

Froeh Weinahten!

Message from Joanne Hertz Townsend, Montague, Michigan

I have read some of the very interesting stories of Christmas in earlier years and it's much like music--"variations on a theme!"

I grew up in a town in southwestern North Dakota that had similar traditions with only a children's service at 7 PM on Christmas eve---with 2 huge Christmas trees (brought into our prairie town) which in earlier years had candles on them that others have mentioned, and a man standing guard by each tree to watch those flickering candles. I think I was 3 when I said my first Christmas piece in front of the congregation. The little 'magpie" that I was, I had 2 to say, one in English, and one in German for Grandpa! At the very last moment before I'd take my place with the children, my father would say, "Now, make sure you say it loud enough so Grandpa can hear! (He was moderately deaf) and I'd belt that one out as loud as I could! One song, always sung with so much joy was "Oh, Come Little Children" an appropriate one for the children's own service. After it families would usually go to the head of the families' home--in our case, my Grandpa and Grandma's, where the usual Christmas goodies were spread out on 2 tables--some very German (pfefferneusse, ammonia cookies are what interested me) and some contemporary--and each family would bring a dish or more. An aunt in California would send a big box of dried fruits, which was a real treat! The noise was deafening with a passel of grandkids and stacks of presents for everyone. Santa came to our house in the morning and it was only the sharing of gifts among the family that occurred on Christmas eve. (As for the bag of candy that others mentioned, in our community the city fathers sponsored an appearance of Santa -- whose transportation--getting to town by horse and wagon--not uncommon as sometimes there wasn't that much snow early to mid December. Santa had bags of candy for all the children that were parceled out then--to the kiddies' delight!) Christmas Day there were both German and English traditional services for families. I remember when older and taking the job of organist, and singing in the choir, it was sometimes daunting to get the orders of service just right. The children's service was always full of surprises: missed words, crying babies, children teary-eyed with "stage fright" who'd run from the front to find their mother and dad, the little imps who couldn't stand still and pestered a nearby child for their "entertainment" and so laughter was interjected into the ceremony and added to the joy of all at the coming of the Christ Child!