

THE CENTER PIECE



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Christmas Past

We borrowed the headline for this piece from Ebenezer Scrooge. However, there will be no “Bah, humbug!” to read about. Let’s see what we can remember from past Christmases in our very ethnically diverse community.

Did you know that Santa Claus has resided in Brandon for many years? Those of us who have grown up in the Brandon area can vouch for that.

For many years, Richard Dahl, proprietor of Dahl’s General Store, turned into Santa during the Christmas season. When Richard was no longer able to play the part, Cliff Lund was anointed by the Legion/Auxiliary to take over. Cliff was joined by his wife, Dorothy, as Mrs. Santa.

Santa would arrive by Otto Weinrich’s cutter pulled by his handsome ponies, by fire truck, or

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Christmas Past	1 and 2
Millerville Christmas - Past and Present	2
Brandon Christmas Programs	3
Veterans’ Corner	4, 5, and 6
Merry Christmas from the Board of BHC	7

snowmobile. The snowmobile caused Santa some problems, however. As he was on his way, a snow bank mysteriously appeared in front of him; and he and his means of transportation tipped over spilling the contents of his bag all over the street. After brushing himself off and after comforting a little boy who saw the whole incident (and who thought Santa had lost his life), he flagged down Les Anderson and convinced him to take over driving the snowmobile. The change of drivers didn’t go so well either. As they were going over

(continued on page 2)



Christmas Past – continued

the railroad tracks, the snowmobile tipped over again. To make sure Santa arrived on time and to avoid any potential injury to Santa, the Brandon Fire Department took over the chauffeur's job.

The rich ethnic heritage of our community has an impact on our Christmas foods, celebrations, and traditions. We all remember the good old favorite Scandinavian dish, lutefisk, which we of Scandinavian/Finnish heritage all enjoy. Leo Smedstad and Oscar Pladson used to have this dried cod delicacy in a container in front of the Brandon Meat Market. They informed their customers that the reason their lutefisk was so good was that the neighborhood dogs would visit and add a little moisture and flavor to the fish. (No wonder our mothers soaked the fish in water before preparing it!)

Not to be outdone, our neighbors of German heritage had their favorite dish, schwarzsauer. The ingredients were vegetables; dried apples, prunes, and raisins; spices; blood from a goose; and other parts of the goose we might throw away today.

Our Polish friends probably feasted on fried carp and barszcz (beetroot soup) with uszka (ravioli).

Today, we still enjoy foods from our ancestors' heritage, such as pfefferneuse, lefse, sandbakkels, kolachies, fattigmann, Russian teacakes, etc.

Folks in Brandon and Millerville have always looked forward to the Christmas programs and concerts at our local schools and churches. The Millerville Church of Seven Dolours has a Potluck Supper and Christmas Program every year. The CCD classes have the program, followed by the choir singing Christmas carols. The parish hall is decorated with a beautiful tree and greens.

The photos below show the nativity scene with a live "baby Jesus" and the choir singing Christmas carols.

Millerville's history is one that commemorates the true meaning of Christmas.

Millerville Christmas – Past and Present



Brandon Christmas Programs

Advent Sunday is a special Sunday for Chippewa Church in Brandon. A beautiful tree with twinkling lights is in its place at the front of the church before the service. Each member brings a tree ornament to place on the tree during the service while the congregation sings Christmas songs. Ornaments for children who have grown up and left the area and members who have passed on are also included for beautiful memories. New members add their ornaments each year.

Some time ago, the Chippewa Sunday School created and presented a drive-through Living Nativity the Sunday before Christmas. The children were dressed in costumes sewn and provided by the mothers. (See photo below.) The children were bundled in their warmest clothes underneath their costumes.

Grace Lutheran Church in Brandon created a bit of Christmas history when they had their Christmas Eve

service in Ira and Lila Bergh's barn on their farm a mile southwest of Brandon. There were some animals in the barn at the time so the service included a partial nativity setting. This began during the Iran hostage crisis during the Carter years and continued until the hostages were released. Vern Challes hung a large star on the barn, which remained burning until the hostages came home.

