

# First professor at IU took note of Christmas

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found in the rural areas. The birds were considered a nuisance at crop-planting time, and the children in farm families were obliged to shoo them out of the newly planted fields, lest they eat up all of the corn.

**CANNING WAS** a later innovation, and during the harvest season Hoosier housewives dried apple and pumpkin slices that were cooked for holiday meals. Wild honey was more common than sugar, which was considered a luxury.

Difficult as it may be to imagine today, there was no pre-holiday round of Christmas shopping as we know it. Manufactured goods from the East — brought down the Ohio River by flatboat or overland by wagon — were scarce and expensive. Christmas gifts of the 1820s were mostly handmade and required a lot of ingenuity on the part of frontier families.

Toys for the children were corn husk dolls and wooden sleds, tops and whistles. Balls were made by wrapping a round stone with yarn and covering it with a piece of animal hide.

Homemade clothes were common presents. The frontier housewife who received a paper of straight pins for sewing considered herself very fortunate indeed. Since money was scarce, the pins were usually obtained by trading farm produce or services.

**ALSO LUCKY** were the little Hoosiers that received shoes for Christmas. A Washington Township settler wrote that in his childhood, he and his friends went barefoot six months out of the year.

The influx of settlers into the county brought with them the demand for more manufactured goods from the East. As goods and money became more plentiful, the custom of handmade Christmas presents waned. Christmas trees, rarely seen in a settler's cabin, became more popular. But the ritual of a trip to the county to cut the family tree continued for many years.