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Retrospect

News from the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections at Winthrop University

December, 2007

Volume 3, Number 4

New Security Measure to Take Effect December 17



On December 17, 2007, Winthrop will institute a new access policy for Dacus Library. As a security measure, a Winthrop University identification card or a scheduled appointment will be required to access the Library's holdings and the Archives collection. Researchers should call, write, or e-mail before coming to the library. If you give us a call before you come by, we will be happy to meet you at the door and escort you to the Archives. This measure is being put in place to provide our students and researchers with a secure environment in which to work and so that we may better serve our patrons. The public is still welcome to use the Archives for local history research, genealogical research, scholarly research, or any type of research that pertains to our collections—we just ask that you let us know that you are coming. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr. Mark Herring, Dean of Library Services at (803) 323-2131, e-mail at dacusaccess@winthrop.edu, or write to 824 Oakland Ave., Rock Hill, S.C. 29733.



Christmas with the Knox Family in the Late 19th Century



Christmas in the late 19th century in the upstate of South Carolina was celebrated very differently from the manner in which we celebrate it today. People would visit with friends and family, weddings and quiltings were held, and small parties were given. Many men would spend part of the day hunting. There wasn't much gift-giving or weeks of frantic preparation like there is today. In the Archives we have a collection of diaries of the Knox Family of Chester County, S.C. that provide a grand glimpse of how Christmas was celebrated in the area.

Dr. John Knox was a physician in the mid-19th century. He kept a diary of his medical calls and personal activities. Although he was in Augusta, Georgia in medical school at the time, he writes about how he spent Christmas. "Monday, [December] 25th 1843 Christmas Day. To Episcopal Church. Mr. Ford gave an excellent discourse on the advent of Christ. I met with S. McDowell today at the Eagle & Phoenix. What a noisy day-popping, shooting-fireballs-rockets etc., etc., The weather clears." Fourteen years later, Dr. Knox was practicing in Chester County. He spent the day at home and saw a little snow "Friday, [Dec.] 25, 1857 At home. Rain, sleet, & snow. Clears off toward evening. Frost."

Dr. Knox's brother James N. Knox was a farmer in Chester County. The Archives has his diaries from 1859 to 1880. On Thursday, Dec 25, 1862 he writes "This morning is as still and quiet as the Sabbath. I have not heard a gun. There is no powder in the country and nobody to shoot. All our people is in the army from 18 to 50 years of age. Some clouds." On some Christmases James Knox spent the day doing what needed to be

done. In 1863, he writes “Christmas came in without the crack of a gun. I made a shoe today. Dry Christmas.” He always commented on the weather, the 1865 entry notes “A wet morning. A greate [sic] deal of shooting this morning. Altho day before yesterday was an exceeding cold day today is like summer.” In 1866 Knox wrote “Clear but beautiful morning-White frost. But little shooting this morning. About sundown the day has passed off quietly. My sons William, John, and Hugh set out with their guns early this morning to join some of their school mates in hunting so there is no person here but the remainder of my family-myself, my wife, & my daughter Jane. No persons passing. The day has passed off like Sunday. I have employed my time in reading and I wrote two letters—one to the Rev. J. N. McLeod of New York and the other to R. H. Miller of Kansas. I split some boards in the evening.” In the 1870s there seemed to be several snows and icy weather on Christmas. On Christmas Eve 1872 Knox writes “Cold cloudy day. Some sleet fell through the day. I went to the village. Sold 2 ½ dozen eggs. 25 cents for them,” and on Christmas Day “Sleeted nearly all night last night and is still sleeted this morning. The ground is covered. Sleeted all day. Verry [sic] cold. The wind blowing from the North East.” On Wednesday, December 25, 1876, Knox writes “X-Mas. It sleeted all night and to ten oclock today. Extreamly [sic] cold. The snow and sleet is about four inches deep. A verry quiet day not any stir going on. People keep with in doors.” He follows this the next day with “The sun shone out today and the face of nature looks grand. There is a heavy coat of snow on the trees. Verry little thaw today. A party at R. L. Millers tonight. Hugh went.” The face of nature looks grand no matter what day you look at it. We can learn much from our past if we only take a look at it.

Through the Casement—Window on Winthrop’s Past

Winthrop’s Christmas Ball



In the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, Winthrop students enjoyed an annual Christmas Ball. It was held in the Dining Hall, now known as McBryde Hall, on the Saturday before school let out for the Christmas holidays. Usually around 1,000 students and their dates attended the festivities which lasted from 8:00 pm to 11:45 pm. A student committee consisting of 10 to 12 students planned the dance. Decorations included a tree and some years had a theme. In 1954 the theme was Winter Wonderland. The bands for the dances included such groups as Henry Westbrook, Charlie Spivak, Tony Torre, and Glen Miller. It was a formal dance and the students shined in their beautiful dresses. Of course there were chaperones, and there was usually a receiving line which the President, his wife, various college officials, and student leaders greeted guests. Refreshments were served at intermission when the band took a break. The tradition of a formal Christmas Ball ended in the late 1960s.



For information on the Archives’ collections and holdings, how to donate historical material, or how you can help, contact:

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