding. Afterwards there was a taffy pull or divinity fudge was made. The children played Old Maid or Parchessi and the men enjoyed Pinochle. At Peconic School the children recited pieces on the day before vacation and everyone hoped there would be lots of snow and ice. That meant coasting on the Soundview hills and skating on Salmon's Pond. Julia Bell was a special friend of Peconic youth. If she was with you on her extra long Flexible Flyer, you could go coasting at night and parents didn't worry. Helen recalls playing in Vail's woods with her friend Ruth Vail. One could buy a simple Xmas gift at Uncle Frank Smith's shop in Peconic where fashionable ladies selected the latest fashions in hats and gloves. Dressing up for church was not nearly as much fun for Helen as taking a Sunday afternoon walk with her friends.

TONY NAPOLI, 95 years young, was born in San Guiseppe, Italy. He remembers going to Midnight Mass with his parents and two sisters and afterwards the family reunion at a bountiful supper. There were fancy figs and other fruits and sweet pasta cakes baked in different shapes. Each family brought special foods to supper, made from their own recipes. He recalls that the only gift shared were colorful Christmas cards, for these were farm and vineyard workers, rich only in the love they held for each other. Tony came to this country in 1913, unable to read so much as a street sign, and taught himself English. He found employment

as a mason's helper and later worked in a fur-dyeing factory. He was drafted for World War I service and trained in Georgia. He remembers marching on to a boat in New York harbor and setting sail for France. The next morning he and his buddies looked out to see the shores of New Jersey instead of the wide Atlantic. The ship had turned back off Sandy Hook, for news of the Armistice had been received. The cheers of 3000 soldiers rang out over the water! Tony married and spent his last working years at Grumman Corp. When his wife, Frances, had a stroke, Tony cooked, cleaned and singlehandedly cared for her, never complaining. Now he makes his home with his daughter Gloria (Mrs. Russell Hillman) in Cutchogue. The following recipe which is a traditional family treat at Christmas and Easter is shared with our readers by Gloria.

Italian Cake-Pudding (*Bianco Mangiare*)

1 pkg. vanilla pudding or homemade white pudding*

1 slightly stale sponge cake or pound cake

semi-sweet chocolate (several squares or 1 lge. bar)

almond slivers

*Follow directions on corn starch pkg. for white pudding. Flavor with vanilla and lemon peel. Remove peel when cooked. Line a transparent bowl or glass dish with cake pieces. Put on thin coating pudding. Follow with slivered chocolate and slivered almonds. Repeat layers. Chill for several hours before serving. Cut into squares. Note: Unlike its cousin "Trifle" it is not tossed. Fruit can be substituted for the chocolate and almonds. Top with whipped cream or Cool Whip.

Several Methodist memories are from friends no longer with us. **FLORENCE MOFFAT** remembered when she and **LUCY WHEELER** directed the Christmas programs. Lucy Wheeler wrote personalized poems for each child to recite, either about the child or his parents. When Florence herself was a child, she had to illustrate her Christmas piece with articles on a table. She was terrified that she'd pick up the wrong item or mix up the lines, but forgot her fears once Santa appeared to give the children boxes of hard candy and that special treat, a fresh orange.

MARY MOFFAT WHEELER remembered the huge holiday dinner with 30 or more at the table, the children playing upstairs while the grown-ups talked downstairs, Mrs. Lacquement, the minister's wife, painting heavy muslin for pageant costumes, Mary Newbold as Mary with someone's baby as Jesus, and walking on hard candy after it spilled from the children's boxes at the Sunday School Christmas party.

May these memories of Christmas Past help to brighten your Christmas Present. Happy Holidays to all our Nostalgia readers!



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Christmas Nostalgia DECEMBER 1989

As the last Christmas of the 1980's approaches, we are aware of how fast our world is changing. And we would wish that the holiday hope of peace on earth is nearer realization. Yet because of change, the traditions of the past become all the more meaningful as the following memories show.

SIGNE YOUNGBERG remembers parents who emigrated from Sweden to Southampton, L.I. following World War I, bringing with them the holiday custom of the Swedish smorgasbord. On Christmas Eve the table was trimmed with the best cloth and gleaming candles, the setting for a bountiful feast. Herring and cheese, rye crisp bread (knackerbrod), meatballs, sweet and sour kidney beans, codfish pudding, roast pork and pickled beets. Dessert was a special rice pudding baked with an almond inside. If you got the almond you would be the next to marry. Seven kinds of cookies were also served. After the feasting came gifts, singing, dancing and the excitement for a small girl of being allowed to stay up all night! The beautiful tree was adorned with glowing ornaments. Signe remembers tiny straw horses on the tree and the heart-shaped spice cookies which brought good luck. When the family moved to Harlem, there was a Swedish Lutheran church they could attend after the all-night celebration. This high Lutheran service was called Julotta.

FRANK (SPARKY) COYLE recalls that there always seemed to be snow for Christmas so his new Flexible Flyer sled could be used that day. Sparky's Christmas stocking had a fresh orange in the toe (a rare treat), rock candy animals wrapped in newspaper and a wrapped penny to bring good luck in the coming years. On the day before Christmas when he was 5 years old, Sparky was gathering eggs in a loft of the barn when he

lost his footing and fell, breaking his arm. Dr. Miles was called to the house, put the boy to sleep with chloroform and set the arm. When Sparky woke up, there was his Christmas gift, an Ivers electric train set which Santa brought early to help him forget his accident! Sparky remembers the Christmas Eve service at his church when children from several Greenport churches walked to the platform and spoke holiday pieces. There were gifts for the children and teachers and there was a large tree with colored electric lights, a special treat, for many people did not yet have tree lights. Sparky ended his reminiscence by saying "In those days Christmas was made for kids."

JOHANNA GRIM stated that her ancestors lived in southern Germany in the Black Forest area. When her parents settled in Queens, the old world customs were held dear. Christmas Eve was a fast day. Soup and fish were the main foods eaten, until after the gifts, when wine and cookies were served. In the evening young Johanna heard Santa's bells ring as he left her house. This was the signal for the children to line up by age (after her three brothers came their little sister, for all wanted to see the joyful expression on her face as she walked into the sun porch and saw the tree with all the toys underneath). She recalls especially the baby doll that cried "Mama". On the tree were German ornaments, now collector's items. She has several; her favorite is a large green glass ball with a beautiful flower showing through. One year her father made her a little table and chair set which she loved to climb on as well as have tea parties. The same sort of set he made for the first grandchild. He also constructed a unique tree holder which contained a nativity scene of a Bethlehem village with movable figures. Christmas mass at church was always a special family activity.

REV. GEORGE BORTHWICK did not celebrate Christmas in the traditional fashion of most children. His earliest years were in Bangalore, southern India, where his parents were missionaries. His mother, a German, substituted

Continued on page 11...



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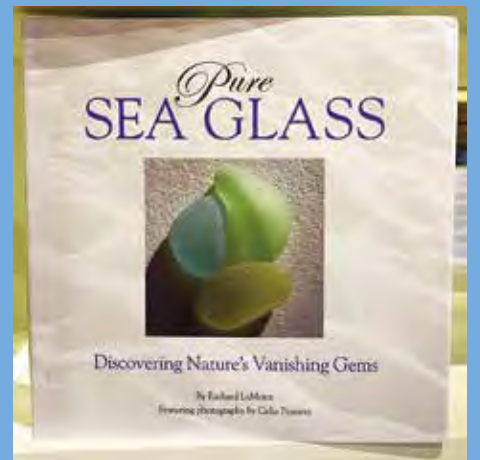
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