

# Proceedings Of The Livingston Historical Society

*Lest We Forget . . .*



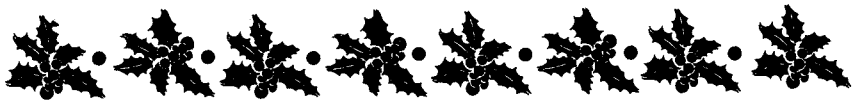
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***Christmas  
Stories  
of  
Old  
Livingston***



**By Freeman Harrison**

With a Biographical Sketch of Mr. Harrison by Ruth Rockwood

Edited by Peter M.G. Deane

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November 1981

Christmas Stories of Old Livingston  
Freeman Harrison



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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Biography of Freeman Harrison	5
A Lucullan Feast	7
Better Than His Word	13
The Day and the Letter	19
A Christmas Sleighride	23
Mine Hill Revisited	27
Be Those Remembrances Admitted	33
Some Things Don't Change	37
References	41
Acknowledgements	42



**Freeman Harrison**

## BIOGRAPHY OF FREEMAN HARRISON

### Compiled from various sources by Ruth L. Rockwood

Freeman Harrison was born in Livingston on July 6, 1887. He was descended from a family which migrated to what is now Livingston Township, decades before the American Revolution, and supplied leadership ever since.

As a boy he enjoyed baseball, fishing and hunting and was an omniverous reader, concentrating on Shakespeare, Milton and Dickens.

He graduated from Princeton University in 1911, majoring in Latin and English. He then taught for several years at Livingston High School, on East Mt. Pleasant Avenue, later to become the Free Public Library of Livingston, and after 1961, when the building was razed, the site of a Firestone Tire Co. He was also a journalist and reported for the *N. Y. Evening Sun* covering city news and financial news of Wall Street. He became editor of a magazine *Topnotch* and wrote poetry and stories for such periodicals as *Ainslee's magazine*.

When Mr. Harrison's father, Amos Harrison died, he took over the real estate and insurance business and developed it to the point that it played a major role in the community. He was a member of the Board of Education from 1923 until 1929 and a member of the Township Committee from 1928 until 1937.

In addition to his many other writings, he wrote and published a book *Flames over the Riker*, containing stories of Livingston.

Freeman Harrison married Elsie Wood on April 17, 1913 and was the father of Virginia, Mrs. Henry G. Muchmore.

He died in Livingston on June 22, 1973 at the age of eighty-five. He will always be remembered as the historian of Livingston.







### A LUCULLAN FEAST

*(A strange Christmas, in which there is, probably, more commotion than the joyous day should have. — The author.)*

It started quietly enough, that Christmas Day away back in the gay nineties, when William McKinley sat serenely in the White House, and the horse and buggy, bless them, were symbols of the happy, contented time. It was only in the unusual mildness of the weather that long-ago morning that one may have found some hint of the odd tricks a fickle fate had planned for the occasion.

The David Grissom family, living on a sixty acre Livingston farm, had invited two unusual guests to have the holiday dinner with them. They did this out of the kindness of their hearts. Each of these invited guests lived alone and many people felt that for anyone to have Christmas dinner alone was a sad thing. The Grissoms were an old family in the section. Living in the mellowed farmhouse were the sturdy David and his wife; an unmarried son, Edward, who helped his father run the farm; and two maiden daughters.

The house, built before the Revolutionary War, faced north toward the street. To the west was a little pond in a rather deep ravine. The pond was fed by a brook which flowed under a stone bridge spanning the road. At the street level there was a brownstone parapet on either side. Well to the rear of the house there stood the barn and other outbuildings.

The two invited guests were Edward Moran and Theodore Berry, both vivid and articulate men, but in most respects strikingly different. Mr. Moran, who lived on what is now North Livingston Avenue, or North Midway as he called it, was a very warehouse of knowledge. He was also irascible and explosive. At times, too, he could be a bit pompous, with his tendency to use long words and classical allusions which were often obscure. Like Thoreau, he lived simply, with little regard for the usual comforts of life. To him, money was a medium of exchange and that was all. His religious and political views were highly individual. He loved his books and the beauties of nature — the restful green of trees and shrubs, and summer moonlight and the bright stars of a cold winter night.

Mr. Berry was rugged, not tall. His mouth was wide and firm. He was full of wisdom. No one could ever say that the old fellow did not have a strong personality, but he lacked, no doubt gladly, the other's extreme dignity. He enjoyed reading, with the novels of Jules Verne, such as *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, being among his favorites. He lived in a part of the old house at the Center, in which, when the building was known as Samo's Tavern, Livingston's government had been formed. It may have pleased him that his combination dining-room and kitchen was in what had been the bar-room.

The mildness of this Christmas Day had followed a frigid spell which had frozen hard the little pond by the street. This was just as it should have been for

the holiday season, but this warmth seemed out of place. Christmas, however, is in peoples' hearts, not in the weather, and, as with the absence of snow, the unanticipated high temperature could be dismissed.

A survey turned swiftly into the graveled driveway. Noon was approaching and Jared Grissom, an elder son of the family, had arrived from his home in Orange. With him were his wife and three children — two boys and a girl. The girl's name was Ruth, and she was destined to play quite a part in the events of this Christmas Day. She was around the age of ten.

Mr. Moran, who disdained the use of a horse, arrived soon afterward. His massive dome of a head, fringed with gray hair, with his beardless face gave him the look of a figure out of Plutarch. He had put aside his usual bluejeans, found a necktie somewhere or another, and was wearing a neat, dark suit. David Grissom, one of the few men on friendly terms with the old termagant, greeted him cordially, as did the others. Shouts of "Merry Christmas!" rang through the wide hallway. To the east of the hallway were two parlors — first a small one, then the main one — and to the west was a secluded little room filled with books. The two sisters, who had been teachers, were fond of reading.

"This hospitality shown to me by you and your family is most gratifying, David," Mr. Moran said.

He had called a man by his first name! Formal to the core, for him such affability was astounding. Surely, this was a different kind of day.

The family, with Mr. Moran, remained in the hall, for Theodore Berry was approaching. He had come over the bridge and was looking toward the house. How vigorous and strong he appeared in the pale December light!

The newcomer received a hearty welcome, even from Mr. Moran. The two men ignored each other in the corner store, but it seemed that there was to be no such aloofness on this Christmas Day. Mr. Moran even used the other's first name in greeting him, as if they were the best of friends. He had almost called him "Thee," as Mr. Berry was generally known.

The grandfather's clock struck one, the magic hour. It was time for the Christmas dinner, and what a meal it was! There were turkey, goose, chicken, even guinea hen. There were headcheese and all kinds of vegetables. There were sauces, cranberry included. Pies — pumpkin and mince — were still in the oven, awaiting the time for dessert. It is hard now to believe that nearly every article of food on the Grissom table that day was not a purchase from the supermarket, but was a product, direct or indirect, of the farm. This included the bread and the butter, the cider, and even the tall white candles which lighted the festive table.

David Grissom was without a trace of snobbery. Sitting at the table were his two hired men — Chris and Morenus Sorenson, who were brothers. If they were good enough to toil on his farm, their employer thought, then they were good enough to eat at his table. With somewhat analogous reasoning, Tillie Gilmore, the housemaid, had her place at the table.

It was Mr. Moran who pronounced the first verdict. "This is indeed a Lucullan feast," he said impressively.

The old man, as it happened was seated next to Ruth Grissom. The girl had chestnut-brown hair — worn down and long, of course — cheeks the reddest of red, and sparkling blue eyes. An independent little miss, she was the pride and

joy of her parents. Mr. Moran, who never was easily impressed, decided quickly that here was a child he liked.

At one point, the head of the house addressed the two neighborhood guests. "You chaps," he said, "were in the war. Perhaps you would be good enough to tell us of some of your experiences."

Although both had plenty to tell, neither seemed inclined to say much on the subject.

It was then that the eager little Ruth spoke up, "I'm in the third grade at my school," she said, "and we are studying about the Civil War. I would like to hear about it very much. Please do as my grandfather suggests."

This was too much for Mr. Moran, who was delighted with the child's desire to learn, and he began to speak about the conflict of the eighteen sixties. When the well-informed Edward Moran talked on any subject it was with authority and likely to be in detail. However, realizing that too much of one subject might be out of place at this holiday meal, he ended his reminiscences in appropriate time. "My dear," he said, looking at Ruth, "I think we have heard enough of this for Christmas Day. I wish your Aunt Emma would tell us how she made this delicious plum pudding."

Ruth, though, was not to be so easily appeased. Having discovered that Mr. Moran was a regular history book in himself, she wanted to hear more. "Please tell us," she asked of her admiring neighbor, "about some of the poems concerned with the war. We are studying them, too."

He was embarrassed, but how could he deny the girl's request? "There is," he said, "the poem 'Barbara Frietchie.' You know of it. It tells of a supposed incident that happened a few days before the battle at Gettysburg."

While the old man eloquently quoted portions of John Whittier's masterpiece, Ruth was in agony, for suddenly she faced an unexpected and terrible problem. She knew that the old savant, with his reputation for learning, had erred grievously. The incredible had happened. Should she tell him? She decided that she would. Ah, the temerity of youth!

"Don't you think, Mr. Moran," she asked when his quoting had ended, "that the event in the poem took place before the battle of Antietam, the preceding year. Stonewall Jackson, who plays such a prominent part in the poem, could not have been in Frederick at the time you mention. He was dead then; at least our history book says so. There is something else, too. The poem refers to 'the cool September morn.' The battle of Gettysburg was in July."

