On the Street Where You Live by Cecelia Wattles McKeig

Who Would Want a Wooden Water Tower?

Bemidji Did!

We do not give a lot of thought to our water supply in Bemidji, but the town fathers were very aware of the need for clean drinking water, and one of their first priorities was to build a water tower in the business district. The first tower was a wooden one at approximately 211 Irvine Avenue near where the current viaduct stands. Bemidji Water Works had their pump house and water tower just south of a 20-foot alley which ran east and west. The 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows the water tank and Bemidji Water Works on lots 23-24 of Block 3, on Irvine Avenue.

A special election was held at Naylor & Young’s Store on Third Street on December 6, 1898, for voting upon the question of issuing $7,000 worth of bonds for construction of the waterworks. The vote was 145 votes in favor and 46 against. A. P. White, a prominent Bemidji businessman, held the bonds. The next step was to call for bids for the construction of the waterworks. There must have been some disagreement (imagine that!) as the bids were presented several times in February 1899, and at each meeting the bid by H. C. Huebuer was laid on the table.

Revised plans and specifications were presented in May 1899, and several companies submitted bids. Huebuer was paid $55 for plans and specifications, but the Waterous Engine Works Company’s bid of $9,690 was accepted for constructing the complete system of waterworks. Martenson & Peterson were paid $155 for the lots for the plant.

On July 8, 1899, the village council convened a special meeting to consider the obstructive measures of the Bemidji Townsite and Improvement Company toward the waterworks construction. The council decided to prosecute the work to a finish, notwithstanding any opposition of the Townsite Company. The council minutes do not give any further details, and we do not have any newspapers for that time period to know what the dispute was with Tams Bixby’s company.

Newton Holroyd was appointed Superintendent of Water Works in 1900. When J. J. Jinkinson was defeated in February 1901 for mayor, he wished the new council success and said that if his co-workers had made a mistake in the waterworks matter, he regretted it as much as anyone. Apparently the waterworks was still a disputed issue.

E. H. “Ned” Jerrard of the Jerrard Plumbing Company received the contract for laying the water mains for the village. Jerrard conducted the first plumbing company in Bemidji and eventually went into the hardware business as well. Louis Eckstrum also worked with Jerrard Plumbing until he established his own plumbing business in 1909 at

(Continued on Page 4)
President’s Report

by Sharon Geisen

On behalf of the entire Board of Directors for the Beltrami County Historical Society, we’d like to wish you Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year.

Please consider joining us again New Year’s Eve, December 31 from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. for our 2nd Annual History Mystery. Several of our volunteers and board members have researched some interesting individuals from Bemidji’s past to be suspects in this year’s History Mystery. Come and learn about Mary Walsh Hemmingway, Sister Amata, “Paddy the Pig,” and “Dutch Mary,” among other suspects. It is a great family team event and tickets are limited so be sure to call the History Center or stop in to purchase tickets in advance. Come and test your detective skills to figure out who committed this make-believe murder at the Great Northern Depot.

Thank you in advance to our actors and actresses: Cate Belleveau, Maggie Carlson, Kevin Cease, Marty Cobenais, Judy Dvorak, Alison and Jorden Hamm, Dawn Loeffler, Kay Murphy, and Ernie Rall.

The Great Northern Depot will be closed from December 20 through December 29 and from January 1 to January 5, 2016. The Depot will be open December 30 and 31. The History Center will resume its regular hours, Wednesday-Saturday from 12-4, starting Wednesday, January 6, 2016.

As 2015 comes to a close, it is a good time to thank all the business sponsors and individuals who donate to the Beltrami County Historical Society. Your donations of time, money, and items for our collection are what continues our mission and preserves the history of Beltrami County for future generations.

WANT TO MAKE HISTORY?

