



NEWSLETTER

BRUNSWICK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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A CHRISTMAS LETTER

Dear Susie:

When I begin to think of the way we used to keep Christmas, the first thing that comes to my mind is the Christmas program at the church with the beautiful tree and presents hanging on the tree; that was a sight to remember, also our stockings hanging from the mantle in the living room, over the fireplace, wondering how Santa Claus could get down the chimney with a big fire in the fireplace and how suttly he would be if he came in that way.

I was afraid of Santa faces, a young man brought one of the false faces to our house and I was frightened of it so I could not look at it. That was when I was a very small girl. Our stockings were filled with the very best candy, nuts, raisins and toys that our parents could afford. They did not have much money - no one in our community did have much, but I am sure that they sacrificed to buy the best they could afford. I suppose that we were poor, but we did not know it.

We were a happy family celebrating Christmas. In later years they had more money and could afford to buy more and they never let us lack for good food, candy and fruit. Our clothes were warm, shoes were good and plenty of wholesome food on the table at all times.

My mother always cooked lots of pies, cakes, chicken, ham and beef or fish; Christmas and week-ends found us with pantry shelves full. We had no refrigerator or ice, but had a big pantry with shelves for canned fruits and vegetables, a smoke house full of meats, banks of sweet potatoes, at times there was a nice bank of rutabaga turnips, and they were best after being in the bank several weeks. I recall that one year we had a nice bank of irish potatoes that were raised in the fall, called fall potatoes.

My mother used all the scrap grease at hog killing time to make lye soap. We used it to wash dishes, clothes and most of the time to take our baths. One Sunday morning our pastor had spent the night with us, which preachers often done. That morning when he started to wash his hands and face, Pa tried to apoligize for the lye soap in the soap dish. He told the preacher that we made what we used and used what we made. He replied that he only wished he could do the same.

We did not set up a tree in the house for Christmas then. I suppose it would make our house too crowded as we had lots of company, but we would decorate with cedar and holly. In later years a tree was put up in the house. There was always one at the church and a program. Our people took time to tie gifts on the tree, a man would call out the name and the person would go up front to receive his gift.

Pa would buy a few small firecrackers for the boys and a few Roman Candles. How we did watch as these were lit! He lit them at night and they made several colored sparkles as they burned.

Love, Aunt Berlyn

Some Things I Remember As A Child- by Berlyn Sellers Lancaster

(Things I Remember: Continued)

When we were in school we had a little fun. We made our own games, balls, pop guns, ball bats and water squirters. We had a little fun with those. There was a ditch between the school house and the road which held water most of the time. It was handy to draw up water in the squirter.

One boy, Adrian Phelps, could not talk plain but he was bright. He was not retarded at all and he could get in plenty of mischief. I liked to squirt a little water on him at times. When I got after him with the water gun he would call for the teacher who was named Mr. Parker.

Adrian would say, "Mr. Palker, these younguns is going to squilt walter on me". I only liked to hear him say that. I did not aim the squirt the water on him. We made these guns out of reeds and plungers whittled to fit the reed. One end of the reed was opened and plungers whittled to fit the reed. The other end was almost tight with a small hole in the end. The pop guns had both end open with a plunger of wood to fit. Both guns had a small piece of cloth on the end of the plunger to mke them airtight. We also made cry babies and bull bellowers

I guess children now do not know how to make play things as we did. All must be bought. We also made whistles, boats, dolls, etc. I made a doll that I liked, my brother Ledrew said she needed to be baptized. He took the doll to the ditch of water and baptized her. She was ruined.

We loved to go to Grandma's and eat food cooked in the fireplace. It was delicious. They cooked potatoes in an oven. They fried the best bacon I have ever tasted and that gravy on the warm potatoes was the best I have ever tasted. If you have never eaten any food cookeed in the fireplace, you have missed a lot of good eating.

Grandma Stallings had a log house with shingles on the sides and top. I loved that house. Her kitchen was back of the house with shingles on it and a catstick chimney with a big fireplace in it. It also had a loom in the end of the kitchen. The house was ceiled with wide boards and the flooring the same. Grandpa Stallings had a stroke when he was a young man and had to walk with a stick. He was also so deaf that we had to talk very loud. He died suddenly when I was 7 years old. I really loved my grandparents.

Grandpa Sellers lived until I was married on July, 1908. He also died sudden. He had been to the doctor and died on the way home. His house was a frame house ceiled and floored with wide boards. His kitchen was away from the house, too. Grandma Sellers cooked in the fireplace too. That was really good food. She roasted many potatoes by the fire at night while she knitted or spun yarn.