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Snellville Historical Society

To Research, Document and Publicize the History of Snellville and the Snellville Community



Christmas Traditions in Snellville

In the late 1800's as Snellville began to grow into a town, churches dotted the area, and at the Christmas season many congregations observed this Holy day with a pageant that told the story of Jesus' birth. Children were used as characters in the play, and mothers used their creativity and sewing skills to provide costumes for kings, shepherds and angels. Creating angel wings was always difficult and an ego boost for the mother who thought of a way to brighten the tips of the wings.

In the 1940's some citizens decided to erect a Christmas tree at the intersection of Hwy 78 and Centerville Road. This practice continued for several years until one of the town's teenagers accepted the challenge to drive his car as closely as possible around the tree. Unfortunately, he caught a string of lights on his bumper and pulled the tree down North Road. That ended the tradition of a tree at that intersection.

Having a Christmas tree in homes was a tradition brought from Europe and most families in the Snellville area put up a cedar or pine tree they cut near their homes. Decorations were homemade, but they transformed the trees into a glorious sight for children.

Receiving gifts at Christmas is a tradition that began centuries ago as Christian believers recalled that the three Kings gave gifts to the Christ child. In Snellville for the first half of the 20th century, gifts were meager. Children received a piece of fruit and sometimes a candy cane. Toys were homemade, but most of the time children used their imagination to create toys from whatever materials they found around them.

After World War II and a time when families had more disposable income, Christmas spending increased and homes and businesses were decorated with wreaths, garlands and lights. Decorations began to be seen in government buildings in the area. In 1983 dur-

ing Mayor Emmett Clower's term of office, the city council voted to have a special evening at city hall to initiate the Christmas season. Councilwoman Elise Cotter chaired the committee. The event was planned for the first Monday in December. In front of city hall a stage was erected on which the dignitaries stood and school and church choirs performed. Children were dressed as elves and gave out candy canes to those attending. City hall was beautifully decorated, but it wasn't until a soloist sang *Silent Night* that the lights on the tree were lit. After the lighting of the tree and the crowd sang *Here Comes Santa Claus*, Mr. and Mrs. Claus arrived in a horse drawn carriage. After Santa's arrival, the crowd went into city hall to visit with Santa and to enjoy delicious refreshments.

During the twenty-seven years the city of Snellville has sponsored this event, the tree has found itself in different locations. For several years the tree was at the lake in Briscoe Park, and at one time it was mounted on the roof of the old city hall. Today it is displayed at the new City complex in a position travelers on Hwy 78 can see and enjoy.



Elise Cotter & Granddaughter ready to light the first Christmas tree

The lighting of the tree is still held the first Monday in December, but the celebration is not always done as elaborately as the first one in 1983. Santa is always there to greet the children. Christmas carols are sung. Delicious refreshments are served, and the Christmas tree is lit.

It is now Christmas time in Snellville



In 1987 the city of Snellville started another Christmas tradition, it began selling historical ornaments. The lovely various colored ornaments feature treasured scenes of the Snellville area. The first one featured the old city hall followed by the Sawyer Store and Snellville Consolidated School. Throughout the years there have been ornaments for each of the local churches and significant municipal buildings within the city limits.

Many families treasure their collection of the ornaments, and each year look forward to decorating their Christmas trees with reminders of their hometown.

Christmas Memories

A very special friend of the editor and her husband. wrote this memory of a Christmas when she was young living in south Georgia. Dr. Grace Jones Eubank is an eighty-nine year old retired professor from the University of Georgia.

The Best Christmas Ever 1925

The child sat on the bottom step off the back porch. She sat on the bottom step so her tiny, bare toes could scrunch around in the soft South Georgia sand. She liked the silky feel of sand against skin. She sat very still thinking

Christmas was coming. She wasn't sure what day, but she knew it was soon. What would Santa Claus bring her this year? As a multitude of dream-toys floated and collided in her five-year-old brain, she sighed with cautious anticipa-

tion. Just as a beautiful new doll smiled at her in her day-dream, Mama called,

"Honey, come in for a spell. I have something to tell you."

"What, Mama?"

"Just come in and we'll talk."

Oh, oh! When Mama wanted to talk, it didn't sound good. If the child had known how bad it was going to be, she might not have gone so readily.

"Honey, sit down. I have bad news."

The child's heart felt funny in her tiny chest, like a hammer trying to wake it up or, shut it up, or something. Suddenly the room was cold and quiet and scary.