A different kind of Christmas? Most desperate of moments! The old man threw back his head in shock. He had erred badly and he knew it. Furthermore, he had been corrected by a schoolgirl. Yes, it was a strange day indeed, though no one at the time could have foretold the un-Christmas like turbulence yet to come.

The face and neck of the rebutted man became flushed. His hands tightened. It would have been a rash thing indeed for a grown up to question the accuracy of a statement by Mr. Moran. Such an affront would surely have led to near annihilation in a hurricane of rhetoric. What would he do now in the case of the child Ruth?

There followed a moment of silence — a calm before the coming storm.

Those at the table who realized the situation waited breathlessly. Perhaps Mr. Berry was not too distressed. Secretly pleased that someone at last had found his comrade in the wrong — and had shown the courage to say so — he kept a straight face only with difficulty. “Good girl!” he thought to himself.

The explosion seemed inevitable, but, as has been said, this was an unusual day. Gradually the old man’s signs of anger vanished. His face softened and broke into a smile. Then tenderly he put an arm around Ruth’s shoulders. “Of course, Ruth, you are right,” he said. “When you grow up, my dear, become a school teacher and I will be your first pupil.”

Amazement reigned in the spacious room. As for Ruth, she had something else she desired very much to talk with Mr. Moran about, but she knew that she had taken up quite a portion of the conversation. So she held her peace. “Children should be seen and not heard” was a saying of those Victorian days. The aged Queen still sat on the British throne.

The diners lingered at the table long after they had finished eating. Later they gathered in the long parlor, which ran along the entire side of the house. It had white plaster walls, relieved by the portraits of many Grissoms. A wood fire crackled on the wide hearth. The elders were doing the talking now, with the tactful David Grissom seeing to it that no controversial subject, such as that of politics, came up for discussion. There had been one narrow escape from disaster, and that was enough. At one end of the room there was a gayly decorated Christmas tree. Under it were presents for all. They were distributed by the three children.

The brief December afternoon was drawing fast to a close. Theodore Berry, smoking a fragrant cigar, arose to leave. “I think,” he said, “that I should go home now and help the widow Williams give her chickens their meals.” Courteously he thanked his hosts for their hospitality, and again wished a happy holiday to all. “The widow Williams” lived in another part of the same one-time tavern in which Mr. Berry lived, and she kept her poultry in a coop near the place where Panek’s Garage is today — some years later.

Soon after Mr. Berry had gone, the three children disappeared, leaving a pleasant, if mature, group in the parlor, which was now candlelit. This Christmas Day, it seemed, at last had settled down to a tranquillity more in keeping with such occasions in the past. Certainly there had been more than enough strangeness.

But what was that? There had been a muffled sound coming from the direction of the barn. It was nothing, most of the people in the parlor thought.

Edward Grissom, though, looked out of the rear window and saw smoke rising from the roof of the barn. “The barn’s been struck by lightning!” he cried, incredulity in his voice. Saying something about the horses and the cattle, he rushed from the house. There was no fire department in that distant time.

Yes, the animals must be saved if possible, but another thought flashed into suddenly agonized minds: where were the children? As the others followed Edward Grissom toward the barn, the mother sobbed, “They’re in there!” She knew as did the other Grissoms, that the youngsters were fond of bouncing about in the hay stored in the mow high above the barn floor. The hay was on fire! Small flames were now running along the peak of the roof.

The mother's fears were justified as she reached the big open door of the barn. The two boys, shrieking in dread, were descending the ladder from the haymow. "Where's Ruth?" the mother asked hysterically.

So terrifying had been their experience, their escape from the flames, that they were in a state of shock and were speechless. Convulsions ran through their bodies.

The upper part of the barn was an inferno now. Jared Grissom, who had sensed his wife's intention to rush into the burning structure, was holding her in a strong grip, which proved ineffectual. She suddenly broke away. She ran through the door and reached the ladder. She started to climb it.

At that instant Edward Moran seized the frantic woman. Then, aided by her husband, he pulled her back down the ladder, and, struggling, from the blazing barn.

A terrible sense of futility possessed the onlookers. They were helpless, for there was nothing to do except watch the flames consume the old outbuilding. The freak shower had been brief, with only the one flash of lightning and one clap of thunder. Practically no rain had fallen.

It was Mr. Moran who offered the only ray of hope. "I doubt that Ruth is in the mow," he said to the distraught parents. "I have had a good look at her to-day, and it is my opinion that if she had been in the mow she would have gotten out as the boys did."

These were easy words to say — in the circumstances they sounded almost flippant — but they did convey the thought that the girl might be somewhere else. The pond! The pond! Why had no one thought of that?

The ice was firm despite the present mildness. Because of the ravine, one could not see the barn from the pond, and Ruth had brought her skates out with her, along with a sport coat which had earmuffs. Then, also, she was an intent child, always completely occupied with whatever she was doing. Without knowing what had taken place, she might be at the little pond. Here was hope!

The searchers for the missing girl hurried toward the pond. As they approached it, there came a scream of anguish from Ruth's mother. There was not a person on the ice. The last hope had vanished.

However, the good saints of Christmas Day, perhaps even the very angels themselves, had decreed a happy ending to this day at the Grissom farm. There were shouts of joy and immense relief as Ruth came from the door of the house. At first she was smiling. Then she seemed perplexed as her parents seized her eagerly in their arms. The mother was still sobbing, but it was with joy now.

"Where were you, Ruth?" the father asked. "The barn has burned, and we feared that you were in it. Didn't you hear anything?"

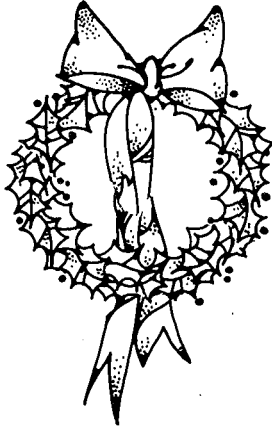
"I heard a scream a few moments ago," the girl said. "That was all. I was awfully busy in the little parlor looking for a dictionary in all those books. It took me quite a while. When at last I found the dictionary, I learned just what I wanted to know. I had never heard of it before. I wanted to find out what Mister Moran meant by a Lucullan feast."

"Bless your little heart," the old man said to her. "In the future I shall have to be more careful about my allusions."

"You saved my wife's life," Jared Grissom said to Mr. Moran. "I shall be eternally grateful to you."

"You would have saved her yourself," the old man said. "You were close by. If you wish to give me the credit, though, just say that I did my good deed for Christmas Day."

Written by Freeman Harrison in *W.E.T.*, December 24, 1970



## BETTER THAN HIS WORD

Beyond all doubt it would be a white Christmas, for the twenty fourth day of December had come, and in timely salute to the joyous season, snow was falling abundantly on field and woodland, on the just and the unjust. The year was 1902, a benign year as one looks back wistfully at it: "Teddy Roosevelt" was President, but despite the resultant strenuousness in the White House at Washington — the man from Oyster Bay, New York, would be described as "dynamic" today — there prevailed a blessed quietude and the thought, deceptive as it may have been, that all was right with the world.

And so one might have hoped that in addition to the Yuletide snow, a kind fate would have arranged that everything else would be in harmony with the joyous occasion. Alas, there was one glaring exception. In the Martin home on North Midway — now North Livingston Avenue — there was nerve wracking anxiety. Ann, six years old, lay dangerously ill.

Some ten days before, Mrs. Martin, a widow, had taken the child on a shopping expedition to Newark. In a big department store on Broad Street, Ann had seen a life-size doll. It had pink cheeks, curly blond hair, and eyes which opened and shut just like those of any little girl. Never before had she seen so irresistible a doll, and she fell in love with it at once.

"May I have it for Christmas?" she asked her mother. "I don't think Santa will bring me one like that."

"I am sorry, dear," Mrs. Martin said. "I would like to do so very much." It was an extraordinary doll, and the price was \$14.95. The mother felt that she could not afford a price so high.

Although tears glistened in her brown eyes, the girl did not beg for the doll. But how she longed for it! It seemed to the girl that she would not enjoy Christmas without it. What a tragedy — six years old and unhappy at Christmas!

By the time mother and daughter left the store, a disagreeable, unexpected rain had set in. It was only half past three, but darkness had fallen, with the street lights shining spectrally through the mist, Mrs. Martin and Ann walked south to Market Street where, after a considerable wait in the rain, a trolley car bound for Orange came along. At length the car reached the post office where they saw Mr. DeCamp's stage drawn up against the curb, the horses blanketed against the rain. In 1902 the Orange post office was in the Masonic Temple, on the north side of Main Street. The stage line carried mail in addition to passengers.

The trip to Newark was an unfortunate one for Ann. She had seen a doll for which she yearned but could not possess, and, as it turned out, she had caught a severe cold in the rain. That very night she began to cough and by the next morning a dangerous chest ailment had settled upon her. Now, on the day before Christmas — a day which should be a happy one for any child — she was at the crisis point of the disease.

In mid-afternoon, Edward Moran, a strong, energetic man in his late sixties who lived alone in a nearby house, came to inquire about Ann. A good neighbor, he had come to the Martin home daily since her sickness began. This time he found the mother even more distraught than she had been.

"Ann is fearfully ill," she told him. "Doctor Peck has been here twice today. It's strange — she's asking for a life-size doll she saw in Newark last week. I had no idea how much she wanted it. Oh, how selfish I was not to buy it for her! The price was fourteen dollars and ninety-five cents, but I could have afforded it by saving in other ways. I feel that if she had it now it would help to pull her through. Oh, how mean I was!"

"Did the store have more than one doll of the kind?" he asked. "What store was it in?"

