

# Times of Halcott



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## The Woolly Bear's New Coat

One cold morning in early November, picking my way, preoccupied, along a path of battened-down grass through a meadow where patches of squash-colored greens and yellows showed through the snow, my step just nearly missed squooshing a woolly worm.

"Excuse me, Woolly Worm!" I said.

"No harm, indeed," said he. "But I must say, I prefer 'Woolly Bear.'" And who would question him? Except perhaps fellow proud and miraculous ground-level and underground creatures like himself.

And also myself, who had a need to know more. I reached down, gently plucked him up, and bore him aloft upon my palm, in order to speak to him face to face. He jerked into a furry curl, a special talent of his, but I peered through the fur of his forehead, seeking the deep inky glint of his eyes. "Have courage, Mr. Bear," I beseeched. "Tell me, what lies ahead?"

Oh, November. After a beautiful but severely droughty summer and a stunning, prismatic fall, snow came early to Halcott, a quick and thick storm that took many of us by surprise, no matter how many times we'd had to see it coming, just days before

Thanksgiving.

And so, for all beasts, winter begins; and so, as always, we look, we yearn for clues to whether will come next: an easy winter or a hard one, a snow lover's dream or a winter of discontent.

As we batten and brace for winter in the mountains—and in the farmlands in the valleys of New York below, and in the sweeping lowlands still lower than those, in cities, in all the constructed world of humans—where some are bracing for hurricanes instead—we can't help hoping for clues that will help us prepare.

And so, we naturally turn to nature for news of winter. Some animals and plants—perhaps all life in some sense, and even the very winds of change—seem to have keen instincts for what is coming in terms of air and water, heat and freezing, fight and flight. There is surely indelible information in careful observation of our natural surroundings, just as our ancestors found, as instinct points to truth.

While the two most popular traditions of winter prediction may be studying the black-and-brown banded coats of woolly bears (brown supposedly equals mild phases and

black amounts to cold and ice) and counting the foggy days in August (each one forecasts a chill white snowy day later, the saying goes), many others are woven into our collective almanac, including:

\* If animals seem to have grown an unusually thick coat of fur (or fat) as winter approaches, expect it to be colder than normal.

\* If birds and squirrels seem especially urgent in gathering nuts and seeds, it may mean a big winter is on the way.

\* Trees will supposedly produce both a greater quantity of pine cones—and larger specimens than usual—before a severe winter (to ensure that some seeds will make it through the squirrel and bird feeding frenzy).

\* Thicker acorn shells may mean an extra-cold winter. (Have you cracked a tough nut lately? There may be wisdom within.)

\* The same wisdom that says thick acorn shells can predict a severe winter applies to corn husks and onion skins, too.

\* If you see bees nesting higher up in trees, anticipate cold knees.

\* If geese and other species of migrating birds are still hanging out in late November, they may not be in a big hurry to leave, because they know the winter weather won't be severe.

\* If you and your house are tuned into the mouse and you start hearing activity in your walls earlier than normal, winter may come earlier than you expect, too.

\* The brighter the fall foliage, the colder and snowier the winter ahead, the saying goes.

And so it all goes, an infinitude of things to look for while guessing about the signs of the times. Further folk wisdom says a harsh winter ahead may be signaled by: persimmon seeds with a shovel-shaped heart; woodpeckers sharing a tree; the early arrival of the snowy owl; the early migration of the

monarch butterfly; thick hair on the nape of cows' necks; raccoons with thick tails and bright bands; early arrival of crickets on the hearth; spiders spinning larger-than-usual webs and entering the house in great numbers; pigs gathering sticks; insects marching in a line rather than meandering; mole holes deeper than 2 1/2 feet; frequent halos or rings around the Sun or the Moon.

With my ticklish hand and gaze joined with the woolly bear's, I realized, all things predictable are also unpredictable. And even when we may be most distracted by modern windings, workings, or woes, we may suddenly be connected by the sights of the world, sun, moon, the universe wherein we all evolve.

