



Belgrade Historical Society

December 2020 E-Newsletter

Edited by Eric Hooglund

Christmas in Belgrade is different this year. The annual Christmas Fair at the Belgrade Community Center on the shore of Great Pond has been cancelled due to concerns about the Corona virus pandemic. This fair has become a tradition at which dozens of local and regional vendors set up tables to sell a wide variety of handcrafted goods. Shoppers almost always found a unique item or two for special persons in their lives. Typically many of these shoppers drove on into Belgrade Lakes village, where the shopkeepers decorated their stores, offered special deals, and gave out free Christmas cookies as the visitors strolled Main Street, which was all decked out in greens with red ribbons. Hay rides, Christmas caroling and the lighting of the Christmas tree in the village green are part of the Christmas stroll that accompanied the Christmas Fair, but, alas, like the Fair, the stroll also has been cancelled this year. Nevertheless, some locals have lit up the giant Christmas tree anyway, and they also have festooned the lampposts with fresh greens. Obviously, this year there is going to be much nostalgia for Christmases pasts. Speaking of past Christmases, who better to soothe our nostalgia than

Belgrade's own 'luckiest boy,' Rod Johnson, who has been entertaining us for many years with his true stories of Belgrade of his childhood and youth! When I implored him, as a fellow BHS Board member, to provide us some recollections of Christmas during his 'storied' boyhood, he said he would have to think about it. Fortunately, he did some explorations of his memory and came up with his reminiscences below. I trust all of you will enjoy reading them as much as I did!

A Boy's Christmas Memories

By Rod Johnson

As we slip into December of 2020 in a rather precarious time of our history, perhaps it would be comforting to reflect back on Christmas in our youth. Our individual memories will vary, but let's go back in time and take a look at this boy's reflections from the 1950's in Belgrade, Maine:



It's early December and in my little village of Belgrade Lakes the colored lights are appearing in several windows on Main Street, Hulin Road and what few other roads there are. The other villages of Belgrade Depot and North Belgrade undoubtedly are showing the same, but I'm too young to know it. The lights create a subdued excitement within us local kids as we ply the streets after school on a daily basis. Whenever an early snowstorm comes, this adds to the sense that winter is here and Santa's arrival is within our sights. The ice has formed on the lake's coves and bogs, so skating has started after school and at night with bonfires showing us the way. At the so-called "skating parties," the local girls have little bells on their skate laces that constantly jingle, heightening the sense that the Christmas season is upon us.

At home there's telltale evidence that Santa will come soon. This morning Mother Elsie is purposely sliding furniture around the living room, making a big space in front of our Main street picture window. As always, she has asked my father Clifford to keep his eye out for a decent tree on one of the camp roads. Neither of them is a perfectionist, so a tree with one Charlie Brown side is okay; it can be turned towards the corner. By noontime a tree appears on the front porch and the two of them will get it onto a stand and glued in its proper place to avoid a toppling. This all assumes that Mom has given the tree a "thumbs up." Clifford most likely had his eye on that particular one as far back as July. By nightfall with Mom's herculean efforts, our house will be in full Christmas season décor, including garlands around the door archways and on the porch posts too!

As part of the decorations we always hang the stockings on the fake mantel a few days before Christmas. Our stockings are home made with our names sewn on— except Dad's, which is a plain gray tall wool stocking. On Christmas Eve, before heading upstairs to bed in the ice-cold bedrooms, we all open one gift of our choice. My older brother Richard has outgrown this ritual and is likely out skating with friends. He will be going away to the Army in a few months. After opening the one gift, with Mother's direction I put a glass of milk and plate of cookies near the stove for Santa and his reindeer, then head up the stairs with a final good night. I know darn well that mother will call up the stairwell in a minute with a reminder to stay in bed until at least six in the morning. After a fit full night, the magic hour of 6 a.m. (well, maybe 5:00 am) finally arrives and house rules allow stockings to be opened. The magic moment is here and the old creaky stairs seem like they are barking loudly as I work my way down and take in the sights. The stockings are full and a quick review of the tree shows some added presents. I know it's okay to open the stocking and one gift but hold off after that until the folks are up and breakfast

is over. I press for a quick breakfast, but Mother will do the traditional cinnamon rolls, pancakes and scrambled eggs at her own pace.

