

# Getting Ready for the Christmas Concert

Ask someone who attended a one-room rural school about the memorable times and you can be pretty sure the conversation will include reminiscence about Christmas concerts!

Many of these memories will touch on some common elements: first there is the preparation. Starting some time in late November preliminary planning would begin. Little bits of time, often near the end of the school day, would be taken reviewing potential skits or poetry recitations. Call it Reading Class.

As December arrived more time would be spent selecting and practicing Christmas carols, dialogues, drills, and recitations. By late December a teacher might compress all the basics into the morning classes and leave the afternoons for rehearsals and other preparations.

In the last week before Christmas holidays, the pressure would be on. The teachers really worked hard at this. They knew they would be judged on the presentation. Students took their responsibilities seriously as well. Lines were memorized, song words learned.

Mothers and the teacher usually made costumes, sometimes on the day before or even the morning of the concert. Lots of crepe paper and old rags were used.

A stage, often of sawhorses and planks, was put in place on one side of the school, with the student desks crowded into the other half. Stovepipe wire was strung above the front edge of the stage and, when appropriate curtains were not available, bed sheets were hung on this wire to conceal the stage until items were ready. Usually two of the older students looked after the opening and

## When the concert was over, Santa Claus arrived!



*A concert item in the 1950's might involve dance, song and dialogue, and some pretty nice costuming. Not bad for a small one room school on a limited budget. There were about 12 students in the school, so everyone had challenging roles. This photo is from Rosehill School in the R.M. of Argyle*

closing of the curtains while the teacher was busy with costumes and prompting. Then the room had to be decorated and the Christmas tree put in place.

The advantage in a small school, then, as now, is that everyone got to participate, and not just as a lamb in the Nativity Scene.

Real dialogue had to be memorized, dance steps perfected, recitations learned. Each student had a number of tasks.

There was lots of learning involved. Some of the skits and other items could be quite sophisticated; a former student recalls that a concert at Verona School once featured a seven-piece orchestra!

The audience sat on makeshift benches – planks on a support.

When the concert was over, Santa Claus arrived! The school board provided candy, nuts and oranges, packaged in brown paper bags for distribution, and always allowing extras for children not yet at school. These, along with gifts, were handed out by Santa Claus and usually before his departure; he might kiss the teacher to the great amusement of her pupils.

It was, for many, a high point of the school year.

### Sources:

Personal Reminiscence of the author.  
Oral Histories from Boissevain and Morton Regional Library and Archives & TM-SPHA Collection.