The Beltrami County Historical Society is looking for volunteers to serve on the Board of Directors. Board Members serve a three-year term and meet monthly at the History Center in Bemidji. Please contact BCHS at (218) 444-3376 or depot@beltramihistory.org to apply. This is a great opportunity to use your talents to give back to the community...and preserve a little history at the same time!

The mission of the Beltrami County Historical Society is to provide connections to county history through public archives, collections, interpretive exhibits, and programs that educate, invite dialogue, and inspire self-reflection.

From the Desk of the Director

by Dan Karalus

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our 2015 Annual Giving Campaign! Your amazing gifts drive the history programs, exhibits, and resources that we offer, and we could not do it without you.

Next year looks to be a busy year for the Beltrami County Historical Society, and there is a lot of news to share. For one, the Minnesota Historical Society awarded BCHS with a $9,374 Minnesota Historical & Cultural Heritage Grant to purchase a new microfilm scanner and computer. We expect our contracted vendor to install the equipment and train us on it in January. The new scanner will allow staff, volunteers, and researchers to view historical newspapers more quickly and with better clarity. It will also allow us to preserve newspapers digitally, save on printing costs, and improving search capabilities. Many universities and libraries have similar scanners, so you may have used one already, but I encourage you to visit us to try it out and search through our collection of newspapers. Last year, we received a similar grant that enabled us to acquire copies of the Bemidji Daily Pioneer through 1985, so think of us when you need to look up some local history!

We also have several programs on tap for 2016. In March, we will partner with the Bemidji Public Library to deliver a series of presentations about women in Bemidji and Northwest Minnesota (see our Calendar of Events on Page 3 for details). Throughout 2016, we will also partner with Beltrami County to offer programs, events, and activities recognizing the 150-year history of the county. These Beltrami County Sesquicentennial events will kick off with a proclamation by the County in February and continue throughout the year. Stay tuned for details, but be ready to enjoy a cemetery walk, historical play, and history tour.

Finally, we are planning a series of sports history discussions to conclude the end of our Good Sports of the North exhibit in Summer 2016, as well as a series of music programs to offer a different way to experience history. If you have a sports story to tell or historical song to play, let us know or send your ideas our way! We want your input!

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Calendar of Events

December 31: The History Mystery
It is New Year’s Eve 1924, and Detectives need your help! A brakeman was found murdered at the Great Northern Depot. Six local historical figures are the prime suspects. Was it the notorious lumberjack? The Socialist mayor? The librarian? Or someone else?

Become an Assistant Detective for this live whodunit that combines the classic game of Clue with local history. Enjoy refreshments, interview Suspects, get help from Witnesses, and explore the Depot to uncover clues. Go it alone or play as a team. Historical costumes encouraged. Solve The History Mystery first and win!

The History Mystery is from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Doors open at 4:00 p.m. & Game starts at 4:30 p.m. Tickets are $15 for non-members and $10 for members. Guests of members receive the member-price. Kids 12 & under free with paid adult! Please choose the appropriate option. Tickets available in advance at the Beltrami County History Center, Wednesday-Saturday from 12-4, by calling (218) 444-3376, or online at beltramihistory.org. Space is limited.

February 28, 2016: Beltrami County’s 150th Anniversary
Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the establishment of Beltrami County! BCHS is partnering with Beltrami County leaders to bring local residents and visitors a series of activities and events throughout 2016 highlighting the 150-year history of the county. Stay tuned to our website, Facebook page, e-Newsletter, and upcoming newsletters for the latest details, and be ready to Get to Know Beltrami County in 2016!

March 2016: Women’s History Month
Join BCHS for the Bemidji Women’s History Lecture Series! Thanks to a partnership with the Bemidji Public Library and a grant award from the Northwest Women’s Fund at the Northwest Minnesota Foundation, we have a full slate of presentations and discussions exploring stories of local and regional women who made valuable and important impacts in Bemidji, Beltrami County, and Northwest Minnesota. Set some time aside on your March Mondays and Saturdays for the following presentations:

March 7, 6:00 p.m. at the Bemidji Public Library (FREE!):
University of Minnesota Professor Dr. Brenda Child presents “Strong Women/Strong Nations: Ojibwe Women at Work,” including stories and information from her book My Grandfather's Knocking Sticks: Ojibwe Family Life and Labor on the Reservation.

