

A Bluffton Christmas carol

Stories from Bluffton
Christmases past

Stories from Bluffton's Christmases past

Intro lyrics to "White Christmas"

This isn't your typical Christmas card, carol or sermon.
But the Bluffton Icon never agreed to be typical.

The sun is shining, the grass is green
The orange and palm trees sway
There's never been such a day
In Beverly Hills, LA
But it's December the 24th
And I'm longing to be up north
- Words by Billy Gilman and/or Irving Berlin

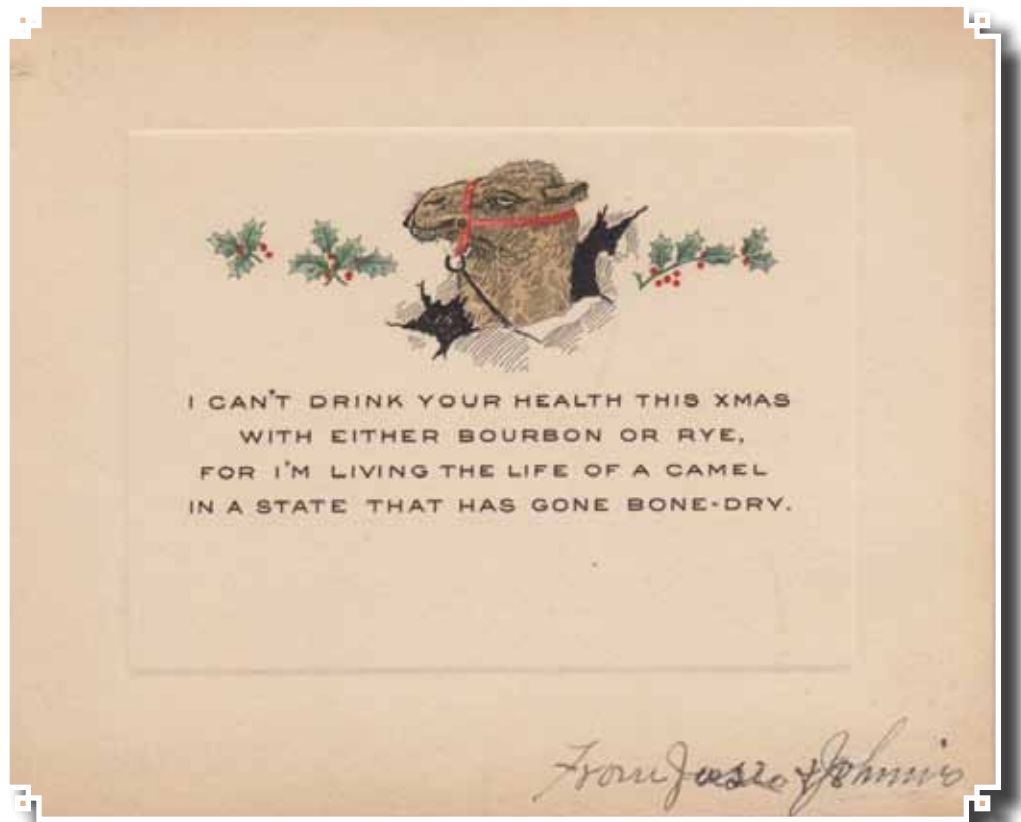
In that spirit, we offer you several Christmas stories that we hope you enjoy. Several are reposts from previous Icon Christmas seasons. Others are posted for the first time. This our gift to you, our loyal viewers, this holiday season.

We, too, are dreaming of a White Christmas...even though there's never been such a day (57 degrees) in Bluffton, Ohio, on Dec. 23, as we write this.

But it's almost December the 24th and we're longing to be like it is up north.



Icon owner (center) with his older Mary, and brother, Rudolf, in a Christmas he doesn't remember.



I CAN'T DRINK YOUR HEALTH THIS XMAS
WITH EITHER BOURBON OR RYE,
FOR I'M LIVING THE LIFE OF A CAMEL
IN A STATE THAT HAS GONE BONE-DRY.

