

A COUNTRY CHRISTMAS IN THE BRIGHTON AREA c. 1900

"Aren't you two ready yet? I've got old Brownie hitched to the cutter. If we don't hurry it'll be dark before we get back. I don't want to have to be on the lookout for wolves," Papa teased.

"Papa, Bonnie's putting on her mittens and I'm tying Elmer's scarf so it'll cover his ears. Don't you dare leave for the woods to get the tree without them," warned Momma.

Cuddling down in the cutter under the buffalo robe, the children excitedly told their father of the popcorn and cranberry strings they had made to decorate the tree. They were delightedly anticipating placing the tiny toys, which the rest of the year were safely stored in a wooden box, among the branches of the table top evergreen in the parlor, normally closed during the winter. "Last Saturday Momma bought 12 new candles for the tree," said Bonnie. "And we'll fill the two buckets of water to stand nearby too," Papa enjoined. "Won't little Bucky be surprised to see his first tree?" piped Elmer.

Following the tracks of other sleighs on the snow filled road, the group in the cutter found the trail often left the road and went through a neighbor's field when an unusually large drift was encountered. Upon reaching the woods the children directed their father to a large pine they had spotted during summer explorations. "No, that's too big. We'll find a small spruce that will still leave room for us in the parlor too," replied their father.

Sure enough, the tree seemed to grow once it was brought indoors. "Did you brush off all the snow?" asked Momma. "I don't want big puddles on the table like last year."

The tree completely filled the corner by the organ, where the children knew their grandma would play Christmas carols for the entire family to sing. Before another week passed, wrapped packages began to appear under the tree and the table. Secret explorations convinced the children that several looked and felt suspiciously as if they contained clothing or books - not necessarily their hearts' desire. The day before Christmas each placed the gifts they'd made for their parents in back of the tree, certain they would be surprised. Bucky, with his father's help, had whittled a wooden spoon for his mother and he'd made a one legged milking stool, under his grandpa's supervision, for his dad. Bonnie, finally having learned how to knit well, wrapped a pair of mittens for her father and a crocheted dish cloth for her Momma. For Bucky she and her mother bought a rubber ball he'd admired at the hardware store the month before. (Continued on page three, please.)

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 481
Brighton, MI 48116

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