March 12, 2:00 p.m. at the Beltrami County History Center (Free with admission to museum & Free for Members):
BSU Professor Dr. Donna Palivec & Retired BSU Professor Dr. Pat Rosenbroek lead a discussion on Title IX and the Shaping of Bemidji Women’s Sports, including stories and experiences shared by women who participated in early Title IX opportunities in the 1970s.

March 14, 6:00 p.m. at the Bemidji Public Library (FREE!):
Cecelia Wattles McKeig presents “Bemidji’s First Librarians and the Ladies of the Library Association, 1904-1921”

March 21, 6:00 p.m. at the Bemidji Public Library (FREE!):
Sara Breeze presents “Sister Amata: The Lumberjack Nun.” Sara will be in character for her presentation!

March 26, 2:00 p.m. at the Beltrami County History Center (Free with admission to museum & Free for Members):
Janet Rith-Najarian presents “Women and Conservation in Northwest Minnesota.” Janet will be in character for her presentation exploring the environmental efforts of women like Mary Gibbs and Florence Bramhall.

March 28, 6:00 p.m. at the Bemidji Public Library (FREE!):
BSU Professor Dr. Carla Norris-Raynbird presents “Celebrating the First 100 Northwest Minnesota Women's Fund Women: Building Toward the Next 1000!”

For the latest calendar updates go to our website: http://beltramihistory.org/events
On the Street Where You Live (Continued from Page 1)

320 Beltrami Avenue. He served as Superintendent and clerk of Bemidji’s Water Board over the next few years.

Waterworks seemed to attract public interest. The Bemidji Pioneer noted that the Nary people had purchased a hand engine and were building a water tank in May 1900. In Redwood Falls, the water tower of the city water works system, erected in 1892, fell in August 1901 when it was about one-third full and had to be rebuilt.

In Bemidji, early on the morning of December 27, 1901, the gasoline in the city waterworks pump house exploded, sending the majority of the engine and pump house beyond reach of the naked eye, with the balance being demolished by fire. M. E. Carson, who was in charge of the pump at the time, was severely burned. It looked at one time as though the water tower would be enveloped in flames. The firemen responded promptly and saved it from being burned to the ground. Bagley’s wooden water tower burned a few years later.

Reed, the photographer, had a platform erected on top of the city water tank from which he took a series of views of the city in the fall of 1902. These photos of the city have been enjoyed by many viewers over the years and are on view or available at City Hall and the History Center.

The Sanborn Map of 1904 shows a second wooden water tower located at the Warfield Electric Company between Third and Fourth Streets on Park Avenue. It was located just west of the alleyway in Block 11, Carson’s Addition. This would be the tower that is referred to in the 1971 Diamond Edition of the Bemidji Pioneer as the wooden tower on Fourth Street. It was 100 feet high and had a capacity of 1,500 gallons.

A special election was held on August 11, 1908, for the purpose of approving $50,000 for a new and modern waterworks system. The old tower was in a “shaky” condition and the timbers supporting the tower were in such poor condition that they could have caused the tank to fall at any time. Polling places were the Midway Grocery Store, on the east side of Beltrami Avenue between Eighth and Ninth Streets; City Hall on the corner of Fourth Street and Minnesota Avenue; J. P. Pogue’s warehouse on the west side of Irvine Avenue, between Third and Fourth Streets and C. S. Dailey’s Employment office, on the north side of Third Street, between Bemidji and Beltrami Avenues.

