

Now, in the midst of the pre-Christmas season, my thoughts turned to my Uncle Albert and his journal entries of the late 1960s and early 70s. I have mentioned before that as a small child, I always felt sad that Albert and Mabel never had a Christmas tree. To me, then as now, the green balsam, brightened even more by lights and tinsel, was the highlight December. But, I know that my aunt and uncle did observe the holidays, so I decided to return to the late 1960s and see what was going on up the road.

At the beginning of December on two of the years in Albert's five year diary, he referred to the heavy winds of the night as "real tree trimmers." We have had a couple of those windy nights recently, too, one of which was the apparent event behind the total collapse of a venerable barn in the neighborhood. We drove past that farm on our way home from replenishing sheep minerals at the area feed store. I always looked closely at that barn, because I knew from old stories that at certain times, depending on light, sunshine, and season, a shadow that was a perfect image of a pig appeared on the polished tile silo. What I saw instead of a figure on the silo was the pile of wood and roof that had once been a barn full of cows.

Albert did make some Christmas purchases. I remember being the recipient of one of them. I had it for years until it completely wore out and disintegrated. In Albert's journal, I read about his purchases. He sent away for several copies of an old Sears Roebuck catalog. I believe it was 1902. Checking on it now, I see that one can still buy a copy of this catalog—really a piece of American history. In 1902 one could order almost anything from that company—in fact, there are several area houses that were sold by Sears, shipped by rail to various locations around the country. I know everyone in our household spent hours reading this old Sears catalog.

A lot of Albert's entries were understandably weather-related. And the variety of December weather during the five years of this journal is notable. In 1968 a December 5th blizzard closed airports and roads. Snow flurries and high winds were the dominant feature the same day the next year. In 1970 December 5th brought light rain and a raw wind. And in the last year of Albert's diary, he described that same day as "cloudy and cold with a freezing mist."

Albert and Mabel enjoyed feeding the birds—he mentions the chickadees, woodpeckers, nuthatches, etc. And a hen pheasant also visited the big hemlock tree in their yard. Albert put out feed for her there. And, they always had their chores. At 80 and 78 years old, Albert and Mabel still had their sheep flock, and many of the entries regarded chores, feed supplies, and incidents with individual ewes—all were named. Politics were often mentioned, and Albert kept up on other newsworthy affairs such as the Apollo project. And, he watched Gunsmoke on television.

Uncle Albert's life might have been a bit quieter than that of some members of the neighborhood, but it seems that he and Mabel had a full life and enjoyed the holidays just as much as the rest of us—even without a Christmas tree.