Mrs. Martin felt certain that there was more than one of the dolls at the time of her visit, and she named the store.

Through the deepening snow, Mr. Moran made his way back to his home. There was mystery about his life, but it was known that before he came to Livingston he had had a wife and children — no doubt at Christmas there had been laughter and presents and a lighted tree — but this had been a long while before. What memories had the old man kept to himself? He was cantankerous, violent, cynical, and hard to get along with; most people avoided him because of his explosive temper. But he was brave and strong, highly intelligent, and largely self-educated. His house was full of books, in bookcases, on tables, and piled up against the wall. The books he read incessantly when he was not walking about the streets, his domelike grey head held high, or sitting on the long bench at the corner store, probably in stormy argument — stormy on his part at least — with some habitue of the place. His face was devoid of a beard, and his cheeks were a healthy tan.

He had given the name North Midway to his street. It may seem strange that this most poetic man substituted a new name for one of the best any Livingston street ever had: Dark Lane. He may have thought that the older designation would still be used informally. At any rate, "Dark Lane" was no longer appropriate by that time. But sixty five years before the street had cut through a veritable Forest of Arden.

"What shall I do?" he asked himself, after entering his home. "The little girl must have her doll. There must be something I can do." Yes; there was one way, but Newark was far distant. The afternoon stage already had left for Orange. Although he could have afforded one, he kept no horse. Yes; he knew what he would do. He would walk to Caldwell, and there take a trolley car for Newark. He would be in time, for he had learned from Mrs. Martin that the store would be open until nine o'clock.

Wind-whipped snow fell fast as he started down the knoll toward McClellan Avenue. Darkness had fallen. The storm, approaching a blizzard in intensity, was now more severe than he had anticipated — but what of it? He had a contempt for the weather. To remark that a day was pleasant or unpleasant he considered dealing in the trivial, boring, and a waste of words. Throughout his whole life he had shown a scorn for danger and weakness. Forty years before, as a sailor in the United States Navy during the Civil War, he had swum alone under enemy fire to carry a vital message. He was not accustomed to failure. What mattered snow, wind, and cold? Now a child's life was at stake.



Walking through the snow as fast as the circumstances allowed, he crossed the Becker flats. Farther on, he found the center of Roseland buried in snow. A few houses were lighted for the season, with Christmas trees shining through windows with drapes pulled wide, but the general store and the post office had given up on the night. He saw not one person in the streets.

In Essex Fells he made his first stop. It was Rudolph's florist shop which had the first telephone available to someone coming from the Roseland and Livingston direction. When he was connected with the Newark store, he soon spoke with a young woman, to judge by her voice, who worked in the sanctum of the manager of the toy department. She said, to Mr. Moran's relief, that some of the life-size dolls were still for sale. "The price has been reduced to nine dollars and ninety five cents," she added sweetly.

"I must have one for a sick child," he said. "Her life depends on it. I'm at a distance now, but I'll be at your store by seven o'clock. Lay aside a doll for me."

"Oh, that will be impossible," the girl said. "Such a thing would be against the rules. You will have to take the chance of there being one left when you get here."

Hastily he explained the situation more fully.

"I will speak to Mister Olcott, my manager," she said, impressed. "Please hold the wire." Soon she spoke disheartening words. "Mister Olcott says that such a thing is out of the question. He is sorry and he hopes the little girl will be well for Christmas."

"A lot he cares about the child!" the old man snapped. "I demand to speak with your manager."

Again the girl left the telephone. "It is impossible for him to take the time to talk to you," she said on her return. "He is too busy. It's Christmas Eve, you know."

When Mr. Moran reached Caldwell, a Newark-bound trolley came along to his relief. It was covered with snow, and the bright lights within afforded some degree of cheerfulness. When at length the car reached Newark, he hastened to the great store, which had been transformed into an enchanted palace. It was a wondrous sight as it glowed through the falling snow, with myriads of colored lights across the whole front and countless toys in the brightly illuminated windows. The Christmas spirit was so intense, so rampant, that it seemed almost a living thing. Despite the snow, happy revelers made their way along the sidewalks.

During the day, thousands had visited the great store, but it is doubtful that any one of them had been so striking in appearance as the old man who rushed to the toy department a few minutes before seven o'clock. His well worn ulster, which looked to be a relic of Civil War days, and his battered felt hat were drenched with melting snow. His massive head was held erect. Clerks and shoppers could not but gaze in amazement.

He pushed his way to the toy counter, only to learn that the last of the big dolls had been sold. "I telephoned to ask you to save one of the dolls for me," he said.

"You did not speak with me," the clerk, a young girl, told him. "The price had been reduced to nine dollars and ninety five cents."

"I did speak with someone," Mr. Moran said, his eyes blazing, "and she consulted the manager of your toy department. Where is he?"

"You cannot see him," the clerk said. "He is too busy."

"I will see him! This concerns an ill child. Where is the manager's office?"

The girl was frightened. "It's at the rear of this floor. You will not be admitted."

Before a minute passed he strode unannounced into the manager's office. "Is your name Olcott?" he asked.

"Yes," the startled man answered, after a glance at the unusual figure before him. "But you have no right to walk into my office. You —"

"An hour or so ago," the other interrupted, "I telephoned to your department asking you to hold a doll which I described. A seriously ill child was longing for it. But even on Christmas Eve you did not grant this favor. In the name of Heaven, can't you find me one in your stock room or windows?"

The manager was impressed by the vibrant man before him. "Yes, I recall your request," he said, "but it was impossible to oblige you — rules are rules, you know. And I regret there isn't a doll of the kind in the store. The price had been reduced to nine dollars and ninety five cents."

"I've heard that twice already!" the old man exclaimed. "You show no compassion or sense. You're a weakling, or you would have the courage to break a rule in a good cause." He went on briefly in his denunciation, but what was the use?

He left the store, heaviness in his heart. After fruitless dashes to other stores, he boarded a trolley car for Caldwell. If anything, the storm had increased in fury, and he feared that the car would never reach its destination. He felt frustrated and, although he would have admitted it to no one, he was disappointed in himself. As the car struggled onward, snow pelting against the windows, he reflected that he had been unjust with the manager. The man was only following strict orders: he was but a small cog in a ruthless system which placed money above humanity. Mr. Moran was unorthodox politically, a nonconformist, and cynical of labels; although he saw the need for reforms, he was wary of reformers.

The struggle against the storm ended on a Montclair hill when the car came to an agonizing stop. It seemed that the snow was too deep for further progress. However, after a heartbreaking delay, by some miracle a new start was made and the summit of the hill was reached. Later the car reached snow-wrapped Caldwell and the Roseland road.

The long walk ahead was one continuous battle. In the darkness, relieved only by the expanse of snow all about, he plodded his way through Essex Fells, then Roseland. On Becker flats the snow, blown savagely across the big field to the east, was above his knees, at times waist high. "I must go on!" he said to himself as he plunged through the drifts. "I must go on!" Only a man of prodigious strength and courage could have conquered the drifts.

It was just before reaching the Martin home that, looking up, he saw two or three stars, lustrous in a patch of dark blue sky. Yes; the storm was ending. Although the logical mind scorned omens as superstition, he felt reassured.

Yet he found small hope in the Martin home, to which he went at once. "How is Ann?" he asked the mother when she came to the door.

"Oh, she is terrible, Mr. Moran. There seems to be no way to break the fever. Mrs. Bates is staying the night with us. But where have you been? You're wet with snow and half frozen."

Briefly he told her of his fruitless journey. Then he said a strange, incomprehensible thing. "Go upstairs, Mrs. Martin, and tell Ann that she will have her doll in the morning. Do this at once — it will ease her mind. She shall have her doll for Christmas."

After he returned to his home, Mr. Moran stood briefly in the light of an oil lamp in the kitchen. The house was cold, for the fires in the kitchen range and on the living room hearth had gone out. For the first time on this momentous evening he really felt cold. A cough shook his sturdy frame. But what of trivial matters? Yes; he would have to go into the attic and open the old trunk once again. It would not be easy to look at little Laura's things on this Christmas Eve, but he had to do it. There was no other way.

Christmas morning broke clear and cold. A radiant sun shone in Yuletide fashion. The elfish beams played sweetly upon field, tree, and rooftop, turning them to a glistening gold. There sounded the cheerful melody of sleighbells, that ineffable music now lost forever.

In the early dawn, Mrs. Martin, who had slept only at brief intervals during the night, looked out of a front window in Ann's room. Scarcely could she believe her eyes. "Come, Ruth," she called to her neighbor, who was in the next room, "Please help me move Ann's cot to the window."

The child was awake and, bolstered on pillows, she soon was looking enraptured at the most beautiful snow figure she had ever seen. It was in the form of a doll: gorgeous and life-size, with the sunlight causing the cheeks to glow an enchanted red. The figure was not all of snow. Over the shoulder was the coat of a little girl, the garment blue and sparkling with brass buttons. There were tiny black boots and a little fur hat, with blond curls showing beneath the fringe. The figure, painstakingly contrived, seemed almost alive.

"There is your doll," the mother said.

"Oh, how happy I am! Ann exclaimed. "The doll is beautiful. I feel better already, mother, and I'm sure I will be well again soon." After making this prophecy, which proved to be correct, Ann said, smiling, "I've seen snowmen before, but never before have I seen a snowdoll. Did Santa Claus make it for me?"

"Yes, my darling. Yes, Santa Claus made it, but not the one you're thinking of. It was our neighbor Edward Moran. Through the storm he went all the way to Newark last night to try to find you the doll you wanted, and when he could not find it he came home, and out of the snow and memories of his broken life he made this wonderful doll for you."