As the great Wendell Berry wrote, "When despair grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting for their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."

And so, still preoccupied, I sat down on a hump of green and yellow grass. And the woolly bear, who was, I could tell, a bit anxious to get to his nap, nevertheless uncurled and said, "I hear your thoughts, and you are right: we must always keep courage in sight."

And my friend the chickadee alighted nearby and said, "And you must keep (eee eee

eeep) your sense of humor.”

And my friend the squirrel scrambled up then and said, “And we must keep busy.”

“Yes!” said my friend the bee, as well—of course.

“And helpful,” continued the squirrel (and I believe he was sincere, although I could tell by the wiggle of his right eyebrow that he also meant that removing the squirrel guards from my bird feeders would in fact be *very* helpful).

“And loving,” said the creek, murmuring along its path, always deepening, subtly shifting, ululating, you know, “and loving.” **CBN**

### Some Grange History

*[Ed note: Much of this material was gathered from Carl Carmer's **Dark Trees to the Wind** and from Audrey Johnson's article on the Grange in the booklet "Halcott Valley 1851-1976, published by the Town of Halcott to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution and the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Town of Halcott." As Halcott's older generation begins to pass away, these sources become very precious.]*

The Halcott Grange and the Halcott Town Grange Hall go hand in hand in their development as well as their historical importance to our town. The

National Grange was a movement begun in 1867 to “advance methods of agriculture as well as to promote the social and economic needs of farmers in the U.S. Today, they continue to advocate for rural America and agriculture. They have an active website with articles such as “Smart Farming Solutions,” and are making plans to celebrate their 150<sup>th</sup> birthday next year. It is an exciting story of how farmers banded together to form a political, social and economic force that produced independent feed stores, purchased large farming machinery that could be shared among members, sent their children to college with scholarships, and through monthly meetings, educated one another on the issues of the day.

The story of the National Grange deserves its own issue, but we give just a little of its background to help our readers understand how central was its role in Halcott.

Greene Valley Grange #881 was organized in 1899, in the home of Jefferson Mead. Early meetings were held in the Town Hall (now the Sybil and Paul Margaritis house, “The Maples”). In

1914, the Grange purchased the Halcott Creamery and met there until it was regretfully disbanded due to lack of members in the early 2000s. Farmers studied irrigation, liming, forestry. Wives took homemaking courses. From 1906 to 1916, young Halcott grangers Crosby Morse, Myron Morse, Morton Scudder



and Martha Morse all won scholarships to Cornell University. By 1926 a new heater was purchased for the building; the first Lady Master was Eliza Griffin. Electricity came in 1927. The 1920s also brought more courses on better cattle care, and a milk tester for the men. "The women were getting new-fangled things like pressure cookers and washing machines."

### ***Continuing the Story***

In the forties, the building was used for square dances, other activities and then, suddenly, in the fifties, came Ola Scudder. Ola arrived in America at age 4 from Finland and as a young woman went to Ithaca to take a short course in Home Economics at Cornell. Bruce Scudder was taking a short course that summer in Agriculture, and must have convinced the young Finn to come back to Halcott with him. After their wedding, they settled in the Scudder place that had been in the family for generations. Bruce's grandfather fought in the Civil War as a substitute for someone else for \$1500. He used the money to build a new barn on the property.

Ola had been Grange chairman of the committee on community improvement for many years, but nothing much was done because she was, like so many, a busy farmer's wife and every summer ran a boarding house for thirty guests. Finally, her doctor pronounced her heart in jeopardy with all this work and she was forced to close her boarding house. Her thoughts turned to the committee on community improvement and she began to make some plans!

