

East Falls Past--Christmas Memories

The Fallser, December 2007, by Wendy Moody

In 1980, local senior citizens reminisced, in a taped session, about Christmas traditions in East Falls during their youth. Here are some of their evocative memories:

Activities:

- All the children chopped the tree. We made chains and stars but we didn't put them on the tree; we let Santa decorate it.
- We got our tree from the woods and decorated it with popcorn and cranberries.
- We would go to Dobson's on Christmas Eve and he would throw out coins.
- My father took me on a sled to Valley Green for spring water.
- I remember the thrill of being awakened at midnight by the carolers from all the churches.
- We took the steam train to Wanamaker's to see Santa. Gimbel's had ponies and a Punch and Judy Show. Then we went to the automat – for 5 cents we got an éclair.
- We went to the 5am mass. It was so cold. Some of the carolers were still out.
- We sledded down Ravenhill and skated on Gustine Lake, the Duck Pond, and the Schuylkill River, too.



*Pictured at Gustine Lake, 1945,
five-year-old Joe Long, Jr. of East
Falls.*

Presents:

- My dolls would go to the 9th St. Doll Hospital to get their hair restrung and new clothes made.
- Before Christmas, my doll furniture would mysteriously disappear and then reappear on Christmas with new paint, covers, and pillows. Unlike now, we were content with the same present over and over.
- Our gifts reflected the weather – ice skates and sleds.
- We were very naïve children – very obedient – and didn't look for the toys.

Food:

- Fresh killed turkey which we hung out.
- Turkeys full of pinfeathers. Many people had goose, but only a good cook could get the grease out.

- Caraway seed cake. It was an English custom; I think they put the seeds in so the kids wouldn't eat it!
- Saffron cake. That was English also.
- We had plum pudding. It was made in a cloth, steamed, and hung in the cellar. On special occasions silver coins were put in it.
- We always had oranges. We served fruit cake with wine and sharp cheese.
- We began baking in early December. The fruit cake had to soak in rum.
- We would shoot deer and hang them out to get the "wildness" out.
- Monsignor Walsh gave each Sunday school child a 4x2 box of candy guaranteed to send you to Dr. Rubin, the dentist. We were told not to eat it during Advent, but we all did!

Sentiments:

- My father played Santa but we were never sure....but, once, when my brother did something bad, "Santa" hit him and he recognized the hit as my father's!
- The electric decorations were in series and were forever going out...
- I remember the custom of having one lighted candle in the window to lead the way to the Christ child.
- It was a rich human experience; that's what we had. It didn't deal with things. It was the preparation and the getting together.
- Kids seem bored with Christmas today. They're beginning to ask us: "What did *you* do?"