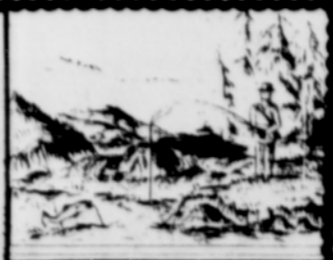


FROM  
The RIVER'S  
EDGE

By  
George MacAlevy



Christmas is often a time to reminisce. In Northwestern Pennsylvania, nearly every Christmas is a white Christmas. We lived on the banks of the Allegheny river which is variable in width from 1/2 to 1/4 mile wide in its middle 100 mile section. By Christmas, the river would be frozen over except for a lead twenty to thirty feet wide three fourths of the way across where the main channel ran. If you got new ice

skates for Christmas, you had a place to try them out. River ice was never smooth. The little wind ripples seemed to always be frozen right in the surface. So we couldn't skate too fast and it was harder work than it should be, but it was fun. Many winter mornings would see the thermometer sitting on -25 degrees at dawn. Snow was usually deep by Christmas, and if no new snow had fallen during the night, a favorite pastime was reading the story

told by the animal and bird tracks in the snow. The woods, too, were close at hand; clothing the sloping ridge behind the house. This was the home of white tail deer, ruffed grouse, cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, and assorted squirrels. The night animals were prevalent also; raccoons, opossums, and skunks. White pines and Canadian hemlocks occurred here and there in small patches to break up the monotony of the bare winter hardwood forest. These evergreen boughs, laden with snow, gave a Christmas card appearance to the woods.

A secondary road invaded the valley at this point, dead ending at the river in the center of the little community. If you came in on this road, there was no place to go except back out over the ridge. These secondary roads got plowed occasionally but never sanded. Every car wore tire chains all winter. By the same token, every road became a bob-sled run, as every road in that part of Pennsylvania is constantly busy going up and down hill and around curves. There isn't much that is level there until you get a little further west onto what is called the Allegheny plateau. The Allegheny mountains aren't high. They are mostly a series of ridges running North and South and are steep sided and closely packed together. This makes any road traversing these steep sided ridges a very interesting bob-sled run. There was always bob-sledding at Christmas, and the whole family participated.

Some of the farms had horse drawn bob sleds for all the winter hauling when the snow got too deep for the wheeled wagons and trucks. One of the more prosperous farmers who lived on the plateau even had a cutter. Perhaps I should explain. A cutter is a one horse sleigh built for two. It is a light weight very graceful looking sleigh. With a good horse, cutters could cover the ground rapidly. It was the custom to use sleigh bells on the harnesses of horses pulling

sleds of any sort. A winter hay ride on a big bob-sled was a popular party event with young rural couples. I used to envy them when they went by with the sleigh bells jingling, the horses blowing great clouds of steam from their nostrils, and the young people waving. Alas, I never made that scene. By the time my squiring days arrived, the bob-sleds were rotting away in some neglected corner of the barn; the horses were gone. Drums of gasoline and cans of oil sat where the oat bin once stood. The Fordsons, the John Deeres, and the Farmalls had taken over. No more are there sleighbells on the roads or on the moonlit winter fields to announce Christmas is here.

The first cold snap and the accompanying heavy snow sufficed to remove the last patches of old brown bark from the sycamores, leaving the trunks and limbs smoothly white. This darkened evenly as winter progressed. Against a winter sky the pale tracery of sycamore was accented by the still hanging seed balls. The sycamores grew well only near the river. From a vantage point by our giant sycamore, one could look out over the river to the open channel in the ice.

The frigid Nor'easters hit New England in December and drove inland our annual winter visitors from the coast. The Old Squaw sea ducks seemed always to be Christmas visitors on the Allegheny. On the ice shelf at the edge of the open lead they would be sitting in long rows, talking to each other.

Do these ducks talk! The Old Squaw is undoubtedly the noisiest species of all the ducks. The ornithological name is clangula clangula, and, believe me, they sure can clang. The drakes are mostly white with some black accents. Their most conspicuous feature is the three long tail feathers which curve downward. Even though a very handsome bird, they are not hunted as they are too fishy to be edible.

Many things were shipped in wooden boxes rather than cardboard in that time. These boxes, sturdily constructed of good wood, would often be used by distant relatives or friends for shipping Christmas gifts. These boxes were just like an additional gift to a boy. This was real wood, the very stuff needed to make a Go-devil. Did you ever make or ride a Go-devil? They are probably on the way back to popularity now, considering all the other contraptions that are being offered for sale to slide on the snow.

A Go-devil consists of a single runner with a post on it. Across the top of the post is a board to use as a seat. We would shape a runner out of the thickest piece of wood and chisel a groove on the running surface. Then we would bend a length of iron rod around the groove and staple it where it came up over the ends of the runner. There always were a few odds and ends of iron rod about a farm.

Once a Go-devil is made, you ride down hill on it. At least you rode it while it was running upright which was usually just until you hit the first bump. Then the Go-devil slewed out in one direction while you sprawled in the snow in another.

The only Christmas greens anybody bought was a sprig of mistletoe. Holly was not available outside the larger cities then. We collected ground pine in the woods and made wreaths of it. We never knew Christmas trees were sold. Everybody in our country village went to the woods and cut either a white pine of a hemlock.

