

At this time of year, I often think about Albert and Mabel, my uncle and aunt who lived up the north road from the homestead here. When I was little, it bothered me a great deal that they never had a Christmas tree. I know they celebrated the holiday in some fashion, and Mabel might even have a little decoration on a table in the front room, but there was never a tree. They had no children, so there was not that impetus for an extravagant response to the holiday. And now, looking back, I realize that a Christmas tree must have held no significance for them. At the time, though, it bothered me, and when I grew up, I vowed that I would always have a Christmas tree so that no little child would feel sad because I was missing out. And, as a matter of fact, I like the Christmas tree as much now as I did when I was a youngster.

Thinking about all of this led me to Uncle Albert's little diary of the late 1960s and early 1970s. What, I wondered, was on his mind during the Christmas season when he was approaching his 80th year?

On December 20, 1971, Albert wrote that "Mabel is in the Xmas card business."

In 1969, on the 21st, Albert wrote that my folks, Einar and Frances, and I stopped in with "a cap for Mabel and a flask for me." I seem to remember that I had knitted a warm woolen stocking cap for Mabel to wear when she went out in the cold to tend the sheep.

On Christmas Day itself, Albert described their holiday. In 1969, he wrote that they had dinner in Luther with Mabel's niece. He also noted that Apollo 8 was on its way back to Earth. He had written earlier that the spacecraft was circling the moon.

The next year, they made their usual trip to Mabel's niece for Christmas dinner. Albert and Mabel gave them a re-issued 1902 Sears and Roebuck catalog. And, they received a gift, too—a nice, handmade martin house for the purple martins that came regularly for the summer.

Albert had plenty of access to areas with spruce and balsam suitable for Christmas trees. He and Mabel certainly celebrated the holiday, as I discovered when I read his diary entries. So, I have to conclude that they just had no interest in having a Christmas tree. Maybe, an evergreen tree in the corner with lights and an angel didn't seem like a necessity or even a desirable little extra treat. So, I guess I should let that old lament go away and just enjoy the Christmas tree myself for what it means to me without indulging in

speculation about others' reasons for omitting a tree from their celebrations.

But, I can't help it! Call it a Christmas tree or a Winter Solstice tree, or something else, but I cannot abandon the belief that everyone should have a tree in the house this time of year. The significance to me is not religious. It is not pagan. It is just the tree itself that is its own reason. It is a time to Celebrate the Tree.