The child was too afraid to ask what; besides Mama was going to tell her anyway.

"Child, this year we are poorer than we have ever been before. Everybody is poor, even Santa Claus. Santa Claus doesn't have any money for toys this year, although you have been a very good little girl. Santa Claus is sad about it, but he can't help it."

Mama looked like she was going to cry, so the child knew it was so. Mama hardly ever cried.

The child tasted the loss of her dreams, and they were bitter, like the awful medicine she had to take when she was sick. She didn't want to make Mama feel worse so she caught her trembling little lips between her teeth and went to her room. Times were hard, but they were surrounded by a wall of love. After winding down a day of promising dreams, she huddled in her aloneness. She had lost the raw, untouched confidence of a child's dreams.

She wasn't hungry when Mama called her to supper, so she wiggled the food around and around on her plate. She knew Mama saw it, and she knew Mama loved her enough not to make a fuss about it. When the cold, stiff day was finally over, and the child went to bed, it was hard to go to sleep without crying, but for Mama, she held the tears inside with a grasp of cold steel. She may have been little, but she could hold the loss of her dreams close to her tired, little body and cry silent tears so that they would not hurt Mama. Finally she slept with the loss of her dreams clutched to her beating heart.

As all bad things finally pass, so passed the awful night. The next morning, as she lay in her lonely bed, she dreaded facing another day with no Santa Claus to bless Christmas morning.

Mama called, "Child get up. Christmas morning is here. Bleak and scarce as it is, Christmas morning is here."

Trembling and scared, the child quickly slipped out of pajamas and into her clothes. She ever so slowly crept down the long hall and entered the family room. The child was so frightened of finding a room with no sign of Christmas to greet her, that she had squeezed her eyes shut so tightly they hurt.

She couldn't stand the hurt any longer and peeped through barely open lids. "What?" Mama had turned on all the lights. The lights were a golden fire, brighter than a summer morning in July. The music of Christmas sang in all its mystery and majesty. Throwing her hurt and disappointment into a vast cavern of forgetfulness, she became a part of the magic of surprise, of the bright glory surrounding her and the entire room. The Christmas tree, which yesterday seemed lonely and bare, was now filled with ornaments of red, and blue, and yellow, and white. The child couldn't move; she couldn't breathe; she couldn't think. There beneath the wonderful, impossibly beautiful tree was her very own doll, which yesterday was old and ragged with hair too thin and worn to comb. Now here was her Betsy with beautiful rich golden hair, floating around her freshly washed face and cascading down and around her shoulders. Yesterday Betsy's dress was dirty and torn, but now it was new, blue organdy that angels would wear to a dress-up party. The child couldn't move. She was helplessly still except for her large brown eyes which darted here and there. Then she saw it, what had been her beat-up chair, scratched with a year of hard play, her little chair that just fit her small bottom. Her little chair stood clean and new, with a coat of dazzling red paint.

The child was overcome with love for her dearly beloved doll and sturdy little chair. Santa Claus doesn't need money! All he needs is a child with dreams and a mother with imagination and unlimited love.

The past reached for an old woman's memory and tapped into a child's dreams.



The President's Corner

by Carolyn Kirkland

Dear Members,

One hundred and thirty years ago if you drove your wagon into the area called New London, you would discover that James Sawyer and Tom Snell had started a retail business in a newly constructed wood frame building. The Snell and Sawyer Store quickly prospered. In December 1882 an ad in the Gwinnett Herald states that their motto was "Small Profits and Quick Returns". Their main interest was to sell needed supplies at the lowest possible prices. They sold dry goods, groceries, hardware, tinware, queen-ware, furniture, saddlery, drugs, hats, boots, shoes and ready made clothes.

Because these two adventurous young men from England settled in this part of Gwinnett County establishing homes and their business, it was the beginning of Snellville, the place we today are proud to call home.

On October 11, 2009 our Historical Society held our general meeting at city hall. We want to thank our delightful speaker, Mary Long, and our members for a wonderful Sunday gathering. The meeting was enhanced with a colorful display of members' quilts. Ann Britt provided fried pies and tea cakes for memorable refreshments.

Our sympathy goes out to the families and friends of the following society members: Kate Allen who died on October 28th, Jimmy Gresham who died August 13th, and R.H. Thomas who died October 9th. Each one of these special members will be greatly missed.

Donations made recently to our historical society are *Reflections of Georgia Educators II* given by Mary Frazier Long, and *Gwinnett Churches* by J.C. Flanigan given by Larry Gilleland.