Nobody had turkey for Christmas, that was a specialty reserved strictly for Thanksgiving. Ducks were reserved for New Years. Several big roasting chickens provided the Christmas fowl. All the traditional Christmas foods were prepared in advance. There were fruit cakes, light and dark; light and dark; plum pudding and currant pudding; dozens of kinds of Christmas cookies; hickory nut bread; black walnut cake; mince meat pies; and cider in all its forms, hot and spicy, cold and sweet, and hard. There was always a big thick ten pound bar of milk chocolate so hard it took an ice pick and a hammer

to break off a piece. Hard rock candy was the only other purchased sweet. But there was fudge, penuchi, divinity, fondant in several colors and flavors, and candied orange peel. There was the usual nut bowl with the assorted nuts that could be cracked with a nut cracker. There was also another bowl of nuts, black walnuts and hickory nuts, accompanied by a hammer and a sad iron. To eat these nuts, you needed a good hammer and a solid sad iron for an anvil to crack them.

Then, when all else had stuffed you to a surfeit, there was the bowl of apples and pears. Crisp cold Baldwin apples that had been just brought in from the back yard where they lay under a great pile of straw and snow. In the early fall they had been carefully layered there in the straw, and then covered with more straw. Between the straw and the snow, the extreme cold was insulated away from the center of the pile, so the apples never froze.

The pears; they were Kieifers, that hard Oriental pear. They were picked in the early fall, still green and hard. Each one was carefully wrapped in paper and laid out on a shelf in the stone cellar. Christmas was the time to eat the first of these treasures.

Yes, there must have been a few hardships too, but I can't remember them. I just recall the good things about those Christmases past.

## Huckleberry discussion set

A public meeting on the Huckleberry Planning Unit will be held Jan. 9, 7:30-9:30 p.m. at Dexter McCarty School, 1400 SE 5th, Gresham, announced Mt. Hood National Forest Supervisor, Wright Mallery.

The purpose of the meeting will be to:

Present the basic land suitability as developed by the Forest Multi-Discipline Team from field inventory; Review the public inputs received to date; Discuss the management assumptions, which are the forerunners to the management objectives which are the criteria by which alternatives are developed;

Involve meeting participants directly in the testing of the validity of the management assumptions.

"We encourage people interested in the management of this 32,000 acre unit to come to the meeting and be prepared to participate in the testing of these assumptions," said Mallery. "For without this

MORE CONFUSION  
The Republican party actually was the original name of the Democratic party, founded by Thomas Jefferson. In 1824 it split into two opposing groups—the National Republicans and the Democratic-Republicans, later called simply Democrats.

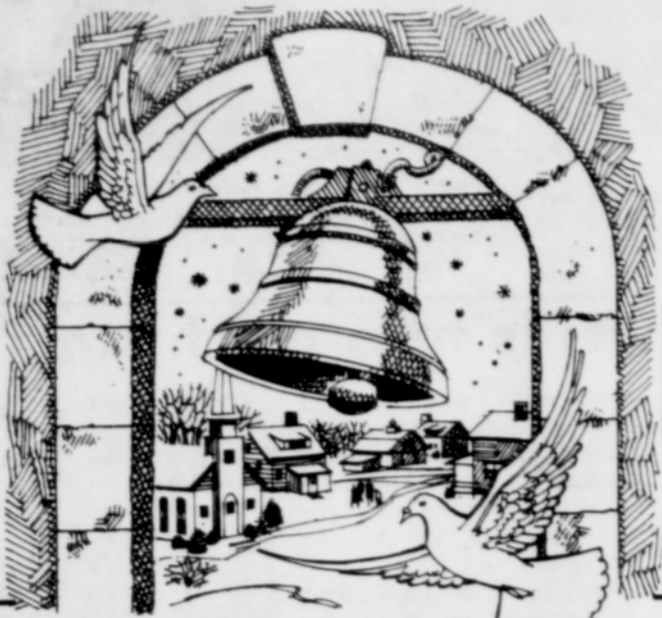
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involvement, we cannot get the necessary direction to take us to the next step of prepari management alternatives."



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## BEST WISHES AT Christmas

We're hoping the holiday brings you many joys shared with loved ones. It has been a pleasure to serve you.



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## A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS



FAIRYTALE PREPARATIONS, NOISES SPARKLING WITH WARMTH - SMELLS OF EVERGREENS AND COOKIES BAKING. SOUNDS OF LAUGHTER MIXED WITH THREATS FOR NAUGHTY CHILDREN. AND A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM THE PAST:

"BEYOND THE OXY STAR, LIKE THE DEW, I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU." psalm 109

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL ...



**AIRMAN FIRST** class Buddy Simpson completed basic training Sept. 28 at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. He has since been attending electronics school at Keesler Air Force base in Mississippi. Simpson and his wife are graduates of Sandy High, and will be living in Mississippi. Simpson is the son of Mrs. Esta Simpson, and Scott Simpson, of Welches.

**OLDEST NYC BUILDING**  
Fraunces Tavern, famous as the site of General George Washington's farewell to his officers at the close of the Revolutionary War, is the oldest building still standing in Manhattan.



## CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS

May the spirit of Christmas enrich your life and bring you joy and love... today and always.



From the Staff of  
**U.S. National Bank**  
Powell At Hood Gresham 665-1171



## Greetings

May the holidays shine brightly with good cheer, good health, and good fortune for all our wonderful friends and patrons! As we gather with our loved ones around the Christmas tree, we'll be thinking of you and wishing you the very best!

**NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY**  
(RESERVATIONS ONLY!)  
**CHRISTMAS DAY HOURS**  
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Hood Land's Most Scenic Spot, off Mt. Hood Highway, 17 miles east of Sandy

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