



THROUGH THE HISTORIAN'S LENS
CHRISTMAS IN A SMALL TOWN – THE 1930's

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The Christmas season is a time of nostalgia. We look back on the events of our own lives and marvel at how some can remain so vivid and others, equally important to our life story, have somehow become clouded. Having grown up in Boyne City, the fourth generation of my own family to do so, I often reflect on what Christmas was like in this same small, Northern Michigan town, during the lives of my parents, grandparents and great grandparents. These same holiday events, having taken place in the city that we call "home," help me fully appreciate how their experiences were connected to other Boyne Citizens and to the memories they were making at the same time.

The Great Depression was a severe global economic downturn that started in 1929. It was triggered by the U.S. stock market crash in October of that year and lasted through the 1930s, with significant effects felt until the start of World War II around 1939-1941. This marked the worst economic crisis in the United States in modern history. The articles you are about to read were pulled directly from the local press.

The images seen throughout this article are original French Christmas cards and are part of the author's personal collection of antique ephemera.

1930

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 11, 1930

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CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

There is a movement on foot, it is reported, by the business men of the city to dress up Lake and Water Streets with holiday evergreens. Flag sockets will carry a small tree, draped with tissue and colored lights during the evening, stores will smell of the pine and the balsam and display an array of Christmas offerings for the young. This is good work and will attract the shoppers from near and far.

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CHRISTMAS FUND FOR THE WORTHY

A small but enthusiastic party met at the Wolverine Hotel to organize for the coming Christmas giving to worthy people in Boyne City. The following subscriptions were secured and the list is at the First National Bank and anything you want to give will be cheerfully received by them.

- W.L. Martin, \$5.00
- W.H. White, \$5.00
- C.C. Burnett, \$5.00
- Rotary Club, \$20.00
- Monday Study Club, \$10.00
- Progressive Club, \$10.00
- Presbyterian Church, \$10.00
- Methodist E. Church, \$10.00
- Catholic Church, \$10.00
- F.O.E., \$10.00

1931

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 17, 1931

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THE FIRST ANNUAL WINDOW DISPLAY

President F.O. Barden of the Progressive Club created no small interest among the merchants as well as others when he introduced window display evening which arrive Saturday, December 12th.

The judges consisting of Herman Meyer, Wesley Dilworth and Ben Belknap, found plenty to do in placing the windows having the most merit nearest the top. 56 store windows were inspected after which the judges opted, first for the best, then continued balloting until 10 or more had been given a "place."

The show windows of Boyne City are shopper's delight, a fact that many people in this vicinity find true. The merchants have made Christmas shopping so attractive to the eye, so easy on the pocket-book, and so pleasing to the most fastidious tastes, that Santa Claus himself could not have improved on the tempting array of samples exhibited as a lure to still more attractive displays inside.

The spirit of Christmas is in the air. The very soul of man is saturated with it and from now on, until we shall have with us in less than two weeks, "the night before Christman when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse," we shall and will do to it that everything possible is done to make life worthwhile.

The happy idea of giving prizes for the attractive window display was a hard undertaking for the judges. The Boyne City Baker, B.C. Hardware Co., and Nulph's Dry Goods Store were winners. Those favorably mentioned were:

1. Neymark's Dry Goods
2. Fox Variety Store
3. F.O. Boaden & Son
4. Smith & Smith
5. Michigan Public Service Co.
6. W.A. Sack
7. C.C. Friend

The bakery won first because of its own manufactured products. The B.C. Hardware showed sports and a similar layout. Nulph's Dry Goods put on an elaborate display of ladies' furnishings. The Neymark store display shone with artistic settings not approached by many. John Parker's window showed pretty nearly everything in the animal line but rats and beaver. Evidently, he thinks too much of his muskrats to take them out. C.C. Friend and Smith & Smith put on a high class display and Michigan Public Services Co, as usual, startled the judges with an outstanding exhibit of "electrics."



1932

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 29, 1932

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CANDLE LIGHT SERVICE AT METHODIST CHURCH

The Annual Candlelight Service, conducted by the light of 100 candles, will be given Sunday evening, January 1st at 7 o'clock with the following twelve girls taking the leading parts: Margaret Wilbur, Ione Robinson, Stella Cook, Margaret Bergy, Maude Hammond, Winnefred Sutton, June Hoffman, Virginia Kime, Gladys Sudman, Bessie Sutton, Ellen Davios, and CristaBelle Sutton.