We continue to collect military pictures, so please share your pictures with our Society. We will make copies and return the originals to you.

The magic of Christmas I felt as a child can never be erased. Anticipating the arrival of Santa was so exciting that it meant a sleepless night no matter how hard my sisters and I tried to sleep.

We have encouraged people to share their memories of Christmas. We appreciate the members that responded, and we share their Christmas Memories.

If you have memories to share, please send them to the Snellville Historical Society, 2405 Springdale Drive, Snellville, GA 30078

Wishing for you a Christmas that creates wonderful memories to treasure as we remember the real reason for this joyful season!

Merry Christmas,
Carolyn

My Childhood Christmas Memories

by Sue Knight Briscoe



While I don't remember having a "White" Christmas, we certainly had lots of fun and memorable Christmases. I can remember walking in the woods looking for that perfect tree, and then Daddy would saw it down, and we would drag it back to the house. I don't think we had those fancy stands for the tree. Daddy would just nail two boards cross-

ways on the bottom of the tree for the stand. Mother would always put the lights on the tree and then let us do the rest. We would make our ornaments from construction paper. We always had a star on top, and we would have some tinsel to put on it. I remember a little plastic sleigh (I still have it.) that had a Santa in it, and it had all the rein-

deer plus Rudolph. Mother would set it up on the table and run a ribbon to hook all the reindeer together, and then she put gumdrops in the sleigh.

I can remember writing our letters to Santa. There was just my sister, Starr, and me. We would cut pictures out of the Sears Christmas Catalogue of just the exact doll we wanted to find under the tree. We would enclose this in our letter to Santa.

In the days prior to Christmas Day, it was always a big treat to "ride around" and look at everyone else's Christmas trees and candles in the windows.

On Christmas morning when we would wake up, we would always call out to Mother and Daddy and say, "Its Christmas morning, do you think Santa Claus came?" They would always tell us that we could get up and go and see, and guess what? He always did...What precious memories!! We would have a stocking hanging on the mantel that would be filled with oranges, tangerines and hard candy...Such a treat! (It would just be a stocking made out of mesh, not a fancy quilted stocking, like today).

When I think back on those years, our house was not heated with heat in every room. We had gas heaters in the "family room", a small one in the kitchen, and one that was in the living room that was only used for "special occasions" and Christmas was certainly special, so we got to light that heater and have the whole house warm. And we would have Christmas breakfast in the dining room!! We would alternate Christmas breakfast with one of my Dad's brother's family- Uncle James and Aunt Esto Knight and my cousin Carol.

Mother always made a Japanese fruit cake. The house would smell so good.

Going to church and Sunday School and hearing the Christmas story and learning it by heart (Luke:2).

I am thankful for the wonderful parents that I had (Robert and Flip Knight). How they sacrificed so much so Starr and I would have such a great childhood. The precious memories will live in our hearts FOREVER!

Christmas Memories

by Dan Pate



Some of my most memorable memories of Christmas were getting up real early to see what Santa had brought that year. Then we would head up to the Clowers to see what Emmett, Woody, Jewett and Jeffrey had gotten. Some years the Clowers would be at our house before we got to their house. I remember Ronald and I getting cowboy outfits one year and how much I liked them.

I also remember the fond memories of walking in the woods with Daddy down at the old farm and looking for a Christmas tree...O what fun and great memories!

I think growing up in a small town really added to life back then. I know I appreciate it more now than I ever did!



Christmas Memories

by Larry Gilleland

The only specific memory I have of Christmas during my childhood was the first time I was allowed to sit up on Christmas Eve and lay out the Santa toys for my younger brothers. It was a lot of fun to play with the toys first.

Over the years I've developed an interest in Christmas traditions and have a really good book describing the origins of most of those traditions. The book is *The Illustrated Book of Christmas Folklore* by Tristram Potter Coffin.

Christmas Memories

by Janet Gibson

I have been blessed that all my Christmas memories are wonderful. This is a season where I've not been challenged with health issues, mourning or other difficulties. One Christmas, in particular, was in 1949. My mother remarried in 1947, and while it was just the two of us, I had begged for a sibling. She explained the need for a daddy in the house. Remembering her explanation, I was more than thrilled to welcome my Dad to the family. My brother was born in 1948 and my sister in 1949. (Apparently, I had more influence than one might expect).