"How kind and good he is, mother! It will not last as long, but I really like it better than the one I saw in the store. How it shines in the sunlight! Do you know what I think?"

"What, dear?"

"I think that Mister Moran really is Santa Claus."

Written by Freeman Harrison in *W.E.T.*, December 22, 1966



## THE DAY AND THE LETTER

(With some credit to O. Henry and W. Shakespeare. —The author.)

Strangely enough, this Christmas tale of old Livingston begins on a Thanksgiving Eve, but as it will end promptly on Christmas Day perhaps the undue spread of time may be forgiven. The occasion was a dance in Collins Hall, now no more, at Livingston Center. The night was cold — winter seemed to set in earlier around 1903 — and the coal stove in the delightful old rendezvous needed frequent attention. Everyone was there — the Granisses, Rathbuns, Collinses, Van Zees, Flynnns, and many others.

All were happy at this gala party, with one exception — Terry Graham. A young man of twenty five, he had brought to the dance Miss Mary Burr. She was an appealing, vivacious young woman with whom he had once studied under teachers Bertha Loftus and Lena Haven in the schoolhouse on Mount Pleasant Avenue. Terry and Mary — if we may refer to them with such familiarity — had been fond of one another even in those days.

Later, as an unkind fate decreed, the Burrs had moved to Scotch Plains. However, Terry, who worked as a teller in a Newark bank, managed to see the girl quite frequently. Eventually, without any formal announcement, it was taken for granted that they would marry.

It had not been difficult for Terry to escort the dark-haired Mary to Collins Hall this Thanksgiving Eve, for she happened to be visiting friends of her family in Livingston. They lived near the Center. Terry became unhappy as the two-steps, waltzes, square dances, and Virginia Reels followed one another; he felt that Mary was dancing entirely too much with Don Metcalfe. Perhaps Terry, who was not ordinarily of a jealous disposition, was the more perturbed because he did not care for the handsome Metcalfe, an older man. Reluctantly, Terry spoke to Mary about the matter.

"He asked me to dance with him," she said, "and I don't like to refuse. Anyhow, don't be silly. This is a happy party. Let us enjoy ourselves."

Terry's resentment, however, steadily continued to increase as Mary continued to dance with the gallant Metcalf. The fellow had a most irritating air of proprietorship about him as he danced with the girl in his embrace.

At last Terry did an appalling thing. He walked to the outer room, got his coat and hat, and left the hall. Let Don Metcalfe take Mary home! They seemed so fond of one another!

The next morning, the enormity of what he had done, the sheer crudity of it, flashed upon the unhappy Terry. He hurried to the Lewis home, where Mary was visiting, and asked to speak with her alone:

For the first time in his life he found the girl cool and unfriendly. Contritely he tried to explain his boorish act of the night before, and earnestly he asked for her forgiveness. It was all in vain.

"No, Terry," she said, "I cannot overlook your conduct. I hardly can believe that you could have done anything so rude and inexcusable. Everyone knew that you took me to the dance, and everyone saw you walk out. It was humiliating, and uncalled for. I am hurt and I never wish to see you again."

"No doubt," he asked, "Don Metcalfe took you home last night?"

"Why do you want to know when it was so apparent that you did not care? If you must know, Arthur Van Zee walked back with me. He is a gentleman, which is more than I can say of some other people."

Terry pleaded vigorously and long, but Mary was not impressed with his eloquence. She did, though, make a slight concession. After bidding him not to see or communicate with her, she promised that if by any chance she changed her mind she would write to him by Christmas Day. "But I am disappointed in you, and I doubt I shall ever write to you again."

Christmas, the magic and joyous day. Snow, snow, snow! It covered the Choctaw and Force Hill; it lay, glistening white, on the river meadows, and on the roofs of houses and barns. The post office in the corner store was open, and residents were coming there for their Christmas mail and a friendly chat around the red-hot pot-bellied stove. The post office and the store would close at noon.

Terry, pale and silent, stood among the happy throng. This was the last call for word from Mary, because he had not heard from her during the month of agony since Thanksgiving. The stage came in from Orange bringing the mail, and Benjamin DeCamp himself. The Christmas mail was there, and it was soon being sorted. His heart trembling, Terry waited through the long process. When it came to an end, he had received no letters.

In anguish, he made his way out of the building. On the long porch he came face to face with Edward Moran, a cynic and philosopher who could demolish an opponent with rhetoric or, on rare occasions, charm with kindness.

"Merry Christmas, Terry!" the stalwart old man said. "But why that mournful look? One would think that you had been sentenced to jail for ten years."

"For a life of unhappiness and regret," Terry said, before he realized the mystery in his words. He respected the other. Why not explain to him the cause of this un-Christmaslike demeanor? Perhaps the recital might bring some relief.

Mr. Moran smiled when Terry finished his narrative. "You have told your story to the wrong man," he said. "You will get little consolation from me, for it is my opinion that you are extremely lucky. Your conduct was correct, and if more men would follow your example, women would not be so infernally obnoxious. Men have been pampering them for centuries. They . . ."

"But you don't understand!" Terry interrupted. "I'm in love with Mary. Doesn't that make any difference?"

The follower of Voltaire and Rousseau, of Darwin and Schopenhauer, was determined. "Love — what is it?" he asked. "A figment of the moment, a mirage, a vagrant bit of chemistry. I'm amused when I hear of people falling in love."

"But they do, Mister Moran, they do! I know! I have ruined my life by an act of temper. I never want to hear of Christmas again, or of Livingston either. I'm making a start at once for Brazil — to Rio where I know some people. My plans have been made for my course in case Mary did not write. I must hurry now."

The gray-haired sage was not to be easily dismissed, for once Edward Moran had begun to talk he was loath to stop. He deluged the impatient Terry with further theories about love. He obliterated all romance as paltry nonsense. And he talked on, and on.

Across the Northfield Road from the post office, in a side yard of what had been Samo's Tavern, James Pringle — "Sunny Jim," he of the fiery red hair — was busy chopping up some logs for a crackling holiday fire on the hearth. The sound of axe meeting wood and that of the consequent splitting were almost jarring in the Yuletide calm.

Would the old Demosthenes ever cease talking? Terry wondered. Then a slightly-built man, with reddish gray hair, steel-rimmed spectacles, and a Christmas smile, unlocked the post office door, came out, and approached them.

Terry's heart jumped with joy, for the little man was John Crane, who had sorted the mail, and in his hand he had a letter.

"This is for you, Terry," he said. "The mail was heavy, and I must have dropped the letter on the floor. I saw it just now as I was leaving for home, and I noticed that you were still here." After being thanked, he went back into the post office.

While Mr. Moran turned aside at a scene so personal to another, Terry tore open the envelope, which was addressed in Mary's neat handwriting. He was thrilled with joy. Then all his fear returned as he read the words. They were:

Dear Terry,

Two notes are enclosed, in smaller envelopes. You must choose, Trusting in your honor, I ask for no witnesses at the time.

Mary

"Why the gloom?" Mr. Moran asked. "You're almost at the altar, aren't you?"

"Far from it," the downcast Terry said. "She wants me to choose from two sealed envelopes. One, I suppose, contains a 'yes', the other a 'no'."

"A modern Portia!" the other exclaimed. "Well, go on and choose, Bassanio. The cosmic effect will be negligible."

Terry chose. Delight, supreme joy, filled his heart as he scanned the words. In an instant the whole world had changed for Terry. The message read:

Dear, you have my forgiveness, and this will reach you on Christmas, the happiest day of the year. Please come to see me this afternoon.

Love, Mary

"It is evident that you have won," Mr. Moran said. "Why don't you take a look at the other note to see in what words she would have turned you down?"

Terry opened the second envelope. He was bewildered, for the moment, at what he saw. "Why," he said, "the words are identical! It is the other note all over again!"

"I have suspected that," Mr. Moran smiled. "It is a woman's touch. Mary had kept you dangling for a month, so she then gave you an extra worry at the end. No doubt she wanted to make sure that you would never walk out on her again. Well, once more, Merry Christmas, and congratulations! You can now visit Scotch Plains, instead of Rio. It's much nearer."

John Crane had departed from the post office, and James Pringle was through with his wood. All was serene at Livingston Center, which was filled with that ineffable Christmas peace which passes beyond all understanding. Occasionally only the music of sleighbells could be heard.

"Merry, Merry Christmas!" Terry said to the old man.

Written by Freeman Harrison in *W.E.T.* Dec. 24, 1968





## A CHRISTMAS SLEIGHRIDE

So glad the day. With a fleet dash of orange brightening the winter paleness, a timid sun was setting over the southern end of Mine Hill. The Christmas afternoon was nearly over, and in the Rowe home, somewhere in the vicinity of Livingston center, three generations of the family were enjoying the pleasures of the holiday. After the dinner — with turkey, cranberry sauce, mince pie, and about everything else — and the exciting distribution of gifts, there came a lessening of revelry in the long living room. There was a well-decorated tree in the living room as well, and a blazing wood fire was on the hearth. At the windows were gay, holiday wreaths.

The grandparents, John and Susan Rowe, whose home was the scene of all this happy confusion, were elderly, which is perhaps an inadequate word to describe their ages. The years, however, had left the couple spry, red-cheeked, and bright of eye.

"Why don't you tell us a story, Grandpa?" asked Ethel, one of the older grandchildren and a student in the high school. "Tell us about one of those old Christmases when the snow was up to the first floor windows, or was it the second floor? Please, Grandpa!"

The grandfather, contentedly smoking a cigar which would have done credit to General Ulysses Grant, shook his head. "I can't think of anything to tell you," he said.