Bemidji voted to purchase the necessary bonds for a new steel water tower, 120 feet high, supporting a 100,000 gallon steel tank with two fire pumps, as well as for the construction of a cement reservoir, moving or rebuilding the city’s pumping station, purchasing and laying of about three to four miles of water mains, and purchasing an additional tract of land along Park Avenue for the new water plant.

The new waterworks was operational in 1909, and the council authorized the sale of the old water tower and tank. Thomas Maloy, village clerk, stated: “A certified check in amount of $100.00 on a Bemidji bank, shall accompany each bid as a guarantee that the structure will be taken down by pieces and not thrown down; and it shall be entirely removed within ten days after the issuance of the bill of sale, by the city to the purchaser.” Earl Carson was the successful bidder for removal of the old water tower.

Bemidji was a little slower in taking care of its refuse. In 1910, they still had not installed a septic system. A committee from the Commercial club appeared at the council meeting and brought up the matter of a septic tank to take care of the city sewage. F. S. Lycan said that the sewage was being dumped into the river at the inlet and allowed to flow through the lake past the city. Low water left sewage on the banks. He said that a tank was talked of three years before but nothing had been done about the matter. Dr. Gilmore addressed the council and said that there was grave danger of an epidemic if something was not done at once. He said the cities down the river had been complaining and that he had been advised by the state board of health that a tank would have to be installed very soon. A committee composed of Emil Schneider, Dr Gilmore, and F. S. Lycan was appointed to investigate the question and report back to the council in two weeks.

In 1914, bids were made for necessary repairs to hoops and rivets on water tower and for repainting the water tower, using graphite, paint and linseed oil. Carl Kervin’s bid of $225 was accepted. George Kirk, superintendent of the water board, warned that for several days the city water would taste of tar or oil because of the repair work being done on the interior of the tank. The tank was repainted and repaired inside and again filled with water. The leak had been eradicated.

The old water tower ceased to be a fixture in Bemidji in the 1970s. Charles E. Osmundson, steeple jack, worked from Bemidji to Montana, painting and maintaining water towers and church steeples. His last job before retiring was dismantling the Bemidji water tower on Park Avenue. A new 500,000 gallon elevated water tank had been built at 15th and Norton.
A Selection of Beltrami County Water Towers

[Clockwise from Top Left]

Water Tower with “Buddy” written on it as a prank, Bemidji, undated [BCHS-1053].

Water tower in Kelliher next to first City Hall, early 1900s [BCHS-2283].

Ponemah Boarding School, with water tower on right, 1901-1902 [BCHS-518].
Bob Montebello: A Good Sport of the North by Sue Bruns

The trail that starts in the City Park bears the name of a man who has been instrumental to the development and maintenance of trail systems in the Bemidji area, but Bob Montebello’s influence in the community is not limited to ski trails. Now in his eighties, Bob has been a pro baseball player, college baseball coach, P.E. teacher at Bemidji State University, time keeper at early Beaver Hockey games, Nordic ski enthusiast, trail developer, and avid outdoorsman since he first came to Minnesota in the 1950s.

It was baseball that brought him to Minnesota from his home state of Ohio. In 1951, he met Sally, his wife-to-be, while playing summer pro baseball for the Class AA Litchfield Optimists. He and Sally were married in June 1956. After doing graduate study at Rice University in Houston, teaching P.E. at Ohio State’s University School, completing his doctorate degree through Columbia University, teaching part time at Sara Lawrence School in New York, and working as a sailing counselor in Maine in the summer of 1958, he and Sally returned to Minnesota where Bob accepted a job at Bemidji State College (BSC).

Bob Montebello, trail developer, and avid outdoorsman.

Bob started coaching baseball for BSC the following spring. Sports programs were in their early stages at the college, he said: “Hockey didn’t exist. It had been a club program for a while, then was dropped. In the 1960s, the hockey team played outside for a few years. The P.E. and swimming pool buildings were near the Bemidji City Zoo – where Birch Hall is now. There was a skating rink outside behind the building. They put some boards up and flooded it.” Bob said spectators had to climb a snow bank to watch hockey games and there were no bleachers, so they had to stand to watch.

