

# Celebrating Christmas in 1875 took endurance

On Dec. 31, 1875, a young man from Tirzah community in York County wrote a letter to the Yorkville Enquirer about spending Christmas holidays in Fort Mill. We don't know his identity since, in the custom of the time, he did not give his name, only signing the letter "G."

"G" spent the morning in Rock Hill and crossed the Catawba at Moore's ferry in the afternoon. He changed his clothes at his friend's home in Fort Mill and attended a masquerade dance in the evening.

"The hall was beautifully decorated with evergreens and winter flowers, entwined over and around the walls, interspersed with appropriate mottoes, all brilliantly lighted up by an elegant chandelier suspended from the

ceiling."

"G" didn't have a partner but enjoyed watching the dance until late in the evening. The next morning he was awakened by fireworks, a Christmas tradition in this area.

The day was dark and gloomy with rain threatening, but that did not stop a large number of people from congregating on Fort Mill's Main Street. One of the fireworks set shingles on fire, which brought out Fort Mill's Hook and Ladder Company. They quickly put out the fire.

Christmas, which fell on a Saturday, remained festive until late afternoon when a "street fracas" occurred. The fellow who started the fight ran away. A few minutes later there was another fight. "G" didn't seem to be aware of the cause of the fighting, but street fights were not unusual in those times. The police generally ignored the fights as long as only fists were used.

The next day, "G" and much of the town went to hear the Rev. J. B. Mack conduct services at Unity Presbyterian Church.

On Monday, "G" attended a dinner at the Masonic Lodge that was followed by the installation of officers. As soon as the ceremonies were over, the witnesses, but not the new officers, went off to play baseball. "G" reported that it was an "exciting game of this manly sport."

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That evening the masquerade dance, costumes and all, was repeated, and "G" thought it was as lively as the earlier dance. The next morning "G" set off for home, but there was so much mud and slush he stopped at the home of another friend and spent the night there.

The following day he set out again for Tirzah. Somewhere along the way he stopped at a farmhouse where he knew the family. They invited him to join them in a Christmas dinner. He accepted and spent the night with the family.

The next day, after a full week of celebrating, "G" returned to Tirzah "feeling considerably improved in mind and body by what we had seen and enjoyed."

A different sort of Christmas was celebrated in the mill village of York Cotton Mills in 1899. The mill closed at noon Saturday and the workers gathered for a distribution of turkeys. The 570 workers in the mill came from 92 families.

Each family was given a large, fat bird. There was an empty area in the mill that was awaiting the shipment of machinery. The cleared area was fixed up as a dance hall. The company hired a band and served refreshments. The workers danced the quadrille, Virginia Reel and cotillion until a late hour.

Workers at Yorkville's Sutro Mill, a smaller mill than the York Cotton Mill, also received a turkey - one for each of the 35 families. Each family also received a liberal supply of fruits, nuts and candy from the mill owner, T. B. McClain. Sutro workers also had a dance.

In later years, costumed Santa Clauses distributed Christmas stockings with toys, candy and nuts to the children in the mill villages. Many of the mills put up huge Christmas trees, decorated them and made the trees the center of partying that became the envy of townspeople who didn't work in the cotton mills.

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