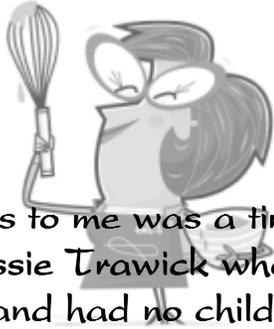
The Christmas of 1949 was the first time I had experienced the celebration of the season observing other children. (I guess at 10 years of life experience I didn't consider myself a child.) It was my first experience with the true magic of Christmas as seen from a child's eyes and the joy and happiness I felt has remained with me for all these many years. Those who know me understand my addiction to all things Christmas as each year I try to create the same experience for my entire family.



Christmas Memories

by Elaine Roberts

My special memory of Christmas is going with my dad to look for a Christmas tree the Sunday before Christmas. Into the woods we would go and find the most beautiful cedar tree. Years later I discovered my dad would begin trimming several trees in springtime so the shape would be perfect. Bubble lights always adorned the tree, and to this day bubble lights are special. Even today, the smell of oranges and tangerines takes me back to the time when we only had this wonderful fruit at Christmas. My memories of this special time of year always revolved around family, coloring books, crayons and paper dolls.



Christmas Memories

by Saralyn Trawick Kimsey

Christmas to me was a time when Aunt Jessie Trawick who was not married and had no children, would come out from town to the country where I lived. At Christmas time she always brought something for my brother and me to make for Christmas as well as our Christmas presents from her.

One year Aunt Jessie brought food to make an apple Santa Claus. This included apples for the bodies, marshmallows for the head, arms and legs held together with toothpicks. There were raisins for the eyes, nose, mouth and buttons on the suit. She also had cotton for the belt

around the middle. All through the holidays I looked forward to eating Santa Claus but don't remember wanting to eat him after Christmas. Guess the dust and soot from the open fireplace had taken care of my desire.

Another Christmas Aunt Jessie brought transparent plastic straws of varying shades of pink and red. We cut these into approximately 1" lengths. We used a sharp needle to stick into the middle of the straws and strung them in a line to use as garland for the tree. I am sure we still have this in our Christmas decorations box in the country.



Gwinnett County 1909

Errors in punctuation or grammar are as they were in the original publication.

Sawyer-Smith

Miss Audrey Sawyer, the accomplished young daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Sawyer of Snellville, was married to Dr. H.T. Smith, also of Snellville, last Sunday. The bride is one of Gwinnett's fairest young ladies and has many friends in Lawrenceville, where she

attended school a few years ago, and the groom is a promising young physician. They have our best wishes for a long and happy life.

The News Herald May 24, 1909

Yellow River Mills Making Fine Flour

Esq. George W. Pharr, of Cates district, left at our office Tuesday a sample sack of flour from the Yellow River Roller Mills, which Mr. Pharr has greatly improved by putting in new bolting cloths and other repairs. The sample brought us was as good as any one might want, and made much better bread than the

highest patent flour from the local market. This is one of the oldest mills in Gwinnett county and enjoys a fine patronage. Arthur Nash is the miller and he takes pride in the output of the mill.

The News Herald July 8, 1909

Rural Route News

Conducted by J.L. Exum

Charles Lamb and family, of London, England, are visiting at the home of his uncle, James Sawyer, of Snellville. Up to the time he came to Georgia he had

never been out in the country. He expects to make Georgia his home from now on.

Excerpt from an article conducted by J.L. Exum

The News Herald May 17, 1909

Snellville

The farmers are behind with their crops on account of the recent rains.

Pate and Barnett will have their new mill in operation next week.

Dr. Smith and wife have moved into their new residence. The doctor now has the prettiest residence in town.

The writer received a letter from J.M. Cofer last week, who went to south Georgia last fall. He reports crops fine and game plentiful.

There will be something doing here on the second Sat-

urday in June. Several cases in court are to be disposed of, quarterly meeting and preaching at the Baptist church. Mr. Editor come out and get some of our yellow legged chickens.

All the sick in this community are better at this writing.

Mr. M.L. Langley was called to the bedside of his mother at Webbville, who was lying at the point of death, Saturday.

T.A. Pate was in the Gate City Saturday.

Prof. L.A. Page, of Auburn, gave us a fine lecture on education at the Baptist church Sunday afternoon.

The News Herald Thursday June 3, 1909

Gwinnett County Fall and Winter 1959

South Gwinnett 'Gets Off To Good Start'

South Gwinnett High School held its opening exercise for the school year, 1959-1960 Friday morning, August 28. The group assembled in the gym for a devotional period and announcements.

