



Left - Spencerville's "A Country Christmas Remembered" is one of several regional festivals celebrating memories of years gone by.

Bottom - A well worn family picture depicting winter travel in Edwardsburgh-Cardinal during the first half of the 20th century.

REMEMBERING CHRISTMAS

By Joe Martelle

Christmas comes but once a year. In her lifetime, Mary has seen the passing of eighty-five yuletide seasons. Sixty-seven of those have been as a resident of Edwardsburgh-Cardinal Township. She moved to the municipality as a young bride and alongside her husband Joe, devoted a lifetime to raising her eight children here. While local festivals might offer a visual picture and historical description of Christmas's gone by, it takes some time talking with someone like Mary to truly appreciate the way things used to be.

For Mary, the biggest change has come, not in the advancement of technology, but rather in its effect on the community. She remembers equipment being rarer, winters being harsher but hearts being warmer. "People were closer then. Back then you knew every neighbour on the road. Nobody had televisions, and you were lucky to have a battery powered radio. All you had were your people. We would finish up chores at night, then get together and play cards or just talk. We all knew each other's families. All the kids went to the school on the corner. At Christmas they'd have a concert and you would know every kid"

Winter made the camaraderie of neighbours more of a necessity. "We seemed to get a lot more snow back then.

Sometimes the whole side of the barn would get drifted in. The ploughs weren't as big and when it really snowed, they just couldn't go through. We would have to use a horse and cutter to go anywhere. We were three close neighbours and we all had kids in school. I remember the men would take turns dropping the kids off and picking them up."

The severity of winter also created the need for innovative thinking. "Not everyone had a phone, and sometimes storms would knock them out anyway. Our neighbours, Ike and Mildred, had a windmill. Every now and then his brother Herbie would climb to the top and look as

far as he could to see if there was smoke coming out of the rest of the chimneys on the road. If there was smoke coming from the stoves we knew everyone was all right."

It was the lack of material possessions that made those earlier Christmas' memorable as a family. "Kids back then didn't get the things they have today. Our kids got gifts on their birthdays, but Christmas was the big one. When we were first married we would shop (for gifts) in Lachine Quebec. I remember they had tax there and we didn't. After a while we started shopping closer to home. I remember Joe would buy ten pounds of hard candy and ten pounds of mixed nuts. You could buy them right out of big wooden barrels and boxes. They don't do that now. The last place we could find them was at Coon's Store in Brinston...that was probably around 1970. For the kids, the big thrill was the Eaton's Catalogue. They would go through it and make lists of what they wanted. The kids always looked forward to Christmas. Christmas was much more special then."

Modern society might be able to research and recreate weekends of winter festivals. Offering a glimpse of what memories might look like, but if you want to know what those bygone Christmas' honestly felt like, take the time to talk to someone who lived them, and enjoy the pictures created in your imagination... LH