From Jesse Johnson

This Christmas card from 1919 offers a political statement of the time. It reads: "I can't drink your health this Xmas with either bourbon or rye, for I'm living the life of a camel in a state that has gone bone-dry." In 1919 several states initiated prohibition of alcohol.



Allow me to explain the photo.

It was taken in the days when Truman was in the White House. The scene is from our family yard at 201 North Lawn Avenue, at the corner of Lawn and Elm. My brother, Rudolf, was born in 1943 or was it '42?. He was named after his great-grandfather, Rudolf Althaus. Well, everything was going along fine until Gene Autry recorded Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer. That was in 1949, the year I was born.

My parents thought the whole thing - the Rudolph thing - was pretty novel. So, my dad built a sort of early Christmas outdoor lawn display. These were in the days before people did that sort of thing. The display stated something like "Rudolph's Play-House." He made a cut out of a reindeer. Even found a red light bulb. I imagine that in 1949 he probably painted it red. Don't know for certain.

Rudolph lives here

He placed the reindeer on the lawn. Earlier in the year the Steinman Brothers Lumber Company had a miniature ranch house built for a Fourth of July parade. The house had a one-car garage, breezeway and a large room with a front door, picture window and two windows on each side. As I recall, the windows were sort of an early Eisenglass.

My grandfather, Fred Hahn, was a custodian at Steinman's. He somehow acquired the miniature house and the next thing we knew the house was in our front yard next to the sign. If you examine the reindeer closely you'll notice an extension cord used for the red nose. Remember, these were in the days before outside long extension cords. You can see part of the sign that reads: "Rudolph's Play-House."

The next year the reindeer appeared on the roof with a sign reading "Rudolph lives here." Eventually the excitement of having a reindeer in the family must have worn off. After a couple of seasons my parents decided to call it quits for the outdoor lawn display.

The miniature house, however, became a playhouse for the neighborhood. Rudolph was retired to the upper rafter of the garage and since my parents never threw anything away, the cutout lived in the garage for a good 15 years longer than it should have.

Anyway, I wanted to share this story with you, because not everyone has a brother whose name is Rudolf.

(A point of spelling. The reindeer is Rudolph. The brother is Rudolf.)

When Bluffton was 80 years younger

Note: Robert Kreider, now of North Newton, Kansas, has a special place in his heart for Bluffton, Ohio. Here are some of his thoughts at Christmas. This column was originally posted on the Icon in December 2010.

By Robert Kreider

At Christmas time boyhood images of a Bluffton of more than 75 years ago come surging out of my past. In my ripe old age, I savor these scraps of memory. Speaking of “ripe old age,” how does one know when he or she has become “ripe”? Relax for this flow of nostalgia:

Both an afternoon and evening performance of the “Messiah” in the hip-roof College Barn. . . . viewing a crew from Hankish candy store cutting ice on the quarry next to the Bluffton Light Plant. . . . standing in awe, view-

ing those giant generators in the Light Plant. . . . outside breathing the foul sulfur aroma from the aeration pipes of the town’s water system. . . .

Page Dairy pouring milky waste water into Riley Creek, contaminating the water for a mile down stream. . . . pawing through the village dump across from Harmon Field looking for wooden staves from touring cars which we could salvage to use as hockey sticks. . . .



The Page Dairy on Harmon Road

the drama across the tracks on College Avenue of watching them saw boards and planks from giant oak logs in Ed Amstutz’s saw mill. . . . the oval island of wooded wilderness beside Andy Hauenstein’s handsome brick residence. . . . two doors south the Biederman house where we lived for a year, 1927-1928, and in the summer watched the drama of crews tearing up Main Street and laying it with new brick. . . .

Mose Steiner accumulating a mound of brick on his lot at the corner of Jackson and Kibler preparatory to building a handsome brick house (later the residence of the Urichs and today the Boehrs). . . .

