

Early Christmas Trees in Monroe

Today we're going to look at Christmas trees through the decades. But you may be surprised! Is a Christmas tree something that grows in the ground or is it rather an event that is held for the entertainment of the children? While I was reading the earlier Monroe newspapers, I was confused for a time. I now believe that they use the term to mean either. As you read what I share today, you may understand why I was confused.

A prime example of my confusion can be seen from this article in the Monroe Evening Times of December 26, 1908. "Fifty couples enjoyed themselves at the Cardinal Club Christmas tree at the Turner opera house last evening. Santa Claus appeared on the scene during the evening to distribute the presents which had been brought to the hall by the different ones there. The remainder of the evening was spent in dancing."

It was announced in a headline on December 19, 1914: "First Sunday School Christmas Tree Tomorrow." The article went on to say that every Sunday school in the city would have a Christmas entertainment of some sort for the little ones that year. The first was to be the following evening when the Universalist Sunday school would have a tree and exchange gifts.

Another article from 1914 stated, "Local Christmas festivities will be inaugurated in this city the coming Sunday evening when the Sunday school of the Universalist church will have their Christmas tree. In order that the little folk may not be out too late, the program will start at 7:30 p.m. A cantata by Charles H. Gabriel entitled, 'Santa Claus' Arrival,' will be given by members of the school. There are many beautiful songs in it.

"It is hoped that all who may desire to do so will make the tree a medium of exchange for gifts. There will be no admission charged for the entertainment and it is open to all. An offering for the Sunday school will be received at the morning church service.

"The Charity ball will be given by the Sunshine girls of the school on Wednesday evening at the armory."

There were also some early references to Christmas trees in the Monroe Sentinel. The first from December 11, 1872 said that the Universalist Society was making preparations for a grand time on Christmas. "A magnificent Christmas Tree is to be the main feature." Another article was printed a week later. "The Baptist Sunday school are making arrangements to have a Christmas Tree at their Church on Christmas Eve. It is intended to give each one who belongs to the School a present of some kind."

The following year the Methodist Church and Sabbath School planned to have a Christmas tree on Christmas Eve. Preparations were being made for a good time. They invited any person, whether they were a member or not. Presents were to be handed in as early as possible on Wednesday (Christmas Eve). No presents were to be received by the committee after 6:00 p.m.

It wasn't only churches and organizations that had Christmas trees. A short article in the December 23, 1885 stated, "A Christmas tree and dinner at the Ludlow House, next Friday p.m." This dinner was going to be on Christmas night.

Years later in 1896, the newspaper said that the "Universalist people have decided to have a Christmas Tree and Entertainment" on Christmas Eve. A committee had been appointed the previous Sunday to make the



This is a photo of the Universalist Church, now owned by the City of Monroe and the home of the Green County Historical Society. It was taken before the stained glass windows were installed in 1895. The church frequently had a Christmas tree in December as described in this column.

arrangements. The paper stated "it was the sort of committee who generally make a success of anything they undertake." A collection was taken up at church services the following Sunday to defray incidental expenses.

I hope that each of you will be able to spend some quality time with family and friends during the Christmas and New Year season. And while you are together, why not share some memories of what Christmas was like in the "good old days." I hope to return next year with some more bits of history from this area.