"Don't coax him," his wife spoke up, smiling. "He will think of something. Just give him time."

"Well, Ethel mentioned snow," the old chap said. "That reminds me of something. I can tell you a story after all." His gray eyes were shining in the room's cheerful glow.

This was his story, a rather unhappy one for a Christmas afternoon:

Turn back to a Christmas in Livingston in 1907. There was indeed snow, after a near-blizzard two days before, and it sparkled on rooftop and open field. The cold winter air and a clear, blue sky added to the zest of the day. John Rowe, who lived in the very same house in which he did as a grandfather, was a student in the high school mingling with the Squires, Forces, Hochs, Collinses, Vogels, and others of that distant time. The school was on Mount Pleasant Avenue, and John still had his diploma to show his grandchildren, duly signed by Principal Home G. House and Board President Edward Stephens.

Now, in an age of progress, the old schoolhouse has been torn down, and in its place there is a modern structure in which automobile supplies are for sale.\* This is a respectable and necessary business, but, ah, the old faces are gone!

But this is a Christmas story, and there must not be undue regrets for a time which can never return. It was so different that no one who did not live then can comprehend it. Well, the story. It happened that John had become fond of a girl in the school. She was a charmer, with dark hair, blue eyes, pink cheeks, and a smile which drove the lad to ecstasy. She lived quite a distance from the Rowe home.

\*It was the Livingston Public Library until 1961.

After the Christmas dinner with his family, John suddenly decided to take the girl for a sleighride. Why not? There was no telephone service in the section in which he lived, so he could not communicate with her. But he felt fairly certain that he would find her at home.

In a jiffy he was dusting off the new cutter, a real "one-hoss sleigh," with its green and black colors glistening in the clear winter light. To the cutter he harnessed "Belle," a black speedster not much larger than a good-sized pony. She was John's favorite among his father's three horses. The two others were "Flora" and "Kate." There were also, of course, a warm fur robe, sleighbells, and a whip which Belle never needed.

Away westerly they went on Mount Pleasant Avenue! How joyous life is, John thought. How sweet and beautiful the snow! How sweet the music of the sleighbells! Even the sleek little horse seemed to catch the buoyant spirit of the day as she dashed up the easterly slope of Ely's Hill.

They passed the tall Ely windmill, and on the other side of the hill John suddenly saw several of his schoolmates pulling a long toboggan up the incline. Ray Winans, Fred Hauck, and Fred Meeker were among the boisterous group.

"What ho, Duke John!" called Master Winans, who in school recently had been studying *Ivanhoe*, with Miss Lena Haven as teacher. "Going to take your best girl for a Christmas sleighride?" Raymond was a vigorous youth, and his voice had plenty of volume.

John, a bit self-conscious, nodded.

As the horse had diminished its speed on the downgrade, Fred Hauck had time to shout: "You Romeo! Don't upset your Juliet in a snowbank!"

The revelers were his friends, but somehow John felt relieved when he passed them. There was no traffic circle to go around in those days, and so John drove straight through old Morehousetown. When he reached the girl's home, he drew up the glittering sleigh by the side door on the west side of the house.

How pretty she looked as she opened the door in response to his knock. Never had she smiled more sweetly. After holiday greetings he stated the reason for his visit.

"How nice!" the girl exclaimed. "Of course I'll go. Come in and wait while I get my coat."

Alas, this afternoon was destined to provide unexpected disappointments for the hapless lad. Before he had crossed the door sill, the girl's father appeared on the scene.

"This is John Rowe," she said to her parent. "He is going to take me for a ride."

"You cannot go," the father said. "You're too young to go out with young men." He was a strict Scotchman and he spoke with an air of authority. John did what he could to change the father's mind — the girl helped, too — but it was all to no avail.

In the cutter once more, John drove out of the driveway and turned easterly on the Avenue. The sleigh seemed not to glitter now, for he was dejected, completely down and out.

Suddenly he thought of his schoolmates coasting on Ely's Hill. He could not

return home that way, for he could imagine their taunts when they saw him returning alone. The sight would be entirely too amusing to his friends.

He decided to avoid the hill by going around it. Fortunately, there was no sign of the merrymakers as he turned into Beaufort Avenue, which had only lately received its fancy new name. He drove past the pleasant, comfortable homes of the Baers, Roesings, Buhlers, Hoffmans, and others. How conspicuous he felt riding all alone! What a Christmas! Never before had he been so downcast.

But an unkind fate was not through with him yet. He had been unlucky, it turned out, in choosing Beaufort Avenue as a part of his way home. The Morristown and Erie Railroad had recently been completed. It was a passenger and freight line, with a station near the point where it crossed Beaufort Avenue at grade. As he started down the slope toward the tracks, John suddenly heard a shrill blast of warning and saw a freight train approaching from the east. The great, black locomotive spouted smoke and steam.

Belle was a sensible horse but she was not used to trains. The noise and the sight of the engine were too much for her. She shied to the left, then started to run despite the driver's frantic pull on the reins. She tore into the open space in front of Mrs. Underwood's tavern, dashed out onto the street and bolted, entirely out of control, straight ahead toward the crossing and Eagle Rock Avenue. By this time the train had gone by, but Belle was now a runaway horse and she was not to be easily stopped.

At Eagle Rock Avenue she turned right. On the north side, not far from the corner, stood the home of "Bill" Beach, one of the last of that family whose members long before had occupied most of the homes in that section. On the street in front of the rambling old farmhouse the snow had drifted to an immense height, which the frightened Belle failed to avoid. The cutter was overturned and Belle came to a stop.

John, though thrown head first into the snow, was unhurt. After getting to his feet quickly, he had started to right the sleigh when he saw Mr. Beach coming from the house. John knew the oldtimer. "My horse ran away," he told him. "She was scared by a train."

"I don't blame her," said the tall native, whole side-whiskers and mustache were somewhat sparse. He patted Belle on the nose and helped John with the sleigh. "I don't like the consarned things, either," he went on. "These locomotives, spouting smoke over everything, will ruin this whole neighborhood, spoil our crops!" Then his mood changed and his eyes glistened as he said: "I think, John, that when I was your age I would have found a pretty girl to take sleighriding with me on a day like this, though it would not have been very gallant to dump her into a snowbank."

"Then I would not have come this way," John gulped. The remark left the old householder quite puzzled.

The remainder of John's homeward journey was even more joyless and depressing than the first part had been. As he turned onto Locust Avenue, a road now abandoned — old streets like old schoolhouses and old homes are swept away with the years — he glimpsed on his right the sharp end of the Riker. There was no sunlight on it now, and the hill, where dinosaurs once roamed and obligingly left their footprints for posterity, loomed dark and foreboding. He passed

the Klem farm, with its quaint barn banked with drifted snow. How dismal everything was! At length he reached the Livingston-Roseland road — Dark Lane indeed! — and he was in Kenttown, well named since in the section a family of Kents lived in every house. Before long, then, John was home.

“A Christmas story without a happy ending!” exclaimed the granddaughter, Ethel, when the grandfather finished his tale. “Poor grandpa! What a Christmas you had, with your sleigh upsetting in the snow! And that dreadful father! I bet he could have bitten an iron bar in two. No daughter would stand for such treatment now. Young women are no longer slaves.” She shot a look at her own parents, then said to her grandfather: “What about the girl? Is she still living after all these years?”

Zestfully, the old man said, “You’re looking at her. She is your grandmother. We were married a few years after the day I told you about, and so you see there was a happy ending after all.”

“Don’t blame my father too much,” said she who had been the pretty girl in the doorway that long-past Christmas afternoon. “He was a good father and was only trying to protect his daughter from what he imagined to be a young wolf, although I must say that you didn’t look much like one that day.”

Her dark hair had turned gray, but the smile of her youth remained. It shone sweetly as she winked at the children and said: “You really should not blame my father at all, for when I saw the chance, I shook my head to tell him that I did not wish to go sleighriding.”

“There,” said the grandfather, “is another story for Christmas.”

Written by Freeman Harrison in *W.E.T.* December 21, 1972



## MINE HILL REVISITED

It was not the best way in the world to celebrate Christmas Eve. It was dark and freezing that December night in 1909, and Robert DeCamp, proprietor of the transportation line between Livingston and Orange, was in serious trouble. That very year he had made a sensational innovation in the old company — his father, Benjamin DeCamp, had founded it — by adding a motor bus. A bus in 1909! Except for size, it was not too impressive, perhaps, with its open sides and crossseats, resembling the open-air trolley car of that distant period, but it was the first of all the buses on the DeCamp line. How many more have followed in the history of the ancient and honorable company which has done so much for Livingston?

\* There was nothing strange in Mr. DeCamp's history-making change, for he was an up-to-the-minute man. As instances: in a time before electric current had been brought to Livingston by the Public Service Company, his home on Livingston Avenue had been lighted, at least in part, by current from a storage battery; in his pocket he carried a metal gadget which in the twinkling of an eye would produce a first class cigarette, without filter.

The reliable old stages were still in use, but the proprietor, correctly anticipating an increased number of passengers on this merry eve, had decided to employ his bus for the occasion.

The bus had left Orange at five o'clock. Now, on the easterly slope of the First Orange Mountain, Mr. DeCamp found it necessary to ask all the male passengers to leave the bus and push. Although the motor still ran, and even with the passengers' aid, the bus barely moved. Never had the mountain road seemed so long, steep and dark.

The sources of light combined — the stars of the clear winter night, the glow of the Oranges below, the acetylene contrivance on the vehicle itself, and the widely separated bluish arc lamps, one added each year by a thrifty town government — did little to dispell the darkness, and at first the muffled figures formed one black blur. Then, as eyes became adjusted to the dark, faces could be recognized.