“I wouldn’t say there was a big crowd,” he quipped. “I was the time keeper for all of the hockey games that were played outside. The colder it got the faster the clock went.”

Bob Montebello: A Good Sport of the North by Sue Bruns

Litchfield Baseball Team, 1950s, [Courtesy of Bob Montebello].

When Bob joined the coaching ranks at BSC, “Baseball at Bemidji was low key. We had sixteen games scheduled for the spring when I took over – our longest trip, maybe, to St. Paul or Winona. Conference was mostly state college and Hamline, St. Thomas occasionally, Mankato, Moorhead, St. Cloud. Winona State was always the best team in the conference, then Mankato and St. Cloud. Bemidji brought up the rear a lot of the time.

“Over the years the program grew. Our athletes were mainly from the Twin Cities with a few local kids. TC kids came up here for the outdoors and to play a little baseball. We were an accommodating program.”

As the quality of the program grew, BSC became a place where good coaches graduated.

“There weren’t many jobs around the country at that time,” Bob said. “The job [in Bemidji] paid a little more than the other [offers I’d had], and Sally being from Minnesota – it made a good fit. It was a hot, sweltering August day when we moved into a bottom floor apartment we rented from Charles Sattgast, the Bemidji State president, on Dewey Avenue. Bemidji was a little college town. Fishing and hunting were always big. I had never been involved in any of that in my youth.”

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Bob Montebello: A Good Sport of the North (Continued from Page 6)

Bob Montebello, 2012 [Courtesy of Bob Montebello].

Bob coached the BSC/BSU baseball team for 29 years. “I retired from it the year I retired from teaching. I was just 60 years old at the time, but with the rule of 85, I could qualify. I hated the idea of leaving at that point and left some pretty good kids in ‘87-’88. They went on to do pretty well. Jim Grimm was one of my assistants at the time.”

Cross Country Skiing
Retirement from coaching and teaching opened up time for Bob to pursue other things, like cross country skiing. He had already worked with Marge Beck and Muriel Gilman in the early days of the Finlandia Ski Race, and in 1980 he became a member of the Finlandia Board of Directors.

Beck, the skiing instructor at BSC, brought in Gilman, a downhill skier, and when the Finlandia came to Bemidji, BSC started offering P.E. classes in cross country skiing.

“Sally and I had skied a little downhill at Buena Vista, but we’d never done cross country,” said Bob. He served on the Finlandia Board for several years. In the early days of the race, the starting line was by Paul and Babe. Racers skied all the way to Buena Vista the first day and made the return trip the second day. Bob remembered what a nightmare that course was for a trail administrator to clear and groom.

“It was all classical at that point,” he recalled. “Roger Jarvi was the first trail boss, a great guy. He made sure the trail was ski-able.”

Bob worked many Finlandia events over the years – good days and bad in terms of weather. Working the event requires many volunteers working long hours, often in very cold weather. Bob was in charge of feed stations for a number of years, which involved assembling everything and hauling all the food and water everywhere. “It was a logistical nightmare,” he said.

Over the years the number of volunteers and supporters declined and the race was cut from two days to one. The entire course is now run at Buena Vista. “It’s a lot of work and effort to put in for a one-day race,” said Bob. “The town has not been so supportive of putting on the race. The concept was to get a group of people in town to work with the race – it takes a lot of volunteers, but it’s been hard to maintain.” Some years, like 2015, the race has had to be canceled for lack of snow.

Bob recalled the early days of trail development in the Bemidji area with the Movil Maze as an early trail, occasionally groomed for skiing by the snowmobile club. Things really picked up, said Bob, when Sue and John Tibstra took over the ski shop. They, along with a handful of other ski enthusiasts, formed a ski club. Bob assisted with some grant writing and also worked with Earl Dickinson from Buena Vista. They sent off a grant proposal for equipment to the Neilson Foundation for $16,000 and got the grant. Soon afterward, they submitted a second grant to purchase some used snowmobiles and were awarded that grant as well. They used those sleds to pull home-made grooming machines to groom the trails.