The senior choir will sing, "Send Out Thy Light," by Gound and "They Light Is Come," by Adams. Each person in the audience will have a candle. Short sermon by Rev. Boodagh. You are cordially invited to attend this service to see the "Living Lighted Cross and to worship with us.

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NEEDY FAMILIES REMEMBERED BY CITIZENS

Boyne City has kept faith with its needy families. In the face of almost insuperable difficulties the warm-hearted men and women of the city have succeeded in their effort to see that no child went to bed forlorn or forgotten on Christmas Eve, and to ensure some portion of yuletide cheer to the many children whose parents were unable to provide them with even the most inexpensive present. Cartons of food were distributed by willing workers under the directions of those who, as in many previous years have assumed the burden. Their devotion and energy need a special word of thanks.

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CANDLE LIGHT SERVICE HELD AT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A beautiful candle lighting service was held at the Presbyterian church on Sunday evening to a well-filled house. The senior girls opened the program with the "First Noel" during the singing the Madona and Child appeared. Then came three wise men with their gifts will be rendered by the three young men. Then the procession of 60 voices, each with a candle and the building lighted with the candles only, and beautiful festoons of evergreen and wreaths enveloping the whole church made a vey pleasing setting for the Christmas season. Several choruses and three solos by Miss. Virginia Schaub, Betty Kay and Mrs. Helen Boehmer constituted the program. Mrs. Bissell and her helpers deserve a great deal of credit for this program.

1933

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, January 5, 1933

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WOLVERINE HOTEL IS SCENE OF MUCH MERRIMENT ON SATURDAY NIGHT

One of the season's most enjoyable social affair was a New Years party at the Wolverine Hotel, Saturday evening. Mr. and Mrs. Russell Barden entertained informally, fifty of their friends. The evening was spent in dancing, card playing and visiting in groups around the cheery fireplaces. At midnight a delicious buffet lunch was served. Mrs. F.O. Barden, Sr. poured, the table carrying out the season's decorations of candles and small trees. After welcoming in the New Year, the guests departed, each wishing for more of these "get together" affairs during the coming year.

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 28, 1933

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CHRISTMAS CAROLS SUNG SATURDAY

The Christmas song program set for 6:30PM, December 23 was staged at the corner of Lake and Water Streets. Seventy voices in charge of Mrs. Cecil Bissell circled the large Christmas tree while they entertained a large company who had assembled to take part in the ceremonies.

A real Santa Claus impersonated by jovial John Parker came down the street in a gorgeously decorated Ford. Santa Claus was in full regalia and was cheered lustily as he distributed the presents to the children.

The weather was of the rugged sort, but [the] crowd certainly enjoyed the entertainment which was arranged by the community club.

1934

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 13, 1934

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COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS TREE

Mrs. Frank Thompson, president of the Community Club, has arranged with the city authorities and the Conservation Department for a community tree at the intersection of Lake and Water Streets, also for the smaller trees in front of each business street. The Michigan Public Service Company, through Mr. Blongne, has responded to the president's request by furnishing electric lights for the Christmas trees along the business highways of the city.

The Community Club, aided by the local lodges and citizens, will distribute the Christmas baskets to those whom Lake Luci has not yet found the opportunity to smile upon, that there may be a merry time in the city on Christmas.

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BOYNE CITY TO ELECT WINTER QUEEN

Qualifications for Winter Queen are as follows:

- Must be between the ages of 15 years and 25 years.
- Must be unmarried.
- Must be able to skate.
- Winter queens from other years are not eligible to re-election.

Tickets will go on sale January 1. Nominations for Queen close January 15th. Only the tickets for the first 15 [will be] counted after January 22nd.



1935

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, January 23, 1936

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[A description of the December 1935 event.]

WINTER QUEEN'S BALL HELD AT THE GYM, THURSDAY **Skating Events Took Place on Forest Lake Last Saturday Night**

On a beautiful, simulated ice throne set in a grove of evergreens with dangling snowflakes overheard, Miss. Martha Reidel, 20-year-old Charlevoix County school teacher was crowned Boyne City's Winter Sports Queen by Senator Otto W. Bishop, of Alpena, last Thursday evening. Without a doubt the guy was tastefully decorated in keeping with King Winter.

The coronation took place during the Queen's Ball attended by 150 couples and hundreds of spectators who were happily surprised at the impressive ceremony.

