

2003

### CHRISTMAS AT THE OLD SWOPE HOME

A couple of days before Christmas we younger kids would go with Dad up to the road along the border of which was a row of lovely evergreen trees (spruce I think). He'd chop down the one we selected and we'd proudly carry it back. It was always a lovely one, nearly reaching the ceiling in the bay window where we placed it.

We had two living rooms, separated by a double sliding door. They were well lighted because the windows reached from floor to ceiling. Because of the good light, Mother, who loved flowers, always had a variety of potted plants on stands in front of the windows.

Room #1 contained the piano where sometimes we'd gather and sing, Mayme or Elnora playing. There was also among other things a coal stove for heat during cold days.

Room #2 where we'd placed the Christmas tree also had a fireplace that on the big day always had a cheery fire blazing. There was a black mantle where we'd hang our stockings on Christmas Eve. Several days before Christmas, we younger kids would dress up our dolls so that they could be put under the Christmas tree, hoping perhaps to get a new one, or at least some new clothes for the old.

Mom and Dad, and I suppose the older sisters, would decorate the tree with strings of popcorn, icicles, ornaments saved from years past, and real candles which we'd find lit on Christmas morning.

The morning of the big day, we children would stand impatiently for the sliding door to open. Then what joy! The tree sparkling in all its glory, gifts piled under and around, and stockings stuffed with oranges, tangerines and a variety of nuts. I think this was the only time of the year we'd have Brazil nuts (though I'm afraid we didn't call them that then!)

My gifts consisted usually of hair ribbons, books, maybe a pen or pencil set, some new doll clothes and only on a rare occasion a new doll, usually things I could use at school. Guests began to arrive later – aunts, uncles, cousins. We had a long dining room with a table that seated 10 or 12. Adults ate first and children waited on them, filling and passing dishes and keeping glasses filled. When it came our turn to be waited on, one year we kept asking for water.

They wondered how we could be so thirsty at such a big meal. The secret was a pan under the table to receive the water! The meal always began with oyster soup (I didn't like oysters, but I loved the stew!) followed by baked hen, roast beef or ham, many vegetables from Mothers garden, and for dessert Elnora's plum pudding made several weeks ahead of time, and mince or pumpkin pie. The pudding was served with both a rich brown sauce and a white hard sauce.

We all worked at cleaning up and washing dishes (no dish washers!) Many hands made light work and it was soon finished. Then we'd gather around the piano and sing Christmas carols and hymns. Dad seemed to enjoy the singing for awhile, but after so long a time he would say "Now sing something quick and devilish!" One year my Uncle Walter Goldsmith played Santa Claus. We were told to hide behind the door leading to the back parlor and watch because Santa was sure to come. Sure enough Santa finally came, peaked in, and looked around stealthily as if afraid to be seen, then quietly took a big bundle off his shoulder and placed gifts under the tree. He then quietly slipped away, again looking all around for fear of being seen.

Good memories, but I hope we remembered the reason for the season as we should every year, celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so as Tiny Might say "Merry Christmas to all, and God bless you every one!"

Anne Isabel McKeeby

(Aunt Isabel is 95 years old)