Over the past several years, more grant proposals have gone out, more money has been received, better equipment has been purchased, and 75-80 kilometers of trails have been developed in the Bemidji area.

“If it weren’t for the Neilson Foundation,” Bob said, “our cross country program wouldn’t have taken off. They kept us going, helped us with equipment and trail development. They’ve kept us going over the past 25 years.”

Bob and Sally are still active skiers – often times on their personal trails – and the Ohio transplant and his Minnesota bride organize a Ski Club outing to Maplegag Resort each winter. Bemidji is indebted to Bob for the many ways in which he has promoted sports in the area and for the time, talent, and dedication he has given to the community. He is truly one of our Good Sports of the North.

Bemidji area with the Movil Maze as an early trail, occasionally groomed for skiing by the snowmobile club. Things really picked up, said Bob, when Sue and John Tibstra took over the ski shop. They, along with a handful of other ski enthusiasts, formed a ski club. Bob assisted with some grant writing and also worked with Earl Dickinson from Buena Vista. They sent off a grant proposal for equipment to the Neilson Foundation for $16,000 and got the grant. Soon afterward, they submitted a second grant to purchase some used snowmobiles and were awarded that grant as well. They used those sleds to pull home-made grooming machines to groom the trails.
Meet Lily Jewell, a senior at Bemidji High School, history enthusiast, future archaeologist, and currently a volunteer at the Beltrami County History Center.

“I started in June,” Lily says, “working two days a week, about four hours a day. I do inventory of items, work with deaccession – sorting out what the center needs and doesn’t need.” Since school started, Lily has continued to volunteer at the museum four hours per week. Her enthusiasm is obvious as she unpacks old LPs from a box on the second floor of the archives, makes note of the catalog numbers, and re-boxes the records.

“I make suggestions of items for deaccession and put those items in this pile,” she says, pointing to a group of records and artifacts on a nearby table. “Then I enter the item numbers and locations into PastPerfect,” [the online database for museum items at the History Center]. The “pile” includes old horse harnesses with damaged leather, a deteriorating candle holder, a woven suitcase with a broken buckle, and other items either with no particular connection to Beltrami County and Minnesota, not in good enough condition to remain in the collection, or otherwise do not fit the criteria outlined in the BCHS Collections Policy.

“If I find an item without a number,” Lily continues, “I put it here.” She points to another table to her left. From there she tries to track down whether it is listed somewhere in a previous number system (often with help from Judy Dvorak, another History Center volunteer).

What, besides a love of history and an interest in archaeology, brings her to the History Center? As a National Honor Society member at Bemidji High School, she is fulfilling (actually has fulfilled, a few times over) a requirement to volunteer, but more than that, she finds the work both fascinating and relaxing.

“IT’s so peaceful and quiet here,” says Lily, “and it’s cool coming across old stuff,” some of which, she says, she cannot identify.

Volunteering allows Lily to explore the archives of the museum, to help to keep the artifacts relevant and organized, and to gain experience in a field she hopes to pursue in the future as a student of archaeology at Bryn Mawr University in Philadelphia. It is a win-win situation for the museum and for Lily.

Deaccession FAQ

Staff and volunteers are still busy assessing items in the Beltrami County Historical Society archives and making plans to deaccession items from our collections. So we thought we should provide BCHS members and the general public with more information and an update on our progress. Please refer to the below Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). For other questions, clarification, or for more information do not hesitate to contact us at depot@beltramihistory.org or (218) 444-3376.

- What is this deaccession thing again?
  Deaccessioning is the official removal of items from a museum’s collections.

