

History Nook

Three Short Holiday Stories, Deer Harbor

by **SUZANNE P. GOTT**

for the *Orcas Island Historical Museum*

From 1940, a lively social life developed around the 1905 Deer Harbor Community Clubhouse.

Thanksgiving and Christmas were all about family, community, tradition and merriment. Holiday pot lucks became legendary.

Emma Maas and Dena Hudson roasted turkeys in the wood-burning range. Deer Harbor ladies brought side dishes and desserts, center pieces and starched white linens.

When it came time for cleanup, men washed heavy crockery, pewter tableware, large pots/pans, and put away tables.

One Christmas— between 1946 and 1952— stands out in memory. Women and children did the nativity pageant. Dorothy Montgomery accompanied on piano.

The children were told that Santa and reindeer would soon land on top of the three-seater Cadillac-version outhouse (with a cupola).

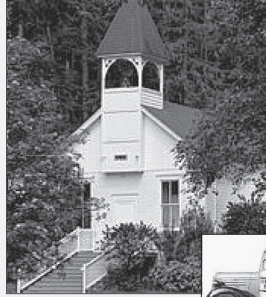
Meanwhile, hiding in the stinking cold outhouse, Santa and a couple of guys (helpers) waited for their cue.

But they had problem: a skinny Santa, an XXL red wool flannel Santa suit reeking of mothballs, and no pillows.

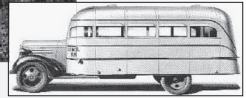
Their ingenuity to transform skinny Santa into fat Santa characterizes improv comedy at its best...

A jolly lumpy-chested Santa ho-ho-ho'd into the main room of squealing children.

Trailing behind one red pant leg was a banquet-sized white linen tablecloth that



(Photo courtesy of Deer Harbor Community Club)



had broken loose from his belly padding and slithered down the inside of his suit.

Santa didn't miss a beat. He handed out bags of candy bearing each child's name.

Another classic holiday activity was caroling to six to eight shut-ins after dinner time.

There was something wonderful about pushing the limits beyond common sense in that cranky yellow 1937 Chevy school bus.

Its cramped seating configuration— a center section of front-facing seats and two long side benches— added to the thrill, much like a death-defying theme-park ride.

Ralph Gott (Herculean driver) synchronized the hand throttle, ignition switch, gas-adjusting choke lever, double-shift double-clutch transmission and accelerator pedal, "arm-strong" steering and screeching manual brakes.

Dim headlights did little to illuminate his cautious navigation along slippery and bumpy farm roads, no better than one-lane deeply-rutted wagon trails.

Without coach heater or lights, giggling teens paired in back to find warmth and to share cookies or candy served by

Thank you to the History Nook Sponsor



Chele Enterprises
Insurance Services

Home | Auto | Commercial
Aviation Insurance

Michele Wiley
licensed independent agent

365 North Beach Road, #106, Eastsound
360-376-5707 office | 360-722-2802 direct

www.cheleent.com