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Here's where Bluffton elementary students went to school during the 1930s that Robert Kreider writes about.

reading hunting and fishing magazines as I waited for Doc Ludwig to resole my only pair of shoes. . . . next door Bogart's Dodge dealership with a pump out front on Main Street. . . . seeing occasionally a horse and buggy tied up on Church Street alongside the Gratz Dry Goods store. . . .

buying on sale at half price a catcher's mitt at Edgar Hauenstein's Corner Drug Store. . . . at Sidney's Rexall Drug Store buying each September a supply of school books. . . . at noon in the fall Mr. Huser of Steiner and Huser men's clothing coming to watch us play football on the grade school grounds. . . .

enjoying making the rounds at Winter Fair seeing the livestock exhibited in the three livery barns adjoining Cherry Street. . . . going to Hankish's candy store in winter-time to get a pint of fresh oysters dipped from a cooler setting outside in the cold. . . . buying for mother a pound of Hershey milk chocolate chipped by Mr. Hankish from a one foot cube.

. . . . ditto, at Ed Reichenbach's grocery chipping dates from a big block. . . . buying Christmas gifts at Shalley's ten cents store that adjoined Pudd Worthington's Star theater with its forbidden delights. . . . across the street next to a pool hall, getting a haircut for 25 cents (maybe 15 cents) in Dillman's barbershop. . . .

going to the Buckeye for a swim, stopping at the foundry by the Main Street bridge to watch a blacksmith pursue his fiery trade. . . . Saturday nights when downtown Bluffton bustled with crowds, lights, action. . . . and then village residents and characters. . . .

On I could go: images of wilderness haunts in the Bluffton countryside. Nostalgic ramblings for the reader but therapy for the writer.

Happy holidays.

Bob Kreider robertkreider@cox.net

Main and High
Streets, Lima in
the mid-1950s.



Looking forward to Christmas shopping in downtown Lima

No question about it.

My memories of the best Christmas ever come in a package wrapped from stores located in the Lima public square.

I know. It's sounds impossible to viewers born after Neil A. walked on the moon; but it's true.

There was nothing...nothing like going to Lima and shopping downtown for Christmas in the 1950s.

Picture this: Somewhere on South Main, Lima, there was Porter's Music Store.

You could actually select a 33 1/3 rpm album, enter a listening booth and listen to the album in privacy. That way you'd know if you wanted to buy it or pass.

There was Kresge's on the corner of Main and High (think CNB today). You could sit at a real-1950s era counter and buy a piece of coffee and a cup of pie for under a buck, maybe under three quarters. Can't remember.

All the major department stores were there...J.C. Penney's, Sears-Roebuck, Montgomery Ward. Who am I missing? (Sam Diller will inform me at today's Christmas eve service).

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Getting from Bluffton to Lima circa 1958. Route 25 had a bypass around Bluffton and Old 25 passed through Beaverdam, then south of “new” 25. There was no Interstate 75 at this time.

Christmas shopping in downtown Lima...continued

The Leader, Three Sisters, Greg's were all there. There was a Stechschulte from Columbus Grove in The Leader's men's department who always serviced my dad for all his suits. I grew up thinking that men's departments actually had guys like him. You know, personal service.

Greg's even had elevator operators. Necessary for three floors and a basement. Actually, one elevator eventually became automatic. We always went on the elevator with an operator.

Downtown Lima had more shoe stores than I can name. So, I won't try.

Parking? None available. You couldn't find parking in downtown Lima on the Saturday before Christmas even if you shopped early. We usually ended up parking behind Memorial Hall... '56 baby blue and white Mercury, four-door, V-8, AM radio, no seatbelts. two teenagers, one elementary kid (me) and mom and dad. Can't recall if we locked the doors when we got out to shop.

A Niswander, maybe Evan, who grew up in Bluffton and went to school with my parents, had a typewriter shop on High Street.