Cold weather did not deter the folks at Grace from participating in these Christmas services. People would be bundled in their warmest clothes and wrapped in blankets. After the service, doughnuts and hot apple cider were served. If someone has pictures, the History Center would love to copy and preserve them.

What memories were created in the minds of the children and families! Our communities of Brandon and Millerville are proud of their Christian heritage.



Veterans' Corner – Brandon American Legion

The Argonne Forest Post #278 of the Brandon American Legion has been in existence since 1920. The purpose of the American Legion is to honor veterans of all wars and the men who died in service for our country.

When Post #278 was first organized, membership included veterans from Brandon, Evansville, Garfield, Moe, Urness Township, and Millerville.

Each year on Memorial Day, the Legion members would march to the Brandon Cemetery west of town on Old Highway #3 to pay tribute to their comrades. Memorial Day Services were held on the Brandon School Lawn until the Brandon Auditorium was built in 1936.

The Veterans of Foreign War, Post #936, also originated in Brandon; but in 1940, the Post was moved to Alexandria and is still active today.

After a short period of inactivity, the Argonne Post was reinstated on December 29, 1941, with 27

charter members. The first officers were Commander John Knudson, Treasurer Richard Dahl, and Adjutant Walter Hoving.

Following World War II, the Post had a membership of 117; and by 1949, there were 192, an all-time high in membership. As other neighboring towns started their own Legion Posts, membership numbers in Post #278 were greatly reduced.

Post #287 presently has about 60 members. Current Officers are Commander Lydon Sletto; Treasurer/Adjutant Bob Reynolds. The Post and Auxiliary continuing to be in active service to our community, longer than any other organization. Memorial Day Services are now held at the Veterans' Memorial Park located east of the grain elevator and at the Brandon High School.

The Legion and Auxiliary began sending high school juniors to Minnesota Boys and Girls State in 1955 and still continue to do so. The Legion has sponsored and still continues to sponsor youth baseball.

Continued on Page 5



Argonne Forest American Legion Post # 278 -- Brandon MN

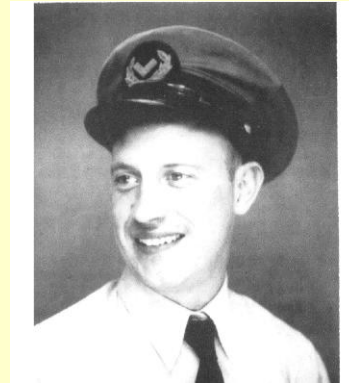
American Legion Post #287 – continued

Past Legion Post 278 officers include:

1944 – John Knudson
 1945–46 – Richard Dahl
 1947–50 – Richard Dahl (not totally verified)
 1951–52 – Walter Hoving
 1953 – Howard Vickerman
 1954–55 – Charles Rossum
 1956 – Leonard Schulte
 1957 – Melvin Lund
 1958–59 – Phil Lacher
 1960–61 – Clifford Lund
 1962 – Otto Weinrich
 1963–64 – Alfred Schultz
 1965 – Richard Buse
 1966–67 – Kenneth Johnson
 1968–69 – Warren Toft
 1970–71 – Nathan Tolifson
 1972–73 – Conrad Horst
 1974 – Clifford Lund
 1975 – Leonard Schulte
 1976–77 – Lloyd Sletto
 1978 – Roy Sletto
 1979–93 – Lydon Sletto
 1994–04 – David Fjoslien
 2005–07 – Charles Foslien
 2007–10 – Robert Olson
 2010–14 – Lydon Sletto

In 1993, during David Fjoslien's time as Commander, Grand Marshals were added to the Memorial Day Parade to honor veterans from the community. Clifford and Dorothy Lund were the first Grand marshals.

The American Legion has always played an important part in the history of Brandon, or of any community for that matter. Brandon's Memorial Day celebration draws many people. A delicious luncheon is served by the Legion Auxiliary in the Brandon School cafeteria. Thank you, Veterans!



Clifford Strom was born in Brandon to John and Julia Strom on August 31, 1916. He attended District 48 and Dunwoody Institute in Minneapolis, where he took welding classes. He moved to Milwaukee and worked at a civil defense factory, making parts for ships prior to World War II.

