

A PARSONAGE STORY – CHRISTMAS 1919

By June Campbell

With the passage of Prohibition in 1919, my Grandfather, William Maag, lost his job as Superintendent of the Vineyards for the Kelleys Island Wine Co. Included in his employment had been the company house at Carpenter's Point, now owned by Dick and Paulette McMonigal. Grandma Minnie Maag did laundry and cleaning for the West End Club next door. One of the Club member told me of seeing her name in the log with instructions to "Call Mrs. Maag when you leave so she can clean and wash the sheets."



Having six young children to feed and clothe, Will Maag needed a new job and was hired by the Village to be the Constable. New housing was also necessary, and the German Reformed Church parsonage was available. In 1919 they moved in, and Minnie did the janitorial work for the church. The older children worked together and mowed the grass for the two buildings.

Christmas 1919 found the family in the parsonage with their Christmas tree set up in the small room beside the dining room. The abundance of juniper trees in the island woods was where all islanders acquired their Christmas trees. It was decorated with a few precious glittery ornaments from Germany, home-made garlands of paper circles linked together and popcorn. A few real candles were carefully attached to the outer tips of the branches, and a Star of Bethlehem ornament placed on top. The candles were to be lit Christmas Eve after church services, but only for a couple of minutes and only when the parents lit them.

A few days before Christmas, Minnie was at a Ladies Aid Meeting at the Community Church on the corner, now Zion United Methodist. The oldest, Julia, age 12 and the next one, Oliver, age 10-1/2, were at their jobs helping other islanders. Lillian, age 9, was in charge of the other children, ages 7, 4 and 2, with strict instructions for chores to be accomplished for the hour they were alone.

Mischievous 7-yr old Lee, quietly slipped into the room and lit the candles. Within seconds the tree started to burn, and Lee yelled "Lilly, Help!" Lillian rushed in to see, told Lee to get the other kids out of the house, then ran for help. The next closest house was to the south, the Ed Bauman house, more currently Don Haas', and Lillian told me many years later, "It was such a long way to run, and I thought I'd never get there."

Baumans made the fire call. The fire apparatus was kept at the quarry and had to be hitched up to the horses. They quickly arrived at the scene. The damage at the house was minimal, the wallpaper in the corner burned, and the ceiling scorched.

My Grandma Minnie, the children's mother, heard the alarm and hurried home in fear for her children. All were found except the 4-year old, Howard. Then he was spotted standing in the crowd across the street with his hands in his pockets and all wide-eyed at the excitement.

The Maag family lived in the parsonage for only a year. Then the diminished population didn't have enough employment for a constable, so they moved to Sandusky in time for the children to start school. The Betzenheimer family moved in the next day.