By mid-morning, the gifts have been shared and I'm intrigued with a new gizmo that Santa brought. Mother Elsie has moved on and is busy preparing for a mid-afternoon dinner, and Clifford, like other area fathers, has found a way to keep out of sight until dinnertime (think ice-fishing). Often a ham is the centerpiece of the meal, but on occasion a deer roast may be available from the previous month's hunting. We even had bear once, which was unique but tough to chew. The pies for desert most always will be mincemeat, chocolate and whatever berries had been prevalent the last summer and saved in the shed freezer. We might even have a pudding or a cake. Two or three guests often come for Christmas dinner, and they might include the two old men who live alone just down the street and perhaps my brother's girlfriend, Judy.

The length of time that the homes stay decorated seems to vary greatly. Some are cleared of decorations within a day or two and some may seem to adopt the idea that on New Year's Day most or all signs of Christmas should be removed and stowed back in the closet or attic.

Fond Reflections

The week between Christmas and New Year's Day always seemed to me to be a ton of fun. Depending on conditions, it was either sliding on hills, ice skating or building snow forts where the plow had piled it high. Often, we had a chance to go out on the lake and ice fish with our parents, assuming the ice was thick enough. Later in the winter we could go out in the pickup trucks and many of us learned to drive on the ice.

The tree decorations that both my wife Doris and I remember are: Big colored bulbs for lights, often sporting green or red reflectors on the back; lights that bubbled with colored water or alcohol moving up their stems; foil tinsel hanging over the limbs; and many hand-made

decorations that accumulated over the years. The children at school or Sunday school made most of the latter, but some were from older generations. Oh, let us not forget the hard-to-get-at angel on the tippy-top. Each and every household seemed to have some different ideas so every tree was unique. No fancy store-bought stands then, just a couple of short 2 x 4 boards crossed with a spike up into the tree or perhaps a galvanized pail with rocks and water inside.

A personal memory or two from my helpful wife Doris: She fondly remembers her grandmother who never failed to lose her \$5 cash gift in the wrapping paper. The kids always dug through the remnants and returned it to her. Secondly, in earlier years, her grandmother sending her down cellar to fetch a quart of canned raspberries to make a pie.



We hope our holiday recollections from the 1950's have stirred your own memories. May you enjoy this year's holiday season and have many, many good thoughts from the past. Best



wishes for a brighter year coming and may our country be back on solid footing. Thank you all for your Membership dues and Fund Drive donations. We are forever grateful—and with your help are making good headway on the Old Town House renovations.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM
THE BELGRADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



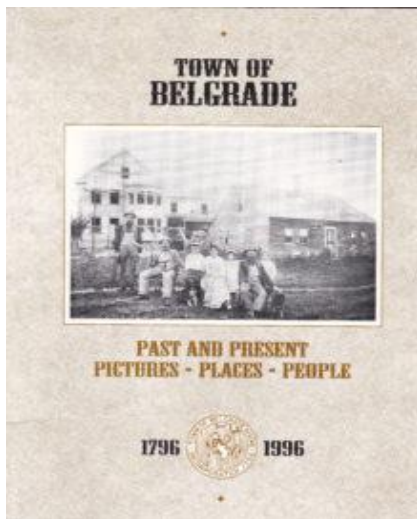
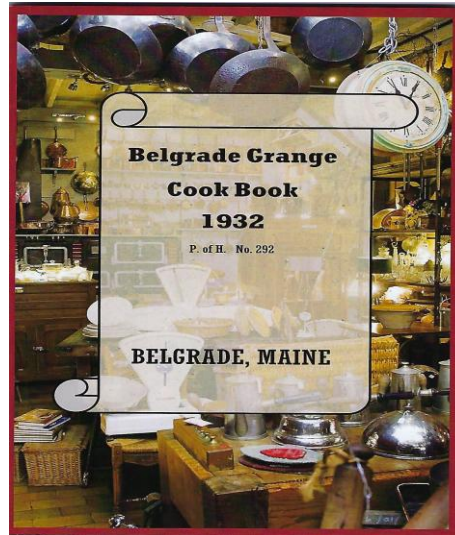
Buy some special Christmas gifts: BHS Books!