D.L. Dicken, chairman of the committee in charge, acted as master of ceremonies. Promptly at 10 o'clock Senator Bishop was introduced. Immediately after which, several tiny girls dressed in red cellophane preceded the Queen's entrance after trumpets had been sounded.

Following the little girls, Miss Reidel in a long, white satin gown over which she wore a gorgeous white velvet wrap, walked slowly to the throne. Members of her court followed her. After the actual coronation, Queen Martha introduced the members of her court. At this time, Queen Frances Marshall of Charlevoix and Queen Shirley Squires of Harbor Springs were presented to the crowd. It was to be regretted that Miss Gertrude Riggs, Petoskey Winter Queen, was delayed by motor trouble and did not arrive in time to be represented.

Saturday night Forest Lake was the scene of the concluding events of the week. Members of the Petoskey figure skating club favored Boyne City and her guests with a dazzling display of figure skating. Queen Martha and her court were again presented in a very beautiful ceremony.



1936

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 17, 1936

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CHRISTMAS TREES DISTRIBUTED

Individual Trees Furnished and Erected In Front of Stores

The Common Council did a splendid thing when it delivered a pretty Christmas tree to every business place in the city and then put it up in front of their place of business which adds a lot to our holiday dress. Nor is this all- a beautifully lighted Christmas tree has been placed at the intersection of Water and Park Street where it displays a large number of electric lights. Lake and Water Street merchants will have their trees and windows bedecked with lights and Christmas colors.

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 24, 1936

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CAROLS TO BE SUNG IN CITY TONIGHT, 7:30

Many Business Places and Citizens Donate to Christmas Party

The City Council, joined by civic societies and many of the merchants have provided the enterprise to make a feature of singing Christmas Carols this year.

Santa Claus is due on the street at 7:00 PM. The Carols will be sung commencing at 7:30. After the march from the Christmas tree to the City Hall, it is expected that Sant Claus will distribute at least 5600 prizes to the young folks who are 14 years old and younger. A larger number of voices are engaged to take part in the holiday ceremony.

1937

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 23, 1937

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LEST SANTA FORGET

Christmas Club Gladdens the Heart of Many Needy.

That every child in Boyne City should have a happy Christmas a Community Christmas Club was started several weeks ago. This club was sponsored by the Monday Study Club and the co-operation of every club, lodge, and church was asked as well as the help and support of this movement by every interested individual. No personal solicitations were made but co-operation was asked through article in this paper.

In no other town could the response have been made as willingly and with as much real Christmas spirit as the have been here. And if any child is missed it will be because some neighbor or friend has forgotten to turn that child's name into the committee.

Toys have been made and repaired by Mr. Krause and his boys. The toys made would satisfy any child's idea of a real Christmas toy. They are the "Berries" and many children will owe their happy Christmas to Mr. Krause and the Manual Training classes. The material for these toys was paid for by pennies brought by the children and a nice sum was left to turn in to the committee to help purchase fruit and clothing.

Toys were also given by the Monday Study Club members and North Boyne Extension group, and members of these clubs will have a happier Christmas knowing that they have given some child faith in Santa Claus.

Mr. N.J. Rovick donated several armloads of good warm underwear. Many thanks and a "Merry Christmas" to Nels from the committee as well as from the kiddies made cozy by his gift.

That the older people may not forget that this is Christmas, baskets of fruit and candy are being sent to a large number of homes with the best wishes of all the people who have made this possible.

Sacks of candy have been filled so that Santa Claus may call in person Christmas Eve and hand these out to all the children. Meet him at the Community Christmas tree. The Rotary Club is in charge at this time and a good time will be had by all.

It would be impossible to list all the toys and clothing which have been turned in, but at this time we wish to thank all individuals and groups who have made this community Christmas possible as well as the committees which have worked so hard to put it across.

Many thanks from the Monday Study Club which sponsored this idea as well as my own personal thanks and best wished for a Merry Christmas. -Angeline B. Barden, Chairman

1938

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 22, 1938

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COMMUNITY TREE IS ERECTED ON WATER STREET

CLUBS TAKE CHEER TO THE NEEDY FAMILIES

Santa Claus Will Visit in Boyne City, Saturday, December 24

STORES TO CLOSE ON MONDAY

The Christmas date, December 25th this year falls on Sunday. Officially throughout the nation, therefore, Christmas will be celebrated on Monday, December 26. The Boyne City public school will be closed during the entire holiday season and the business places of Boyne City will be closed all day Monday.

The stores will be open evenings tonight, Friday and Saturday, however, giving late Christmas shoppers opportunity to make last minute holiday preparations.