She entered the Grange in the national Community Service Contest run by Sears, Roebuck. Worker bees were formed and projects started for the benefit of the Town. The enthusiasm of grangers, friends, neighbors and others from nearby towns was infectious. The results were impressive. The cemetery vault, written about in the last issue of TTOH was only one. There were fire ponds dug under the direction of Bob Johnson. (Fire



ponds were key to protecting rural homes and barns too far from hydrants and water trucks from the dread of fire). A juvenile Grange was organized (more on this worthy effort in the next issue). A cow testing association was formed for the 16 dairies that had a total of 573 cows. Earl Johnson was sent to Cornell University to take the cow tester's course to determine which cows were producing and which would be better as hamburger, so to

speak. Clothing was collected and sent to the needy in Europe. (Another era!!) A Grange basketball team was organized and three bowling teams formed.

But the central piece in all this effort was the renovation of the one-time creamery into a real community hall with a kitchen and dining area, a library, and a central hall that would be used for square dancing, town board meetings, voting, bazaars, various club meetings, and church programs. A 9x30x49 foot hole was dug *by hand* to set the foundation for the new kitchen. Worker bee announcements went something like this: "You're invited to a bee Wednesday night to

take down the West Wall of the Grange Hall. Everybody meet at the Hall after supper. Hamburgers and Watermelon! Bring shovels, picks, and ambition.”

In the end, our Halcott Grange won first prize in New York State and second prize in the nation: \$100 in bonds, \$1500 worth of equipment and immeasurable dollops of self-respect. Carmer says the Grangers were proud of that, but they say they were prouder of the fact that about 80% volunteered for different projects and only \$3000 total was spent on an effort valued at \$8000. Another issue of

*TTOH* will detail the frugality of their gathering, from scavenging dump sites to attending auctions.

Is it any wonder that this community carries such a strong legacy of mutual encouragement? It's the gift that keeps on giving.

*IK*

### **Christmas Tree**

One of the high points of the Grange Hall's annual calendar, and one that planted some of the community's most cherished memories is the "Christmas Tree," the community program held during the darkest days of the year and featuring some of the brightest faces, young and old, entertaining one another. Who can tell why it was called just "Christmas Tree," with no "Program" as part of its title? Perhaps the authors had in mind that graceful green shape brought out for the season upon which everyone gathered to decorate with some ornaments. Any type of ornament, from a memorized poem to a skit or a joke. When they all hang on the Christmas

Tree, you stand back and see that it looks very festive! Following are some accounts.

*[Reprinted with thanks, from Donald Bouton's By the Light of the Kerosene Lantern]*

The annual "Christmas Tree" program was sponsored primarily by the teachers of the district schools and held at the grange hall to a full house. It was an event looked forward to with great anticipation.

The hall was decorated appropriately for the season with a fresh cut Christmas tree adorned primarily with handmade ornaments awaiting the great festival.

The program was well rehearsed in advance of this great night. Recitations by even preschoolers, musical numbers, plays, special talents and always ending with a nativity scene by the Sunday School.

The audience participated with carol singing until the sound of jingle bells and a loud knock was heard announcing the visit of Old Saint Nick himself with a pack on his back. A bag of candy plus pencils engraved with your name on them was a real treasured gift from Santa and his "elves."

One of the biggest changes today in this yearly happening is our means of transportation. Dad owned a Model T Ford truck with a canvas top, no side curtains and an open truck box. The lights on the Model T were poor, so Dad would often hang the

### *A Note of Apology*

*TTOH* has been given various lovingly saved photos of different Christmas programs.

They are adorable treasures. BUT, they do not reproduce well for this editor! Thankfully, this year's pageant was captured by an audience member, Marissa Dookeran. Thanks, as ever, to all who organized, participated and enjoyed!

kerosene lantern on the radiator cap to help light the way. With Mother and Dad in the front, Carson and I in the back, a thick horse blanket on the floor to sit on and a felt-lined cow hide blanket robe (still in good condition today) to pull over our heads, we had a fairly warm ride to the party. Then the blanket was used to cover the radiator to keep it from freezing – no antifreeze in those days. If the night was real cold, Dad would go out a couple of times and crank up the engine so it wouldn't get too cold.

