

Christmas in Bonner

1950's

The Bonner Hooligan

Good Friends -- Old World Customs -- and Black & White Snow

Good friends and neighbors was the magic formula which made Bonner such a great place to live. This small company town was like a melting pot of people from various nationalities who joined together with one common goal. Give an honest day's work to the Anaconda Company's sawmill for an honest day's pay. Housing would be provided to those who qualified at a reduced rental fee. Fire wood for heat and cooking purposes was also cut and delivered for about \$1.75 per dump truck load. A load of Planer Blocks for kindling wood cost a staggering \$0.75 per load. The millworker's houses all had board side walks which were kept clear of snow with an interesting looking wooden hand plow.

As the Christmas season approached, simple single lighted candle decorations would appear in the windows of each house along with Door Wreaths made of Pine Bows and Pine cones. The exception to this was a more elaborate light display in front of the White House (Main Office) on Silk Stocking Row. Out side Christmas Bulbs in the 1950s were large, colored, fist size contraptions which emitted a lot of heat. It was many a cold winter morning that I would stop to warm my hands on one of these bulbs as I delivered the morning news paper. It is interesting to note that these light displays adorned the Two Huge Spruce Trees which border the entry way to the White House. During the 1950s the Spruce Trees were about 25 feet in height.

A few of the mill workers living in Bonner immigrated from old world countries, and loved to reminisce over Christmas celebrations and customs in their native lands. It was a delight to hear these stories related in a heavy Swedish or Norwegian accent, not to mention enjoying old world cookies and other pastries as Christmas day drew closer.

Most of Upper Management lived on what is known as Silk Stocking Row. These folks were fine people and a little bit competitive. As a News Paper Boy, I worked this to my advantage. When I collected for the month's deliveries, I would start with the low man on the Totem Pole. At the next house I would mention the generous tip I had received from the previous house. Not to be out done I would receive a slightly larger tip here. This process was repeated until I reached the home of the Mill Manager. By this time I managed a handsome amount of tip money.

Christmas at Bonner was filled with School Plays, Church Activities and fun filled nights on the Sleigh Riding Hill, located behind the present day Post Office and History Center. This hill played host to a wide variety of Sleds, Toboggans and even a saucer shaped Coca-Cola Sign. Ed Olean was the most skilled operator for this contraption and gave most of us a wild and harrowing ride before crashing into a snow drift. Our nights on the Sleigh Riding Hill was further enhanced with a large Bon Fire located about mid way on the run. Sparks would fly up into the dark night air and a cheerful glow of fire light illuminated the sled run. Little did we know that we also contributed to the Black and White Snow which blanketed the surrounding area. The two large Tee Pee Burners from the Mill pumped tons of cinders into the air but at the time it was just an accepted way of life in a Company owned Sawmill town.

It was tradition to cut and smoke a stalk of Milk Weed on the last sled run before going home. Far up the draw on Bonner Mountain you could see the small red Milk Weed glows, and hear the whoosh of sled runners as each sleigh rider made a dash for home.