City workers Tuesday erected a beautiful thirty-foot Christmas tree in the center of the intersection of Water and Park Streets. That night, lights sparkled from the huge community tree.

Clubs Spread Cheer

Saturday evening is to be the scene of Christmas activities. There is to be a Santa Claus and music and as a result of the Christmas activities of the Monday Study Club, four hundred glittering cellophane bags containing apples, oranges, and candy, will be given away in front of City Hall to children who otherwise might not receive a visit from Santa. Mrs. J.H. Parker and Mrs. Wesley Dilworth are the committee in charge.

Tuesday evening the Boyne City Rotarians went in a body to the Charlevoix County Infirmary near East Jordan, taking with them a load of Christmas cheer in song, candy, cigars and fruit for those at the County Farm [Grandview Care Facility today.] Rev. Guy Smock delivered a Christmas message to the group assembled there and the Boyne City high school orchestra provided music.

None Shall Be Overlooked.

Federal, State and City welfare groups are efficiently caring for the needy in Boyne City as well as other communities of the nation. This year the motto is that "None shall be overlooked on Christmas Day."

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"WELL BY HECK"

[A weekly column then written by William Wallace Bailey.]

To those who can be merry, I wish a Merry Christmas. To those who by reason of illness, death or other sorrow are not in a state of mind to be merry, and to those who by reason of financial distress have to deprive themselves and [their] families, especially the little children of the toys and joys and nice things to eat and wear that those who are more fortunate possess, I extend my heartfelt sympathy for I was deprived of most of them as a boy and realize what it means to "go without-" while others have a plenty and some more than they know what to do with.

1939

The Boyne Citizen

Thursday, December 28, 1939

Page 1 Column 1

CHRISTMAS SPIRIT TAKES BOYNE CITY

Belated Snow Brings Cheer to Generous Hearts.

Favored above other nearby cities with a blanket glistening snow, Boyne City enjoyed a Merry Christmas Eve. Swinging into the last-minute rush of shopping after the Thursday storm, gown-ups and children alike went about their happy secret shopping with unusual zest, spurred on by the sight of snow for the Santa Claus sleigh. Happy throngs surged about the streets until midnight.

Throughout the city, Christmas decorations added to the spirit of the season. Nearly every window had its blaze of colored lights, doorways were festooned with decorations and topped with silver stars a bright moon lent luster to the whole scene. crisp cold nipped at laughing faces.

Merchants who had reported lagging sales of Christmas things met smile for smile, finally totally the largest single day in recent history when Saturday crowds thronged the shopping district long after the expected closing hour. One merchant stated that he sold three times as many dollar neckties as he did seventy-five cent ones. Dad and brother seemed to rate higher than formerly.

Not to be outdone by the restive spirit in the downtown area, the residence districts of the city took on added glow. Colored lights sparkled in homey windows, festive trees dripped tinsel behind lacy curtains, lazy smoke spoke of the warm fireside. In many door yards live Christmas trees carried wide and high the season's colors, crowned by the Christ Child's star. Under all was the crystal white of wind-driven snow and over all the silver glow of moonlight. People scurried with fogged breath. Yes- the Christmas Spirit was with us.

At the stroke of eight, hundreds of eager children gathered at the main square of the city under the boughs of the tall Municipal Christmas tree to greet the expected Santa Claus. The shrill chatter of anticipation swelled to exultant realization as the group of modern children spied the up-to-date old gentleman in ancient raiment, riding not the mythical reindeer drawn sleight but latest Sedan. Dancing in joy, they followed that grand gentleman to a nearby building where he presented with his usual gusto, each of the youngsters with a gift of candy, nuts, and fruit. No problem of theirs that Santa had found it necessary to enlist long in advance of the ceremony the several civic groups who acted as unseen helpers. For them it was a lusty greeting from the personification of Christmas Spirit, theirs the welcome gift, the sharing delight of friends. Was not this Christmas brought to us for children by the Child who taught us all the joy of giving!

> Patrick McCleary is a Certified Genealogist affiliated with the Charlevoix County History Preservation Society (CCHPS), 12555 Taylor Road, Charlevoix, MI 49720. The CCHPS promotes the understanding and appreciation of the heritage of the people of Charlevoix County and its townships by seeking out, collecting, preserving, and interpreting artifacts of historical and cultural significance. For further information, contact Patrick by email: Throughthehistorianslens@gmail.com.