On returning home it was a must to drain the radiator and usually take out the four coils about the size of bricks and place them on the warming oven of the kitchen stove. With a tea kettle of hot water and warm coils to spark the engine, a few turns of the hand crank, the Model T usually made an attempt to start the next morning after for its daily trip to the creamery. If the truck was a bit hesitant in starting, he would sometimes jack up on the rear wheels – this made the cranking easier.

### ***And Another***

*Marilyn Bouton Gallant and Kathleen Bouton Mech*

We remember our father, Carson Bouton, born in 1913, tell how he and his brother Donald used to take part in the Christmas Tree Program at the Halcott Grange Hall by giving recitations. They would choose a piece to recite and then practice until it was polished to perfection. The big night finally arrived. Everyone did their very best. The program was wonderful, plus there was a visit from Old Saint Nick who brought candy for all

of the children. This was such a treat! Years later we experienced the same type of wonderful evening at the Grange Hall Christmas Tree program. As little girls, we walked upon the stage to speak our little piece. Then all of a sudden we heard sleigh bells outdoors – such a beautiful sound! In came Santa Claus with a large pack on his back. He handed out boxes of hard candy, including ribbon candy.

One year when Karol Mech (Kathleen's future husband) was a young child, he sang "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." At the end of the song, he stamped his feet – it was so cute!



It is amazing when one thinks of how many hundreds of lives have been touched by the beautiful Christmas Tree Program at the Halcott Grange Hall. Throughout the decades children have

experienced the excitement and wonder of this very positive tradition. Our Halcott Grange Hall is truly a treasure providing a gathering place for many reasons; however, for one special night every year there is truly magic in the air!

### ***One More***

*(Newspaper article found by Kathleen Mech)*  
"Halcott Christmas Program Was Excellent"

Halcott Center, December 28. – The community Christmas Tree [Program] Thursday evening crowded the hall to overflowing and an appreciative audience enjoyed the following program:  
The Sunday school opened the evening with the old carol "Joy to the World" and prayer by Rev. Taylor, then followed recitations by

Douglas Faulkner, Ginger Kelly, Sissy *[this is the only clue we have to date the article: Kathleen was only known as Sissy when she was a very young girl. Any other guesses?]* *[Innes adds: I found Rev. Taylor referred to in the Carl Carmer article written about the Sears, Roebuck contest, which I figure was in 1948. "When the Halcott UMC donated \$100 to the grangers towards the renovations, Tom Taylor, the preacher, said that was certainly putting the cart in front of the horse, because it was the first time he had heard of the church not being on the receiving end."]* and Marilyn

Bouton, Keith Johnson, Emily VanValkenburgh and Emerson Kelly, a piano solo by Arlene Griffin and a solo, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," by Richard Kerperka. The Juvenile Grange presented an interesting tableau, "The Old Land in the Shoe," and the older members of Juvenile Grange sang "Jingle Bells."

Then the adults took over and the Grange and the Ladies' Aid presented the play "Our Neighbors," under the direction of Mrs. Jay Kissock. This was a fine and appropriate presentation, carrying a beautiful and impressive message. Roger Mattice sang "Ave Maria" in such a way that everyone seemed to feel the true beauty of Christmas. Finally, Santa appeared and taking time out for a little story before gift-giving time arrived, he told something of his life at the North Pole. Handing out candy and peanuts as well as loads of other gifts, he wished everyone a merry Christmas and a happy New Year as a fitting end for a community Christmas Tree.

## LINN TRACTORS

### Alan Reynolds

Some old photos floating around town show snow removal being done by methods that might be surprising today. A few show a line of men across a road using shovels to remove drifts. Others show horses pulling wooden plows through lighter snow. It was inevitable that more efficient methods of dealing with snow and drifting snow would be developed.

The Linn Tractor Company was established by Mr. H.H. Linn in Morris, NY in 1917. The Linn HafTrak was a similar design

to a machine manufactured at the time by Alvin O. Lombard, who had been Mr. Linn's employer.