Cliff then joined the Merchant Marines. His group transported British and American troops and supplies between England and France, during the Normandy invasion. He was also involved in missions to New Zealand, India, and Africa. After the war, he owned and operated the Brandon School buses, a sand and gravel business, and Strom Construction. He was a lifelong member of Chippewa Lutheran Church of Brandon.

Cliff is survived by four children, seven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. He is also survived by one sister, and two sisters-in-law. He was preceded in death by his wife Viola, five brothers, one sister, and his parents. Cliff died on November 19, 2013.





Darold Plaster was born January 7, 1926, in Waterloo, Iowa, to Ted and Elda Plaster. He attended Brandon High School, graduating in 1944.

As a teenager, he helped his dad on the dray line, delivering coal and hauling materials to help build the Brandon water tower.

He enlisted in the U.S. Navy in January of 1944 and served on the U.S.S. Cullman, carrying troops from the Philippine Islands to Japan. After his discharge in June of 1946, Darold attended Dunwoody Institute in Minneapolis and graduated with an auto mechanics degree.

Darold worked 34 years for Brinks Armor in Minneapolis. He also worked for his son, John, on his garbage route and worked at the Brandon school as a janitor.

Darold was a member of St. Ann's Catholic Church in Brandon. He was a member of American Legion Post 278 for 70 years. Darold died October 4, 2013. He is survived by his wife, Rita; four children; seven grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; one brother; three sisters-in-law, one brother-in-law; and many nieces, nephews and cousins. He was preceded in death by one brother, one grand-daughter, and two brothers-in-law.

Memorials Received – Thank you!

In memory of Adam Webskowski – \$10

In memory of Darold Plaster – \$10

In memory of Agnes Lederman – \$10

In memory of Glen Whiting – \$10

In memory of Austin Kinsella – \$100

Thank you also to Rita Plaster for her \$200 donation!

Thank you, Operation Round-Up!

Thank you to REA's Operation Round-Up for their donation of \$600 which will be used to upgrade the aging History Center Computer system.

Thank you to the classes of 1953 and 1968 who continue to collect more funds for the Brandon History Center! We think they are issuing a challenge to other graduating classes!

Thank you also to Florence Bitzan for transcribing the Millerville City minutes from 1903–1909!

If you are considering a year-end charitable contribution, we are a 501(c)(3) non-profit; and therefore contributions are tax-deductible.

Consider making a contribution of \$100 or more. Your gift will be recognized by name on our contributor plaques. Also make use of our three membership options: Individual or family one-year or single life memberships.

Thank you again for all who have so generously contributed to the History Center. You help make this all possible.



**Merry Christmas to all from the
Brandon History Center Board!**



Front row: Marcia Bolin, Ruth Plaster, and Florence Bitzan

Back Row: Hilda Bettermann, Janet Nelson, Karen Thoennes, and Christella Korkowski

The Brandon History Center is a fun place in which to work and to explore. The items on display are so interesting and reflect the very origins of our little towns and reflect the people who have lived here—past and present.

This Christmas issue was a lot of fun to put together; it made people from Brandon and Millerville dig into old pictures and old memories to make it happen. If only we had more time and more room in our newsletter, we could reminisce about more Christmas happenings. Incidentally, some of our items on display include Christmas premiums or gifts given by Brandon and Millerville businesses to their customers and patrons, such as calendars, thermometers, etc.

Remember the gaily decorated cardboard apple boxes we used to buy from Dahl's and Schelin's Grocery Stores? Those delicious apples were the best—core and all! We could go on and on, couldn't we?

We wish you all a very blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Make memories this Christmas or start a tradition in your family. And then document it so that you can pass it on to your children and grandchildren. And we would like to hear about it!

Stop by in 2014 and spend some quality time looking into the past.

God bless us everyone!

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BOARD MEMBERS:

Hilda Bettermann
Florence Bitzan
Marcia Bolin
Christella Korkowski
Janet Nelson
Ruth Plaster
Karen Thoennes

We're on the Web! Visit us at:

www.brandonmn.com