Mr. Victor Knight, our principal, introduced Rev. Charles Duffey, who gave a very inspiring talk. He built his talk around the words: Accept, Appropriate, and Apply. Mr. Knight made announcements and introduced the faculty. The students received their books and then they reported to each class.

A new service has been added for the students. Mr. Joe Johnson will be our counselor. We feel that this service will be a very valuable asset to our school.

We have an increase in enrollment this year. We believe we are off to a good start and expect this to be our best school year ever.

The News Herald September 3, 1959

Miss Loyce Hutchins

In Memorium

by Grace B. Snell

Miss Loyce Hutchins, beloved teacher of fifth grade, Snellville Elementary School for nineteen years passed

away suddenly on August 31. She had attended the week of pre-planning and on Monday had finished the first day of school. She went with the pupils to the bus, and when they were all on and ready to go home, Miss Loyce slipped quietly away to her eternal home.

The News Herald October 8, 1959

'Farmer of Week' Was Row-Cropper, Switched to Grain, Then Livestock

A Snellville farmer who raised five children "down on the farm" is this week's farmer of the week.

Elmer Pate started with 400 acres in 1933-all row crops, mostly cotton. But in 1941, he turned to grain farming (Oats, wheat, lespedeza, clover) after acquiring 120 additional acres, he produces two crops a year, such as following oats with beans which he may use for hay.

He also abandoned mules for three tractors, a self-propelled combine, and seed-cleaning outfit.

In 1952, Pate "changed over" to livestock with 5 cows and a registered Hereford bull. This year he has 85

brood cows and heifers. His goal is 100 cows. He has a large fishpond and a good acreage of alfalfa.

Pate has served as a director of the Gwinnett County Livestock and Fair Association and director of the Farmers Mutual Exchange here. He is active in community life and according to J.T. Alexander, assistant county agent, is "doing a good job on an ideal farm."

Pate was interviewed this week by Alexander, and Dave Kistner, supervisor for the Upper Ocmulgee River soil Conservation District.

The News Herald December 17, 1959

Tastes of Snellville...



Chicken Divan

1 pkg. Of frozen broccoli floweret's cooked (I use fresh)
3 tbs. Of lemon juice
½ cup grated sharp cheddar cheese
3 boneless chicken breasts, boiled and cut into pieces
1 can of cream of chicken soup
¾ cup of mayonnaise
1 cup of Panko (Japanese style) bread crumbs

The recipe is a favorite of Candace Pulliam who is a City of Snellville receptionist. This is a delicious dish to feed guests or is something special for your family. Although a wonderful dish for the holidays, it is a year round favorite.

Preheat oven to 350°.
Spray 8x8 casserole dish with Pam.
Layer broccoli on bottom of dish.
Next add all of your cut up chicken.
Mix soup, lemon juice and mayonnaise together.
Pour on top.
Add cheddar cheese and sprinkle with Panko bread crumbs.
Bake approximately 30 to 45 minutes or until bubbly and golden brown on top.

We Remember...

Mary Kate Allen



When the Snellville Historical Society was having a revitalization, one of the most diligent committed members was Kate Allen. Until she and her husband, Bob, began to have health problems, she was involved in all projects the Society attempted.

She was one of the two members that chaired the historical display our society sponsored for Snellville Days in 2003.

She was born April 9, 1929 and reared in Loyston, Tennessee the youngest of nine children. She entered into rest October 28, 2009.

She was a wonderful historian and was the chair of the Archives Committee at Snellville United Methodist Church.

She is survived by her husband, Bob, two daughters and their families.

Lewis E. Seay graduated from Snellville High School in 1944. He died September 9, 2009.

Freddy McCullers died October 15, 2009. He graduated with the class of 1957.

On November 7, 2009 **Donald W. Aderhold** died. He was in the class of 1955.

Jimmy Gresham died August 13, 2009. He was a retired postman.

R.H. Thomas died October 9, 2009. He was a State Farm Insurance Agent for 43.5 years.

Gladys Gilleland, age 89, of Snellville, died on October 12, 2009.

Adi Moon, the widow of Hubert Moon who was in the class of 1936 died November 9, 2009. She was 93 years old.

Officers of the Historical Society

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Vice PresidentElaine Roberts
Secretary Janet Gibson
TreasurerLynette Couch
Directors at Large
Ann Britt
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