The Lombard machines were primarily marketed to midwestern loggers who used them to pull log sleds out of the woods. Linn had developed a highly superior drive and flexible track system that

allowed each track to remain flat on the ground regardless of the terrain being transversed. That design resulted in the maximum traction to be achieved. It was reported that Linn Tractors, occasionally two hooked together, frequently hauled as many as 12-16 log sleds as one train. In winter conditions the front wheels could be replaced with heavy skis, increasing maneuverability when pulling those log sleds in the woods.

About 2500 tractors were produced at the factory in Morris and they were sold around the world for various applications, but the majority were supplied to the northern and especially the northeastern U.S. Among the company's biggest customers were town and county highway departments, with large number of upstate New York State towns among them. Town highway departments

### OPINIONS?

What kind of tee shirt would you like at the 2017 Halcott Fair? Colors? Sizes? Please let us know! HCF Directors: Kari Pagnano, Jenn Bouton

found that the Linn HafTrak, when equipped with v-plows and wings were well suited for snow removal, the Town of Halcott being no exception. Halcott had owned two Linn's, but to my knowledge the two were never operational at the same time. They were particularly adept at cleaning up the deep drifts which were so common on rural roads at that time. Russell remembers, from Marilyn's stories I suspect, that when his grandmother Ella Bouton died in 1956 the town used a Linn to plow over to Marshall's house to get her body out. Her body was then brought back to the house at some point to lie there before the funeral. That was typical for funerals when I was growing up.

Although useful machines, it did take some serious manpower to operate the Linn's. The v-plow and wing were cable controlled through a series of large hand wheels, probably 3 or 4 feet in diameter, located on the platform behind the tractor cab. The blade operator stood on that platform and spun the hand wheels to raise and lower the blades as needed. The tractor itself, utilizing the half track design, would always try to run straight ahead. Because of the weight of the machine the front wheels were very difficult to turn and was almost impossible for one man to steer, so there were frequently two men inside the cab to keep the Linn headed where it needed to go. Both men would grab onto the steering wheel to turn the machine. Meanwhile the blade operator would stand behind the cab usually in the snow, wind and

cold doing his own job. I've seen a Linn that was set up with a wooden shelter around the blade control platform equipped with a small wood stove to give the operator some heat. I learned from the owner that Linn did not supply tractors with that option, but many towns built those shelters for their employees. The Linn's owned by Halcott did not feature



shelters.

One of my earliest ever memories is getting a ride in Halcott's Linn from my grandfather, Garfield Reynolds, who worked for the town from time to time. The Linn's job that spring day was towing a pull grader while working a gravel road. That ride was for probably 50 feet or so and the image remains of the steering column coming straight up out of the floor with the large steering wheel, of course, being absolutely horizontal, probably not adding to any ease of operation.

Although the Linn Tractor was a huge step forward in highway maintenance, the machine had some serious drawbacks. The earliest models, equipped with 4 cylinder engines, had top road speeds of 5-6 miles per

hour while later tractors, equipped with 6 cylinder engines, could approach 12 miles per hours, so using those tractors was a slow process. The track design, the very reason that the Linn became popular, could cause serious damage to paved roads which were becoming more and more widespread. By the late 1930s, heavy trucks such as Walter, FWD and Oshkosh, were being built to do the jobs that Linn had previously accomplished without the associated drawbacks. The trucks were more powerful, faster, easier to operate, did not cause major road damage and could plow snow more efficiently. The Linn Tractor, at that time, became much less useful and the company finally went out of business in the late 1940s.

*Alan Reynolds adds: I've been able to learn quite a bit about Linn, but not much about Halcott's Linns. Can anyone add information? The photo supplied by Leighton is not of either of Halcott's Linns. After looking at the photo, it seems pretty obvious that a bulldozer is in front, possibly towing a Linn, or are they just parked in that position? Special thanks to Leighton Scudder for his photo which prompted the research for the article.*

### **Barn Clowns**

Working with animals sure makes life interesting! To borrow portions of a quote from Sally Jesse Raphael, "With an endless assortment of animals living on one farm, there is always some absurd crisis that gives comic relief to my problems." Indeed, every day on a farm full of various types of livestock as well as assorted dogs, cats and poultry interacting with one another, with their caretakers and with their environment, is an

opportunity to experience the miraculous, the disappointing, the frustrating and, sometimes, the downright hilarious. Here I will share a few funny incidents that still make me laugh. Please enjoy!

