

Letters to Santa Claus gave glimpse of 1895 Christmas

"My Dear Santa Claus: I wrote you a letter yesterday and gave it to papa to mail and don't you know he lost it, and when he told me about it I cried and papa said to write again so this is what I want." Iris Woodward, *The Courier*, Dec. 24, 1895.

A glimpse of Christmas past can be found on the front page of the *Bloomington Courier* for Dec. 24, 1895. The newspaper had provided the opportunity for children of Monroe County to tell Santa Claus what they wanted for Christmas.

Some of the little writers were very ambitious. Fred Campbell wasn't bashful about asking for an air rifle and five cents worth of ammunition, hunting glasses, a pair of skates (No. 10), rubber snake and a silver watch with a chain ("not as big as a man's, about as large as a lady's watch").

Willie Adams had a lot of presents on his mind, too. He suggested



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

a gun, ship, rocking chair, drum, steam engine and a pair of skates (No. 8 1/2). As an after-thought, lest he sound greedy, he said, he added, "I hope you will call at my house and leave me some of those things."

It should be noted at this point that the children had an ulterior motive for writing the letters. The *Courier* had apparently offered some kind of prize for the best one.

It is not surprising then, that some of the little notes were not entirely artless. Take, for example, the one from Cecil Mitchell. "I have

always sent my letters through the chimney to you, but this year we were told to mail our letters in care of the *World*, "one of our good daily papers." (The *Courier* and the *World* belonged to the same publishers.)

One little girl, who lived in the country, was concerned about Santa's travel arrangements in the event of a non-white Christmas, Eloise Harris wrote, "I live in the country. . . The roads are awful muddy. I am afraid your little reindeers Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comets, Cupid, Donder and Blitzen could not get here unless there was snow."

Another child had a very practical approach when it came to a friend of his. Stanley Smith asked for a horn, bicycle and a drum, and added, "There is another little boy in my class, Jimmie Wright, I want

you to bring him the same things you bring me. He is a funny boy and I like him. If you have not got enough for he and I both, please give him part and me part."

Perhaps the most unusual letter was written at the jail. Lena Raley, who asked for a gold ring with a moon stone and a mackintosh cloak, had some very special delivery instructions for Santa. "I live at the jail (not because I am a bad girl for I think I am a very good girl). Now be sure and not go down the back chimney for alas, Santa, you would get into a place you might not easily get out of, the jail. Come down the front chimney on the south side and on the second story you will find my room. Don't stop at the third story for that is Charlie's room and I am sure he would not want a girls's mackintosh."

Many of the children asked for

nuts, fruit and candy. One exception was Pansy Johnson, who said she lived at a restaurant. She wanted a cook stove, doll and "whatever else you can spare" and added, "Don't bring me any candy for we have plenty of that all the time."

Some of the children thought of others less fortunate. Mabel Gilmore wrote that she had been trying hard to be a good girl and advised wistfully, "Santa, there are so many poor children you had better visit first, because they do not have a nice Christmas. You have always been very good to me for bringing me so many nice presents. But I would like for you to bring me a nice doll with white curly hair. So waiting to hear from you soon, I am your little friend."

Next week: Letter to Santa from "Old Tramp"