Sure enough, that was William Halsey applying due pressure to the bumper, and that was Walter Van Zee at his side. "I wouldn't wonder," Mr. Halsey said in his accustomed drawl, "if Robert isn't doing some proper seething within. Hades tonight, what a night for a bus!"

"Yes, no doubt he would welcome the sight of Ira King and a stage." The light-hearted Walter spoke without irritation, although there was some mumbling from others.

It was a night of surprises. Before long the patrons became aware of a stranger in their midst. An unknown on the night trip from Orange! The fellow was well dressed, if one looked closely enough to see, and probably of early middle age. Evidently he was enjoying the situation, for he was making a lark out of pushing the bus.

"This is the best exercise I've had in years," he exclaimed joyfully.

"I don't know, stranger, how you take your exercise," Bill Halsey drawled, "but I'll darn well take mine in some other form."

The unknown man went on gleefully with his work. He did, however, pause to ask one question of a young man nearby. "Is Edward Moran still around?" he asked.

"No," the other said. "He died a few years ago."

"I am sorry." The stranger spoke with evident regret.

The person of whom he had asked the question was Jonathan Force, who, not foreseeing his coming task on the First Mountain, had taken a vigorous workout in the Columbia University gymnasium early in the afternoon. He was a senior at Columbia. Why, he wondered, did this chap inquire about the old sage of North Midway?

At last the bus rounded the turn just below the crest of the mountain. Then it stood triumphantly on comparatively level ground.

"You can all ride now," a relieved Mr. DeCamp told his equally happy patrons. "Jump on, you men!"

The vehicle, now crowded, started slowly, but there was a disturbing sound coming from the motor. Then the sound became a gasp, and the bus came to an abrupt stop.

To be laggard on the road up the mountain was excusable, but to stall on the very crest seemed to be beyond endurance. Mr. DeCamp worked furiously with every means at his disposal, but not even a gurgle resulted. The embarrassed owner shrank from again asking the men to get out and push. This on Christmas Eve, of all times!

At this point there came a new and unexpected development. The unknown passenger got up from his seat, and walked to the front seat. "I think I can start this thing," he said.

This was too much for the frayed nerves of the owner, a direct man not given to nonsense. "I'll attend to this!" he said sharply. "Please take your seat."

Again he began his efforts to start the vehicle. Not a sound came from the motor, but there were some expressions of impatience from the passengers.

"Come here, whoever you are," he called to the stranger. "You said you could start this bus. Well, come on and do it."

The stranger took the driver's seat. Oddly enough, he did nothing. He just sat there, motionless. This was too much, and there came some snickers. Who did this derby-wearing show-off think he was? "At least," Bill Halsey commented, "the feller wasn't wasting any gas."

But wait, you impatient ones! Listen! All at once the engine was running smoothly! The passengers cheered and the owner took the wheel from his unidentified patron. "Thanks," Robert said simply but with warmth.

"Tom Edison incognito?" asked Walter Van Zee.

"Maybe Henry Ford," said Harry Price. "In any case, we'll all get home for supper. For me the chap is a regular Santa Claus without whiskers."

From then on all went well, as things really should on Christmas Eve. At Livingston Center, the bus drew up before the general store and post office. The mail pouch was delivered. Except for the oil street light in front of the building and the lamps within it, the Center was largely in darkness. To the regrets of those others who had ridden to this last stop, the stranger did not enter the store. He did, however, take a glance through the window in the door, as if, perhaps,

he was looking for someone or something within. Then he turned away into the darkness of the December night.

Except for one disturbing thought — maybe it was a fear — he walked with keen enjoyment westwardly on Mount Pleasant Avenue. A cold wind off the Riker swept across the frozen landscape, but it only increased the elation in his heart. There was no snow, so the Christmas of 1909 would probably not be white.

The house toward which he turned to from the street was large, and the tall French door of its white porch were lighted with candles.

“So it’s you, Frank Blake!” A buxom, pleasant-looking woman greeted him at the doorway. “I got your letter, and I have a room for you — my teachers have gone home for the holiday. How many years has it been, Frank?”

“Twenty, Mrs. Tilton.”

“Gracious, you’re a regular Rip Van Winkle! How good it is to see you! You look the same as ever, Frank.”

They were standing in the wide hallway now. “Not quite the same,” he said. “There’s some gray in my hair.”

“Nonsense,” she said. “From your looks the West has agreed with you.”

“Yes, but it’s nice to be once more in the town where I was born.”

After dinner they sat in the big comfortable chairs of the back parlor. “No doubt, you’re married,” the kindly Mrs. Tilton said, “and have five or six children by this time.”

“No, I’m not even married,” he told her. “I’ve been a fool, Mrs. Tilton. I’ve done nothing but work day and night since I graduated from the engineering school in Boston which Edward Moran advised me to attend. The old man was my guiding star, but he did not tell me to turn myself into a machine. Work, work, work. It was only last week that I decided to chuck it all for a while. It was then that I wrote you.”

“You made a wise decision,” the other said. Then she asked: “Exactly what line are you in?”

“Automobiles,” he said.

“I’ve never been in one,” she remarked happily, “but I wish you continued success in your calling. We still have our horse and buggy and are content.” She paused, then went on: “You will find the town greatly changed. Why, in this one year three new families have moved into this very section. Somehow they’re not like us oldtimers. They’re not like real folks. Sometime they may be, but they’re not yet by a long shot.”

As was natural in the circumstances, he asked many questions. There was, though, a vague embarrassment in his manner, as if he wanted to ask something and hesitated to do so, and the shrewd Mrs. Tilton made a silent guess. Years before people had said that Frank Blake and Kathy Morse were in love.

Then at length the expected query came.

“The Morses are well,” she said.

“How about Kathy?” he asked further, trying his best to avoid a quiver in his voice. “I suppose that she married years ago.”

As he awaited her words, thoughts of Kathy flooded his mind — Kathy, the chestnut-haired, friendly girl with whom he had gone to school years before.

Never had he forgotten her, despite his absorption in his career. They had bicycled together to the school at the Center. Later they had attended the high school at Orange. What a bright, companionable girl Kathy had been, how sweet her smile!

Mrs. Tilton was speaking. "No, she never has married and why I don't know, for it is said that she had plenty of suitors."

Kathy unmarried! Ah, kind spirit of Christmas! As he considered this unexpected news, he decided that he would visit the Morse home that very evening.

In 1909 there were only three or four telephones in Livingston, and they were in houses along Mount Pleasant Avenue. As the Morses did not live on that street, he could not telephone to see if the girl would be home. However, some elf of the joyous Christmas told him that she would be there.

On his way later, he had to retrace his steps to the center. In front of the Baptist Church, on its terrace above the stone wall, he saw a happy throng of children entering the building. Years before, as a young boy, he had been one in a like throng. Perhaps, he thought, despite Mrs. Tilton's worries, the town had not changed too much. He felt quite certain that the kindly John Henry Parkhurst would be in the church, as ever, to give each Sunday School pupil a box of candy and an orange.

He paused at the door of the Morse home. So many years had gone by! Had Kathy greatly changed? He knew that he had. She, too, would show the effects of all the unforgiving years. But after all, thank goodness, she would still be Kathy.

Then she stood before him and he could scarcely believe the vision he saw. Momentarily, at first glance, he thought that she had not changed at all. Then he realized that she had matured and was more beautiful than ever. There were the same happy smile, soft blue eyes, and chestnut hair. She wore a woolen suit, with a sprig of holly on it. "Kathy!" he exclaimed.

"It cannot be," she said, "but it is! Oh, Frank, this is a happy surprise."

In the living room he greeted her parents, and he felt a slight embarrassment in the fact that some of Kathy's brothers and sisters were too young to remember him. Later Frank and the woman sat alone before a blazing wood fire on the hearth. They talked in the manner of those with many shared memories.

At one point in their reminiscing, Kathy reminded him that he had been the one to break off their letter writing, which had lasted for several years.

Embarrassed, although he knew that she was bantering with him, his words came slowly. "Yes, I was probably the culprit," he said. "Forgive me if I was. I had turned myself into a dynamo, Kathy. I had become a slave to work. It was only lately that I regained my senses and decided to return to Livingston. I didn't tell you — I arrived on the bus tonight and I have a room at the Tiltons' home."

The woman laughed. "Now I know," she said, "who started the stalled bus. You are already famous, Mister Fix-it. The whole town is talking about you. Why didn't you tell somebody who you were?"

"My name would have meant nothing to them," he said. "I did recognize Bob DeCamp, but he had no time for civilities. The whole episode of the bus was amusing to me."

He told her of his work, of his bachelorhood, and of his only extended travel



experience — a trip to the Austro-Hungarian Empire to confer with a world-famous scientist.

The hearth fire grew low as they talked, Alice-like, of many things and people; of the high school and skating on Littell's pond; of their one-time school-mates, and Edward Moran. He mentioned Mrs. Tilton's worry about the growth of the town.

"Oh, the poor woman!" Kathy said, laughing. "She's the salt of the earth, but people wish she would stop fretting about newcomers. She calls them foreigners, you know."

"She did not quite get to that with me," Frank told her. "Perhaps she felt I was a foreigner myself."

"You are," Kathy said.

Once it had been habit with them to go for walks together, either along the winding dirt road that was Laurel Avenue, or to the crest of Mine Hill. Before they parted that night, they had agreed to meet early next morning — Christmas morning — and journey to the top of Mine Hill.

"People will think we're daffy," the woman said, "but what of it? Let's go early and see the sun rise."