Toby was a Border collie, known as the Wonder Dog, on the dairy farm I was employed at in Northern California. Although he wasn't much help with the cattle, he was a great companion and a more happy-go-lucky dog would have been hard to find. Toby's nickname, the Wonder Dog, came not from his fantastic exploits but because we always *wondered* what he was up to. Most of Toby's time was spent simply following us around the farm and happily greeting any visitors who happened to stop by.

One day the milk inspector pulled in the drive to do an inspection of the milking house and milking parlor. Because this is a regular occurrence on all dairy farms, none of us paid much attention except to exchange a few pleasantries while the inspector opened the hatch in the back of his car to get his boots and clipboard before going into the milking center. Well, apparently Toby was paying attention because while the rest of us were occupied with chores and inspecting, he decided that the open hatch was an open invitation to rummage around the back of the inspector's car. Among the other items in the car was the inspector's lunch which Toby was only too happy to wolf down before anyone saw him. All that was left was the torn paper bag which the inspector discovered upon returning to the vehicle. Thankfully this inspector had a good sense of humor and the farm still passed inspection despite Toby's uninvited dining experience.

The Alameda County Fair was one of three fairs that ran back to back over about three weeks in late June to early July. The

farm I worked for took rather sizable show herds of beef and dairy cattle to this fair located in the city of Pleasanton toward the Bay Area in California. One year, for some reason, the people in charge of deciding where all of the animals were to be stalled during the fair changed things up by placing the hog pens in between the cattle barn and wash racks where exhibitors were to lead their cattle to get washed before the competition. Mind you, few if any of the cattle had ever seen hogs before. This made most trips to the wash racks dicey affairs. While some of the cattle didn't seem to mind the hogs, others were terrified by their presence thereby turning a simple task into our own version of the National Finals Rodeo as the cattle tried to run past the hog pens as if they had been shot out of a cannon, dragging along the less than amused leadsmen who tried in vain to calm down the frightened bovine. After a few days of this, most of the cattle became accustomed to their porcine neighbors so the trips to the wash rack became less troublesome for man and beast; however, a few cattle still remained wary for the entire duration of the show. Happily, no one was ever seriously hurt and enough complaints from the cattle exhibitors prompted the fair to rethink their stall arrangements for the next year. This was one of those events that wasn't too funny at the time but became a source of good natured joking as we watched each other navigate the "booby trapped" path to the wash racks.

And then there's the lure of grain. Most livestock, regardless of age or kind, can't resist a tasty helping (or two, or three) of grain. The milk cows on our farm, as

well as on many farms, receive some grain when they come in the parlor to be milked. The grain not only provides an excellent source of the energy that cows need for milk production but it also serves as an effective enticement to help get the cattle, especially the new, younger ones, in the parlor (kind of like saying "time for dessert!" to a group of kids). The funny thing is that nearly every new young cow, once she understands that she always receives grain in the parlor, will try to "double dip" by attempting to do a U-turn to sneak back up the exit alley to revisit the parlor right after she has gone out the exit alley after being milked. It's uncanny how they figure this out. Naturally, these cows trying to go the wrong way create traffic jams with those going the correct direction but most cows will eventually stop doing this once they realize that they won't be allowed back in for a second helping. Currently, we have a young bull from Tim and Christl Johnson that has figured out the whole grain deal and he will often follow the cows right into the parlor to grab a bite to eat with "his ladies". He too, along with an older really personable cow named Esther, regularly try to sneak back up the exit alley and, yes, regularly tie up traffic, all for a little extra of the tasty, sweet grain. That we have to back them down the alley time after time can be a bit frustrating but honestly it is kind of humorous that they know to do this and are quite persistent to boot.

