

INSIDE TODAY

Lifestylebriefs Page E-5

DEAR ANNIE

Dear Annie



Page E-6

HOROSCOPES Page E-7

- Support groups.....Page E-4
- Bridge results.....Page E-7
- Publishers Weekly.....Page E-7
- Crossword.....Page E-8
- Bookmobile.....Page E-3
- Recycling pickups Page E-8



Williamsport Woolworth's Store employees Christmas 1923

A community of women celebrate Christmas

1900-1925

Williamsport Women.....Page E-2

A community of women celebrate Christmas: 1900-1925

Williamsport Women

By JANET McNEIL HURLBERT
Sun-Gazette Correspondent

The women of Williamsport observed many Christmas traditions during the first quarter of the 20th century. The kick-off to the Christmas season was the hanging of the greens at the YWCA. Although many parties were hosted by various groups at the YW, the true meaning of the holiday was not forgotten. Volunteers prepared gift baskets for needy families as well as putting on a program and taking presents to the Home for Aged Colored Women.

Women were avid consumers of information about Christmas. The Clio Club always offered December educational programs for its members, such as "Myths and Legends of Christmas Time" or "Christmas Customs in Other Countries."

In December the women's section of the newspaper was filled with articles on Christmas traditions and safety tips, along with recipes for scotch cake, sand tarts, and nut bread. A column called "People as They Pass" shared information about residents and their holiday plans and holiday travels.

The newspaper also included reminders about the appropriate foods to serve for the holidays. Even in years when the local paper was filled with articles about World War I, there would be entries such as "Your Christmas dinner will be incomplete without Manzanilla olives and pascal celery."

Dickinson Seminary

At the school on the hill, the co-educational Dickinson Seminary (now Lycoming College) presented an annual Christmas program, which featured young

women in the vocal department performing in duets and trios and singing in a chorus. The women would also enjoy a YWCA candlelight service on campus, singing hymns and listening to Christmas stories and a holiday message. Still, the students were always happy to leave campus at that time of year. As an article in the school paper in December 1901 proclaimed, "Our hard work, our worry, our examinations will be over ... Fling all school-cares and worries to the winds."

State Industrial Home for Women

The residents of the cottages at the State Industrial Home for Women in Muncy, a reformatory, celebrated Christmas by decorating with a large tree, lights, and pine boughs for the windows. To entertain the public, they presented a play based on the Christmas story, with the choir outfitted in white dresses that they had made themselves. The "clever" women (as they were called in an undated newspaper article found in a scrapbook from the Home) created costumes for Mary and Joseph out of bathrobes, sheets and tinsel. Although the women received presents from home, local churches and the YW, the lessons they were taught were on giving and the true meaning of the holiday. The women made gifts for each member of the staff and celebrated Christmas Day with a big dinner and a religious service.

A season of generosity

Many local organizations supported the Home for the Friendless, a residence for homeless women and children, especially older women. At Christmas, the ladies received flowers from the YW, and all the residents

Helen Hoyt Prescribes 'I thought Christmas as Cure for "Spugs"

Women Used to Boarding House Life and Club Men Enjoy Day With Friends at Family Gathering.

Little Gifts, Inexpensive But Attractive Please Those Who Are Not Frequently Remembered at Other Seasons.

PHOTO PROVIDED

The Helen Hoyt newspaper column in the Sun-Gazette.

were entertained by various school and church groups. Board members paid special visits to the women and later received letters from the "old ladies," thanking them for their "loving gifts," according to an undated news article in a Home for the Friendless scrapbook. Another article stated, "Friends in town seem to have vied with each other in making Christmas so bright and joyous that words can hardly do justice." The article went on to describe a beautiful tree in the assembly room, with glittering ornaments and a platform underneath with mysterious parcels and sweets.

In 1912, a Helen Hoyt column on the women's page of the Sun-Gazette focused on "Christmas as Cure for 'Spugs.'" It gave many examples of how little, inexpensive gifts and kindnesses could brighten the lives of those not usually remembered during the season, such as the "girl who is forced to live at a boarding house." ("Spugs" is a word that came into fashion that year to refer to those who spent too lavishly on Christmas gifts. It stood for the Society for the Prevention of Useless Giving, which fought against giving indiscriminately at Christmas rather than unselfishly realizing the true needs of people.)

The commercial side of Christmas

In 1911, another Helen Hoyt column was devoted to men's shopping for

women the day before Christmas. "The masculine element will be shopping in full force today. Superior as men are in general wisdom and intelligence they fall down very flatly when it comes to shopping ... the desperation in a man's face when he is shopping is pitiable."

Ads such as the one from Shopbell Dry Goods Co at 108-110 W. Fourth St. suggested a purchase of women's silk hose with spliced heels and reinforced garter tops, some with violet edges. These could be had at 35 cents apiece or three for \$1.00, boxed. The ad also reminded shoppers that "most women need handbags."

In a diary dated 1911, Winifred Maynard, a prominent Williamsport resident, wrote, "I am always so sorry when the holidays are over for I do so love Christmas. All December is one mad rush of preparation and then it is all over so soon."

Much of the information quoted in this article is available in the Lycoming County Women's History Collection online, <http://www.lycoming.edu/orgs/lcwhc>.

Sieminski is a retired librarian and manager of the Lycoming County Women's History Collection. Hurlbert is a Professor Emeritus of Library Services at Lycoming College. Their column is published the second Sunday of each month and the author can be reached at lcwhcmanager@gmail.com.