They were there well before eight o'clock. Mine Hill is not as lofty as a peak in Darien or a pinnacle in the Rockies but, like Mercutio's wound from Tybalt's sword, it was enough. To the east, Frank and Kathy looked down into the little valley, with its scattered farmhouses and barns. The cupola of the Baptist Church was a soft white, even before the dawn. Beyond were Force Hill, with all its Forces, and the high ground toward the south. To the west were the clustered picture-book houses of Morehousetown, and in the distance were the gray, cold mountains, from which a wind was blowing.

"How beautiful it is!" Kathy cried. "Look! There's a faint patch of pink over Force Hill."

"It is turning red now," Frank said in a matter of seconds. "You could hold your breath until the sun comes up."

"Oh, there it is!" There was excitement in Kathy's voice.

It was a winter sunrise, lacking, of course, the flamboyance of one in summer, but there was luster enough to flood the little valley with dull gold light and brighten the mountain tops to the west. Under the feet of the two pilgrims to Mine Hill — if Frank and Kathy may be so termed — shone each blade of frozen grass. Here and there sparkled broken pieces of quartz from the shallow shafts abandoned years before.

Somehow this was not a time for spoken words. As if it had been ordained since the beginning of time, he took Kathy's hand. Then they faced each other on the windswept hill. The question he asked and the woman's answer brought to realization what had been in their hearts for more than twenty years. So capricious are our lives. Kathy had promised to marry him — glorious words for this Christmas dawn.

Far below them, across Hillside Avenue, they saw the first person they were to see as an engaged couple. It was the good farmer Henry Beck, pail in hand, on his way to give his chickens their holiday breakfasts. "Merry Christmas!" Frank and the woman shouted to him, and in the quiet of the morning the words

reached him. He looked about, puzzled, then saw them and returned the greeting. The picture of humble country life which he presented did nothing to lessen the ecstasy of the couple above.

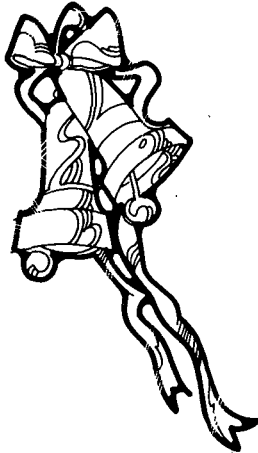
"You mentioned last night," Kathy said, "that you enjoyed the adventure with the bus. I did not quite understand that. How was it fun?"

With his jolly nature, Frank had a touch of diffidence about him. He hesitated, for the answer to the question might sound boastful. Then he thought of some of the remarks about the bus he had heard the previous evening.

"There I was, Kathy, helping to push the bus up the mountain," he said, "and in a way it was my bus, for I had designed it for my company. The whole thing was a lark to me."

The sun, heralding Christmas joy and peace, seemed at least a foot higher than Force Hill. Somewhere in the distance a church bell was ringing.

Written by Freeman Harrison in *W.E.T.*, December 24, 1969



## BE THOSE REMEMBRANCES ADMITTED

Around 1957, William K. Page, Jr., painstakingly made a list of Livingston's earlier homes. It would be much shorter now, for one by one the old homes disappear. Due to location or disrepair, some retain little of their former charm, but each loss takes something from our sense of history and stability. Fortunately many remain, some so ancient that the eyes of Washington's soldiers may have rested on them. There is the splendid Force Home, purchased — and possibly saved — by a thoughtful town government. A scant few of the landmarks are owned and occupied by descendants of the original owners, bearing the same family name.

But enough of this. Our purpose is to tell a Christmas story about Clara Abbot, who was one of those people who cherish old homes. In her case there was one in particular — the home of her youth. She had been a girl here a terribly long while ago, and she had known the Squiers, Dickinsons, and other families of the section. She remembered the churches, schools, and stores of an earlier time.

She was old now, this small, gray-haired widow, who had moved from Livingston years ago, but neither time nor distance had dimmed her affection for the town of her youth or the Colonial farmhouse in which she was born. Before her marriage she had been a Parker, and five generations of the family had owned and occupied the place until at last it was sold. Generally known as "Aunt Clara," she had pink cheeks and a cheery smile, despite the drawbacks of advanced age.

For years Aunt Clara had kept in touch with the Blaines, who lived in West Livingston. She had visited them and was a favorite with the family. The Blaines of her generation were no more, but John Blaine and his wife, Emily, had the same affection for her as the Blaines of an earlier time had.

One morning not long before Christmas, Edith Blaine, a blond, unaffected daughter of the household — she attended the High School with her brother, Bill — brought in a letter from the mailbox. It was for her mother.

"This is good news," Mrs. Blaine said as she read the letter. "Who do you think is coming for Christmas?"

"Santa Claus," answered the red-cheeked, rather chubby Bill, the other child of the Blaines. He was a year or so younger than his sister.

"Aunt Clara is coming three days before Christmas," the mother said. "I'm so glad. She has not been here for five years. She writes that for one thing she is anxious to see her old home again. She is as sentimental as ever. Bless her heart, of course we will take her to see her old home again. How the sight of it will please her!"

Edith's face turned white. "Oh, mother, haven't you heard?" she asked. "The old Parker house was torn down last week."

"Torn down!" Emily Blaine exclaimed. "No, I had not heard. This is awful. Aunt Clara will insist on going to the place and we cannot take her. We'll have to find excuses, for the sight of it would break her heart. Oh, why do we cry for Colonial architecture and tear down the real Colonials day by day? I hate to say so,

but it's too bad she is coming here after all. The poor old thing! The poor old thing!"

"Cheer up, mother," Edith said. "It's Christmas time. Perhaps somehow we will find a way to keep Aunt Clara from the place."

Friday morning, John Blaine and his wife stood on a crowded platform in the Newark station as the long, red train from the West hurtled in and ground to a stop. Then they saw Aunt Clara being helped from the train by a white-coated porter. She looked much older than when they last saw her, despite her happy smile as she caught sight of them.

The next day was spent largely on talk — there was so much about which to reminisce. In the afternoon the elder Blaines took Aunt Clara for an auto ride, in which John Blaine, the driver, was careful to avoid the section of town in which the Parker house had stood. The old lady's happiness, her joy in being back once more, only added to the agony of her hosts. They knew that her mind was on her old home and that she was longing to see it.

Sunday was a dread repetition. It was after dinner that Aunt Clara brought up the subject of her former home.

"All of you are very kind to me, Emily," she said. "I enjoyed the trip about town yesterday, but you didn't take me to the place I wish to see most of all — my old home. You no doubt forgot. Would it be possible for you to take me there?"

"I will be eighty four in April," Aunt Clara said, "and so I doubt I will ever come East again. Even this time I had plenty of trouble with my daughters, who said that I was too old for such a trip. If they hadn't talked about it so much, perhaps I would not have come this time. Of course, Emily, they were right, but I'm so glad I am here."

"And we're glad too," Emily said. "You were my mother's girlhood friend, and we all love you as she did."

As she spoke, she glanced at the weather report in the paper. There would be snow for Christmas, it said. If only there would be enough of it, Emily thought, their poignant problem might be solved. Aunt Clara was leaving for home Tuesday morning. Still, however, for the first time in her life, Emily Blaine looked forward to Christmas with dread in her heart.

It was a white Christmas, as the experts had predicted. Very large snowflakes were falling straight to the ground with no wind to deflect them. To Emily Blaine's dismay, this held no promise of a heavy fall.

Sometime after breakfast, Edith, standing by the Christmas tree which she and Bill had decorated, startled her parents. "Bill and I have arranged to take you for a ride," she said to Aunt Clara. "We'll leave as soon as you're ready."

"How can you do that?" her mother asked. "You know that we do not like to drive the car in the snow."

Edith smiled, the spirit of Christmas in her bright blue eyes. "We don't need the car. A little while ago I phoned our neighbor, Art Snyder, and he agreed to lend us his horse and sleigh. Bill and I will take Aunt Clara for a Christmas morning sleighride — there's room for three in the cutter if we squeeze in. Come, put on your warmest clothes," she added, to the pleased visitor.

In the red-painted cutter, Aunt Clara and the Blaine children sped over the

growing layer of snow. The sorrel horse, driven by Bill, danced along, as if to the music of sleighbells.

"Good for you, Bill," Aunt Clara cried joyfully. "You know the right turns." She was inordinately happy, the light of anticipation shining in her eyes. This was what she wanted, and what she had journeyed two thousand miles to see.

When they reached the Parker farm, Bill reined in the sorrel but did not turn into the driveway.

"Look Aunt Clara, look!" Edith cried.

Aunt Clara looked. "Oh, how beautiful it is!" she exclaimed.

There, through the mantle of gently falling snow — mystic, ineffably lovely — she saw the home of her childhood. There was the old porch where the hammock had hung; the steps which her nimble feet had descended on the mornings when she left for school; the steps she had descended, strewn with rice and confetti, on her wedding day. There were many other reminders.

"You have made me so happy!" she said. "You have given me the best Christmas of my life."

"I don't think we can go in," Edith said casually. "Everything seems closed up. The people must be away for Christmas."

"No, I would not try to go in," Aunt Clara said. "Just to see the house has been enough. Oh, I'm so happy!"

Back in the Blaine home, Edith talked with her mother. They were in the secrecy of a bedroom.

"Before you left you told me briefly of what you had done," Emily was saying, "but I don't quite understand yet."

