


DECEMBER, 1991
WINTER ISSUE

INSIDE
VALUABLE
COUPONS



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HOMETOWN SHOPPER™

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ABOUT 100 YEARS AGO

Ad reprinted from the Matawan Journal




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- Fancy Towel Racks..... .08
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- I have another tub of good Dairy Butter, per lb..... .15
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HOMETOWN
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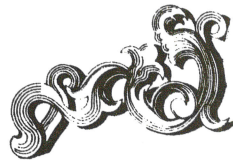
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Member of the
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Member of the
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Chamber of Commerce



**MATAWAN MEMORIES
OF CHRISTMAS LONG AGO**



CARTAN'S DEPARTMENT STORE: CHRISTMAS WONDERLAND

by Genevieve Donnell

Many years ago in Matawan, Christmas was a very special time of the year and the streets were busy with people walking back and forth, horses and sleighs slipping through the snow, bells jangling and smiles everywhere.

Preparations for the holiday season didn't begin in the early fall—no ads in the papers reminding us that Christmas was only three months away. The first of December we began planning, writing our letters to Santa, and dropping hints as to what we hoped to receive. Unlike the shops of today, toys, special sweets, and fruits and gifts were not everyday merchandise. Only at the holiday season were the stores stocked with Christmas items.

Cartan's Department Store, in the building where Andy cuts short and long hair, was a real oldtime general store. Here one could purchase groceries, kerosene oil for the lamps, notions, dress materials, boots and shoes, and clothing. A roof over the windows and entry extended over the sidewalk to the curb and protected customers from both rain and sun.

No self-service here. Pleasant clerks waited on the customers, carefully weighing out the sugar, flour and butter. The coffee beans were ground in a large hand-turned grinder, which always fascinated us and oh! the aroma of freshly ground coffee.

At Christmas time, this shop became a wonderland. All the ordinary everyday articles were put under the counters and the Christmas merchandise was brought out. Each window was redecorated, always a live Christmas tree, gay with strings of popcorn and cranberries and glittering tinsel.

We waited impatiently until the window decorations were completed. Then we knew we could wander down the aisles and see the wonderful new array of toys. Hands behind our backs, because we were forewarned about touching anything, we slowly walked back and forth, mentally choosing the toys we would write to Santa about or diplomatically tell our parents about.

Sometimes the clerk would wind up a mechanical monkey or train and we would watch it spin up and down the floor. Once in awhile, we could carefully hold a doll or woolly animal. We looked forward all year to this moment and it was worth waiting for. I can still remember the thrill and the enjoyment of walking through that holiday wonderland.

Today the shops are so full of toys all year that Christmas doesn't bring the same expectant feeling it did for us. True, the modern inventions, electric trains, moon rockets, robots and all the up-to-date games and toys are marvelous, educational and appropriate in this fast moving, technological age. But I wonder if they bring as much joy to the little child as the clown that pops out of a box or a furry monkey that dances when he is wound up.

The simple Christmas we knew was so different. The scent of the real pine tree with the gold star shining in the early morning light as we crept down the stairs into the cold parlor to see what Santa had left. This is a feeling that can't be compared with any excitement of today. A doll, perhaps a book or two, one toy and a stocking filled with nuts, one orange or apple, and some hard candies.

I recall one Christmas when money was so scarce we couldn't afford a tree. My grandfather plowed through the snow to the woods near Ravine Drive, cut down a cedar tree, and dragged it home through the snow. I'll never forget how happy I was when he returned, his beard and black cape coat covered with glittering snowflakes and a lovely little cedar tree over his shoulder.

Life was not easy in those days, but we didn't complain about the lack of toys, clothes and sweets, because we know no other way of life. When Christmas came and we received even the simplest gifts we were happy.

The simple greeting "Merry Christmas" had real meaning then. So I say to all, "A real old-fashioned Merry Christmas."

Published December 19, 1973

The above column appeared in the **BAYSHORE INDEPENDENT** on December 19, 1973, written by Genevieve DONNELL, born and raised in Matawan, as were here parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents before her. She served on many town committees and was a charter member of the Matawan Historical Society. Ms. Donnell was the owner of a lovely gift shop, located on Main Street, named **The Friendly Shop**. Genevieve wrote weekly columns for the **Bayshore Independent** reminiscing about her childhood. After her death, these columns were put together in a charming publication which may be borrowed from the **Matawan-Aberdeen Public Library**.

MATAWAN MEMORIES

Word Pictures

By Genevieve Donnell

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