- Why are you deaccessioning items?
  Our Collections Committee will recommend items for deaccessioning based on many factors, including: items do not fit our Collections Policy, duplication of items, damage or deterioration to items, lack of suitable storage for items, or an obligation to return items to native groups or other groups. We are also doing this project now to create space in our facility for future collections donations.

- Can you give examples of things marked for deaccession?
  Yes. Our volunteer Lily Jewell (see Volunteer Spotlight on this page) identified some damaged suitcases and deteriorating tools that we may deaccession. We also just assessed over 15 boxes of vinyl records in our archives that do not fit our Collections Policy or mission. We plan to move some of these to our Programs & Exhibits Collection.

- What happens to deaccessioned items?
  We try to return them, donate them to other non-profit groups, or sell them. If an item goes unwanted or is too damaged, we will dispose of it.

- Who is doing all of this meticulous and fascinating work?
  Staff and volunteers, including Board Members.

- Can I still donate items?
  Yes! We recommend calling us first, so we can help determine if your item fits in our Collections Policy.

- How may I help?
  Your membership and support already help us with the operation of the History Center. A great way to help even more is to volunteer for the project or volunteer your time as a Board Member. And, of course, be patient. This is a long project.
The Night We Light Bonfire

Special Thanks to Franklin Valley (aka Jerry Brademan) for the music entertainment during the Night We Light Bonfire! BCHS welcomed hundreds of visitors! Join us again next year!

[BCHS Board Member Linda Lemmer serving hot cider to visitors; Visitors exploring the wigwam (on loan from the Headwaters Science Center) in the Trails Through Time exhibit; A crowd taking in the Good Sports of the North exhibit; Parade-goers warming up outside the History Center; Franklin Valley playing train songs.]

Clockwise from bottom-right]
Sidetracked by Darla Sathre

Are you stumped about what presents to give for the holidays this year? Maybe you’ll find an idea from the following accounts of gifts from Christmases past.

Children were often given paper dolls, picture books, and coloring books. One year Conrad Stai received a five-cent watercolor paint set from Santa Claus.

Mouth organs were a popular gift for children. During the 1920s in Kelliher, the Nielsens bought a Christmas gift for the whole family – a radio. Family members took turns listening using earphones!

Dolls were an obvious gift for girls, usually accompanied by hand-sewn clothes and homemade wooden cradles. When Margaret Buckland of 1115 Bemidji Avenue was about seven years old she was given a doll named Susie from the Tom Walsh family (whose daughter Mary married Ernest Hemingway).

One year Santa stopped at 223 Park Avenue, and gave a girl named Fern a special doll. It was bisque with jointed arms and legs. Later, Fern was surprised to notice that her Papa was wearing a pair of gloves just like what Santa had worn! That leads me to a little sidetrack. The year that I got a blue Huffy bike from Santa Claus, I was so happy because I knew that my parents could not have afforded to give me such a big gift!

Mailmen were recipients of varied gifts. In 1908, mail carrier Harry Geil kept a list of gifts from people along his route. Mrs. C. M. Bacon gave him a “lovely sweaterette,” a type of chest warmer, which sounds like a useful gift for a mail carrier. He received a big bag of popcorn from Mrs. J.M. Dean. St. Anthony’s Hospital gave him one dollar, while the Baptist minister Reverend McKee gave him 50 cents. The following year he received only two gifts from people on his mail route, both cash, 25 cents and 50 cents! Gifts he got from others included a bathrobe and socks. That was the year he gave a silver syrup pitcher to Edna and a souvenir spoon to Marjorie.

Jewelry has always been a popular gift. In 1930, Tillie Omang of Erskine received a diamond engagement ring from O. E. Jamtaas. In his words: “I asked Tillie if she wanted it. Didn’t ask if she wanted me, just the ring. She accepted the ring and me, too.”

If you still are stumped on what to give this year, don’t blame me! I gave you plenty of ideas!

Also find this story online: http://beltramihistory.org/blog
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