"Well," the daughter said, "the more I heard Aunt Clara talking about her old home, the sorrier I felt for her. I did not believe that we could keep her from the place. It was plain, of course, that her sight had become poor, and all at once a thought came to me. Why not take a cue from Hollywood and provide some scenery for her? Bill and I got in touch with our art teacher, who luckily had not gone away for the holidays, and he entered into the thing like a schoolboy himself. Everyone in the class helped, and, working at the school, we painted a likeness of the house front. It was all on canvas by late yesterday afternoon. Then we took it to the site and nailed it to supports. No doubt the snow helped our plan, but I'm sure that the picture itself would have been enough."

Emily Blaine beamed with delight. "Go call the others, Edith," she said. "The turkey's done. It's time for our Christmas dinner."

Written by Freeman Harrison in *W.E.T.* for Dec. 21, 1967





## SOME THINGS DON'T CHANGE

As the sleek yellow bus sped across the Hackensack Meadows, it seemed to Thomas Lambert that there were strange elements in the way he was returning to Livingston, the town of his birth. The sentimental man dreamed of a horse-drawn vehicle — one of Benjamin DeCamp's stages — rather than a bus, which would arrive from Orange, not New York City. Perhaps at this time of the year one would travel in a covered sleigh, with straw on the floor to keep warm the feet of the passengers. One thing, however, brought the old days back to him — he had noticed the name DeCamp on the side of the bus.

It was late in the afternoon of the day before Christmas, and early darkness, aided by drizzle, already had fallen. Only a few hours ago, an indefinable urge had come over him. Twenty miles to the west of New York City, behind the New Jersey hills, was the town of his birth. He fancied — it was nonsense, of course — that a voice had called him to visit the place on this Christmas Eve. Now, after an early dinner in a restaurant near Broadway, he was on his way. He had heard that his old home, one of the oldest in the section, still stood. His stay would be brief, maybe not more than an hour.

The traveler, who was visiting New York City only by chance — his home was in the Far West, where he had grown wealthy at mining — was not in the best holiday mood. He had been glad to leave, even for a while, the blatant, overcrowded city. Despite the lavish seasonal displays, he had found little there to arouse in him the joyous Christmas spirit he had once known. He doubted the sincerity behind the lights and tinsel of street and store. He looked for something more, and he could not find it. People smiled with evident holiday cheer, and passengers on the bus held packages festively adorned with red ribbons, but somehow he could not help but feel the difference from the Christmas spirit of an earlier time. Everything had changed — even the people.

As the powerful bus tore through the darkness, which was frequently relieved by blasts of light from diners or service stations, he thought of those Christmas Eves long ago when his father would play Santa Claus. Early in the evening his father would put on the beard and other accessories at his nearby store and, with a bundle of gifts and a strap of sleighbells, appear at the front door of the home. His coming would be heralded by loud rapping, hearty shouts, and the ringing of sleighbells, this last perhaps the sweetest of all music. Tommy would rush to the door and open it. There stood Santa, rotund and jolly, exuding the very essence of Christmas. Almost filling the doorway, he would push into the room.

"Have you been a good boy, Tommy?" he would ask in a deep, bass voice.

"Oh, yes, Santa Claus," the excited boy would reply. "That is, I think so."

After some joyful minutes, during which he presented the lad with many gifts, Santa would depart, presumably for other homes in the little country community. More than seventy years had gone by since those ecstatic scenes, and yet Mr. Lambert remembered them as if they were yesterday. How happy he had been!

The bus swerved as it made a left turn, and someone mentioned the Garden

State Parkway. Then came well lighted suburban towns and, farther on, the mountains. Then Livingston Center. Nearby was the home of his youth.

The night was not to be without unexpected incidents. As Mr. Lambert was getting off the bus, his foot slipped on the wet step and he fell to the ground. Quickly the driver reached his side, as did a passenger from the bus and a man who had been standing on the curb. Carefully they helped him to his feet. Their aid, however, had not been needed, for Mr. Lambert was unhurt. His heavy overcoat had softened the impact of the fall. The three men, assured that he had suffered no injuries, gave him their Christmas greetings, which he returned.

The bus had gone, and he stood in a town of strangers. Before him stood the Baptist Church on its little knoll. The white building was brightly lighted, and sounding from it was the sweet music of Christmas carols. This was the church of his youth, with the exterior of the building practically unchanged after all the years. Thank Heaven for that, he said. Recollections flooded his mind. In this house of worship he had gone to Sunday school with Arthur Van Zee, Jonathan Force, Halsey Teed, and others. Mrs. Benjamin DeCamp was their teacher. In the parlor of the parsonage next door — it, too, looked quite unchanged — he had taken piano lessons from Mrs. William H. Gardner, wife of the pastor.

Diagonally across the intersection he saw the flat roofed building which had once been the general store and the post office. The sight of all the old structures was reassuring, and pleasing to him. It was so difficult to find anything unchanged.

Aided by a traffic light — a strange incongruity — he crossed North Livingston Avenue, once Dark Lane, and found change, for there progress had laid a heavy hand on what had been the town's baseball field in the golden nineties. He stood before a long line of stores in back of a triangular park provided by the local Lion's Club. Here was a Chamber of Commerce Christmas tree, prettily lighted. All this was good to see, but he thought of the old baseball field, with an apple orchard to the east. What memories of the games during the long, pleasant summers he had. He recalled the ninth inning of one memorable contest in which, with two out, the bases loaded, and the visiting team one run behind, a visitor — a veritable "Casey" — had hit a screaming fly ball to center field. "Catch it, Frank!" came frantic cries. "Frank" was Frank Hoffman, and he caught the ball. Another victory for the Livingston team, managed by Gene Van Zee. (Center field was in the vicinity of where Silverman's front counter is today.)

Mr. Lambert saw the hundreds of cars and thought wistfully of the horse and buggy or farm wagon of a quieter age. The drizzle had increased, with the holiday lighting causing a weird, almost unnatural, aura throughout the entire section.

He crossed to the southeast corner, and soon he was standing on the sidewalk in front of the home of his childhood days. How the years fell away as he gazed fondly upon the Colonial building, which was painted white as it used to be. There was the wide porch and the door at which his father, in the guise of Santa Claus, had appeared on many a Christmas Eve. There was the doorknob his parent had touched on those occasions. A tinge of sadness came to him as he thought of the past, and of his old home, now occupied by strangers. Then the feeling



passed, for who can be unhappy on Christmas Eve? There was one thing that seemed curious to him — except for a large wreath over the door, there was no holiday decoration.

He considered calling briefly on the people in the house. He decided not to do so, however, for it was mealtime, and, besides, the people, whoever they were, would not understand. This was not an age of sentiment. Probably the real reason for his not entering the house was that he did not have the heart to do so. He thought of the families he had known in the immediate vicinity of the old house — the Cranes, Teeds, Van Zees, DeCamps, Flynns, Vogels, Bohnenburgers, Cowans, Roesings, and others — but he felt certain that few, if any, were still here in this Year of Grace.

His doubts about the present-day Christmas spirit persisted, try as he would to dispel them. He had been helped kindly when he fell at the bus stop, but that had been a mere coincidence. He saw the holiday lighting and thought of the solitary candle in a window of the past. He thought of the homemade door wreath, usually of cedar from nearby woods. There was more surface celebration now, but how deep had been the Christmas spirit in earlier times!

The traffic had died down and the pensive man took a long look toward the knoll to the east — Sugar Hill before the grade had been lowered — up which he had trudged on his way to school. Who now, he wondered, had ever heard of Sugar Hill, and did the old schoolhouse, with all the fond recollections attached to it, still stand? And where were the boys and girls?

His watch told him that the magic time had come, that hour at which his father, a hearty old Santa, had made his Christmas Eve call. Mr. Lambert stood quietly, lost in thought. It seemed like a dream that he was before his old home. And at such a time.

Minutes later he started to turn away, because his bus for the return trip would soon arrive. So wrapped in thought had he been that he had failed to hear footsteps to his rear. Then he was seized from behind, and a strong arm was thrown around him. More than one person was there, he sensed. The thought flashed through his mind that it was strange to leave the turbulent city, only to be assaulted in the town of his birth.

Mr. Lambert, however, was to suffer no evil on this night before Christmas. Instead he was facing three young girls who surrounded him. They were smiling, indifferent to the drizzle, and full of youthful zest.

"Would you like to help save an old home?" one of the girls asked him. She looked to be under fifteen, and she wore a red cloth coat with a matching hat. The coat had a fur collar. "Mister Boyd, the owner, cannot pay the interest on his mortgage — he is old and can no longer work — and if he loses the house it will be torn down. We are getting contributions for him, but what we have collected is not enough. Will you help, sir? It would make a wonderful Christmas gift for Mister Boyd and his wife. They are full of sadness and we want to aid them. Besides, we don't want the old house to be torn down."

Momentarily the visitor was stunned by what he heard. Then inexpressible happiness surged through him. Now he knew! The show of kindness at the bus stop had been a symbol, not a coincidence. How wrong he had been in his thoughts! At last he knew that amid all the stresses of the present time, the spirit

of Christmas still remained — timeless and secure. Beneath the surface, human nature had not changed. Goodness and love still lived in people's hearts.

"Where is the house you are speaking of?" he asked.

"It's the one you've been looking at," the red-coated girl replied. "People call it the Old Lambert Home. It must be true, because my grandfather says that a Lambert family lived there when he was a little boy."

"Let us all go into the house," the old man said, when he could find words in his overwhelming joy. "I think we can make sure that the Boyds have a merry Christmas."

To the west, on its little knoll, the church continued to shine brightly, while the carols told the old story of good will toward all mankind.

Written by Freeman Harrison in *W.E.T.* December 23, 1971.



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P.M.G. Deane, Editor.







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