These are just a very few examples of humor on the farm. No matter what else the future holds, as long as we continue working with animals we can count on more spills, chills and thrills in the barnyard! **JD**

# The Times of the Halcott United Methodist Church

Winter, 2016-2017 *Pattie Kelder, Correspondent*



## Our Nation

As I write, it is Election Day and the polls are still open. The outcome, whatever it may be, will be historic. No doubt the race will be a close one. There will be great need for national prayer going forward. Imagine if those voting for the successful candidate were to keep praying for national healing and world peace. Imagine if those voting for the unsuccessful candidate were to keep praying for wisdom and effective leadership. Do we love freedom enough to pray for those in charge of it? If we do, then not just this nation, but the whole world will benefit.

## Here We Come A-Caroling

“You know, I always enjoyed Christmas caroling. When can we do it again?” the caller asked.

“Any time, except when we have the Christmas Candlelight Service at 7:00 on Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup>,” was my quick reply.

We don’t have a time and date yet but you, dear readers, are invited! Time is short, so we need you to volunteer your voices soon and suggest places to stop.

I remember my first experience with caroling. I was four and my sister was two. Most of the other carolers were adults. Elderly

Addie Van Valkenburgh was very impressed to see a two year old standing in the snow in her little red boots.

In later years the youth group went caroling while I was on college break. Some of the kids were from Margaretville, so we stopped at the A&P on our way to Halcott. We awkwardly warmed up on Silver Bells for the startled, but appreciative, shoppers.

On top of Portertown Hill, we stopped at Will Morrison’s. The group decided to sing a lengthy one - O Holy Night. Just one problem: they didn’t know many words. After a few lines I was on my own! Desperate to switch to a better known carol, I looked up at Will and kept singing. There he stood in the doorway with tears flowing down his face. Not a soul breathed or moved. I think it was his last Christmas.

Continuing up the valley we made several more stops even serenading the cows in one of the barns. Our noisy and unanticipated arrival had one especially startling effect. At one stop, the man of the house came out in the yard and quite literally rode shotgun while we sang. It was our shortest rendition of the evening!

Caroling can be a moving experience (no pun intended!) One year some of the Grangers went caroling, taking a few cookies where there would be no other Christmas callers. They got the most

delightful reception! So let's get together and revive this community event. The more the merrier. We'll even bring words this time. Be sure to call soon for details.

### **Abiding Peace**

At this time of year, greetings of peace abound. "Peace on earth, good will toward men," the angels bid the shepherds. In other carols we sing, "Sleep in heavenly peace;" Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace;" Peace to all on earth;" And to the earth be peace;" Grant us thy heavenly peace." From this sampling we see that peace, both universal and personal, is God's hallmark. Peace is a gift. We are to be at peace. Peace is a lifestyle.

How is it then, that peace so often eludes us? Very simple, and very difficult. *Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.* Colossians 3.15 (Italics added.) We have to foster peace. "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me," the old song goes.

Achieving peace takes a certain focus and discipline. To be sure, there are times when peace flows through us suddenly, lifting us and carrying us above turbulent waves. We may later discover that prayers were being offered

for us during such times. More often, though, achieving peace is a gradual process which cannot be hurried. Peace must be carefully cultivated like a garden, then nurtured and watered through the growing season known as a life time.

How can we do this? Spend time with God. Retreat to Him. Release your frustrations to Him. Hand over your anger. Give Him your anxieties and fears. Relax in His presence. Breathe slowly and deeply. Be still. Pray. Ask others to pray for you. Make these actions a habit.

It may be our responsibility to allow peace to reign, but God will faithfully help us achieve the peace He has promised. As we prepare for Christmas, we are really preparing anew for a most wonderful gift, the birth of the Prince of Peace. Thanks be to God!

(Did you recognize any of the carols quoted at the top? They were: "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day;" "Silent Night;" Hark the Herald Angels Sing;" O Little Town of Bethlehem;" "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night;" and "He is Born.")

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Winter 2016-2017

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