All proceeds to our Capital Fund for renovation of Belgrade's historic Town Meeting House, built in 1814 and used for the March 1815 Town Meeting, as well as for the historic 1819 vote in favor of separating Maine from Massachusetts to become our nation's 23rd state, which officially happened on March 15, 1820.

The cookbook is available at Hello Good Pie and Oliver and Friends Bookstore in Belgrade Lakes Village.

It is also available from the Belgrade Historical Society for \$15.00 + a \$3.00 for Postage. To order from BHS send an email to

belgradehistoricalsociety@gmail.com

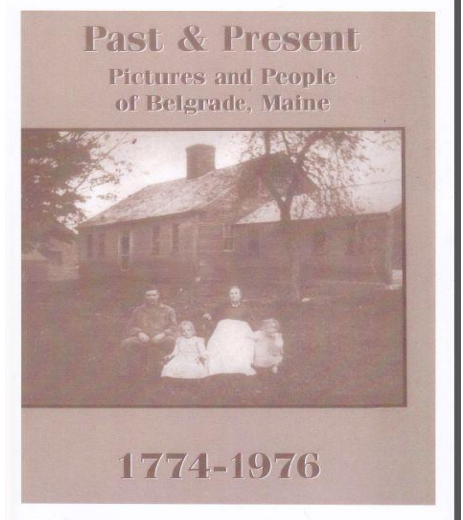


Town of Belgrade Past and Present Pictures of People and Places

A special hardbound photo and text book for the coffee table!

Special price: \$26, includes postage and handling

Past and Present, reprint of 1976 Bicentennial book featuring over 100 old photographs, each with historically accurate descriptions! \$18, includes postage.



BELGRADE, A HISTORY

EXCERPTED FROM

Illustrated History
of Kennebec County, Maine
1625-1799-1892

Editors: Henry D. Kingsbury, Simeon L Deyo



Also available is the 'Belgrade, A History,' reprint of 1892 history compiled by Belgrade native John Clair Minot who eventually moved to Boston and became editor of *Youth's Companion*, a popular magazine for boys & an editor for Boston's Herald newspaper. \$10, includes postage.



Finally, don't forget to renew your

BHS membership for 2021!

Look For Our Postcard in Your

Mailbox and Consider Joining BHS!



The Belgrade Historical Society welcomes all who support our mission and share our commitment to preserve the rich history of the town and its lakes. Individuals, families, organizations, or businesses may join. The membership year is January 1 – December 31, and at any meeting of the members each membership is entitled to one vote. Members may also attend any meeting of the Board of Directors . Please visit our website for more information on becoming a member or how you can donate to the BHS @ <http://belgradehistoricalsociety.org/>

Capital Fund Drive



Rendering of Townhouse after Renovation

Sketch by Artist Erik Johnson

The **Capital Fund Drive** is going well! We have received several thousand dollars and returns are coming in on a daily basis. A friendly reminder to those who want to give and have not yet done so. Use your return envelope or send your own to BHS, P.O. Box 36A, Belgrade, Maine 04917. Use PayPal as an alternative by going to our website belgradehistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Don't forget that BHS is a non-profit 501 (3) 2 organization, so all contributions to its capital campaign to renovate the Old Town House are tax deductible. Any donation you make to BHS can be deducted from your income tax to the extent allowable by law. Please think of making an end-of-year donation to our worthy cause and help to preserve our history.

Please stop by and check out the progress of the restoration of the Old Town House, they are doing a fantastic job of restoring the building!

Happy Holidays!

