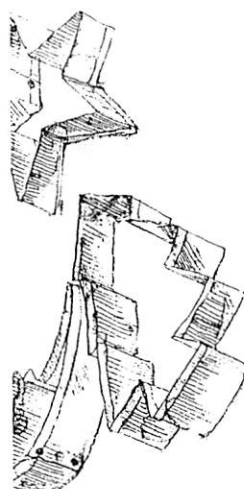




Christmas at the dorm

Dec. 15 1991

■ Winthrop girls shared lively holidays on campus.



Nowadays Winthrop College students enjoy at least two weeks of Christmas holidays. This was not always the case.

When Winthrop moved from Columbia to Rock Hill in 1895, the usual week at Christmas was reduced to only one day — Christmas Day. The students had examinations lasting nearly to supper-time on Christmas Eve. The only students allowed to go home were those who had a death in the family. This was the rule until 1907, when the state legislature determined that all state college students must have at least 10 days holiday.



Nearby history

LOUISE PETTUS

The girls understood when they came that Winthrop stood for no luxury and no display of wealth. That was why they wore uniforms. But the usual cheerfulness at being "kept in prison" was difficult to maintain when the girls thought of their families at home decorating a tree, baking goodies and sharing secrets about the presents they prepared to go under the tree.

The college may have kept the girls in Rock Hill, but there were plenty of Christmas preparations on campus. The dorms and the Main Building parlors had their Christmas trees set up for the girls to decorate. The dining hall's overhead steam pipes wore garlands of greenery. Christmas carols were sung in chapel all week.

Trains stopped on back campus to unload the packages arriving daily from the students' families. One graduate later recalled: "The joy of Christmas Eve was the boxes from home. Big boxes, little boxes — some pathetically small pasteboard affairs from homes where Christmas must have been very bare. Boxes piled high on the hall table and the long piazza. Hampers of fruit for some, and for a few fortunate ones crates of oranges."

Others remembered that some girls received whole roast turkeys, dressing and all. Students lugged whole, cooked country hams up the stairs along with cotton bags of mama's home-cooked biscuits, pounds of butter and loaves of "yeast bread."

Heavy wooden crates arrived filled with jars — all, or almost all, miraculously unbroken. At least one girl on the hall would have a hammer to pry the boards off. Anything that could be pickled would show up. Besides gherkins, the students delighted in pickled peaches, watermelon rind pickles, pickled eggs and even pickled pig's feet.

The cakes — coconut layer, chocolate, fruit, pound — competed with pecan pies, fruit tarts and homemade candies. Tea cookies and molasses cookies were plentiful. One way to handle the abundance of food was to combine with friends and use a couple of flat-topped hall trunks covered with a sheet as a table.

On Christmas Eve the students dressed for a "german." This was a dance sponsored by the "boys" of the German Club who wore tuxedo style jackets and ties along with their long, navy blue serge skirts. Their friends wore their prettiest party dresses and dancing slippers.

The recital hall was decorated and there was always someone to play the piano. The girls filled their dance cards, danced the "rag tunes" and drank punch until midnight. That was two hours later than the usual "lights out."

At the crack of dawn, a hundred or more carolers came through the halls to wake the sleeping students. There was no Santa Claus, but there was a lot of exchanging of small gifts — ribbons, toilet water, "powder rags," sachets, and garters (with a little slit in which the girl could hide her trunk key).

Chapel, more caroling, a Christmas banquet and lots of visiting capped the day. An exhausted campus went to bed by 10 p.m. Classes began at 8 the next morning — after compulsory breakfast.

□□□

Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop College. Her column appears Sundays.