Back up a sec. The Lima Square wasn't the bricked-in walking area of today. It had parking spots on all four sides. There was a huge Santa in a sleigh pulled by reindeers floating high above the parking spaces, hanging from some sort of mechanism. It was on the north side of the square, as I recall.

Was there a chocolate shop on the northwest corner of the square? You know, next to the theater, was it the Quilna? I know it wasn't the Ranger.

After a brisk day of shopping, we'd tool down Market Street to view the lawn displays of the rich and famous of Lima.

You wouldn't want to head north on Main because after passing the court house because you'd have to cross the double-tracked Pennsylvania Railroad. Pretty good chance you'd be stopped by a train. There were elevated buildings with real people who lowered gates to stop traffic when a train approached. Some trains even carried passengers.

There's more to this tale, but if I told you you wouldn't believe me. Just in case, here's one for the road: coming back from Lima to Bluffton on Route 25 (I-75 didn't exist yet) you'd pass THROUGH Beaverdam. The Dixie Highway took you straight into Bluffton.

That's right...all the traffic went down Main Street.

If you don't believe me, study the map with this story.

For me, it was the best of times. White wall tires the width of a man's tie, wheatie pennies, coal furnaces, thus snow"men" with real coal eyes.

Those are the Christmas memories lingering in my mind. What are your memories?

For me Christmas meant a new doll head for "Ruthie"



Decorating the Pannabecker Christmas tree, from left, Wanda, Mary, James and John.

By Mary Pannabecker Steiner

When Fred sent me this photo, I just groaned. I knew it wasn't a good idea to leave him alone with my dad's slides and photos....sure enough, one has resurfaced. Dad labeled all of his slides and photos but this one had been digitized without a date identification. My best guess was that I was 8 because my brother, John (far right) is 8 years older and looks about 16 in the photo.

Then there is that hideous '50s wallpaper. The best thing that could be said about it is that it was gone by the next Christmas. Anyway, to get confirmation of the year, I called the only brother living in the same time zone - James...the shorter of the two in the photo.

"I would say 1964. I think I'm the younger Scout. I don't think it could be Tom because John probably would have left Scouting by the time Tom was a Boy Scout. Also, that's the way I hold my hand. I would have been 11, and John 16. It couldn't be 1963 because then I'd be a Cub Scout, and it couldn't be 1965 because by then I'd be second or first class, rather than Tenderfoot

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A new head for "Ruthie" continued

(the badge on my pocket). Also, you look 8 rather than 7 or 9, don't you think?"

That is a real tree – purchased at Skip's Nursery, of course. The ornaments and lights were stores in a cupboard above the kitchen sink. Somehow our lights always seemed to work the next year and if one was burned out, we'd just replace it with a new bulb from Crow's Dime Store.

Breakfast on Christmas morning always featured semmel, a chewy German roll best slathered with homemade strawberry jam. And our parents ALWAYS made us eat before we could open presents.

For four years or so, my doll, Ruthie, got a new head every Christmas – over the years, she had brown, black, and blonde hair, curly and straight. That was another trick I never figured out. Poor Ruthie – now living in the attic and more than 50 years – is bald.

Some years, we traveled to Elkhart, Ind., to spend Christmas at our grandparents' home, playing with cousins we saw only every three or four years because their parents were missionaries in Japan. That required the ubiquitous family photo in which we were carefully placed and made to wait while Grandpa set the timer on the triple-lens reflex camera, and then ran to his own place.

Later, when those grandparents decided to winter in Florida, we drove down the not-quite-finished I-75 for Christmas. We got to open presents early that year – my mom had made me a green and white gingham two-piece swim suit to wear on the beach that was populated entirely by Northerners who didn't know any better.

Still later – Christmas 1972 – we were living in St. Pete, Fla. What I remember most is opening presents in the very warm, screened porch where we had a decorated pine tree that seemed completely incongruous with the nearby palm trees.

Memories. Everyone has them. What's your favorite?