

A Kilmanagh Christmas Story

This story was written by Walt Rummel in 1979.

It first appeared in the Sebewaing Blade and the Progress-Advance.

Ever since that first Christmas, nearly 20 centuries ago, Christmas and giving have been almost synonymous.

Through the centuries, giving has been the symbol of that first - and greatest gift of all, when The Babe of Bethlehem was given to the World by a merciful, loving Father.

Gift variations by the millions have evolved from that beginning, some overly generous and others overly-niggardly, but residents in the Western Thumb of Michigan have long heard about the generous community that once gathered sacrificial gifts to present to their beloved, needy minister.

The community was Kilmanagh, and although no one remaining there today was a participant in that event of 1891, the memory of the spirit remains strong.

A minister who had a 55-year career, and started congregations in Kilmanagh, Elkton, Pigeon, Caseville and Lincoln - as well as others in the western part of Michigan - often recalled the event that occurred as he began his ministry here, near the tip of the Thumb.

It happened in Kilmanagh, named for a community in Ireland like this one, which was surrounded by heavy forests. Ninety-five years ago, Kilmanagh was a busy crossroads town in Huron County. At the time it had a busy grist mill, 2 general stores, a pharmacy, 2 physicians, a blacksmith shop and 3 saloons.

All goods that came into town were hauled over roads that changed with the season. Just before Christmas 1891, the roads that led through the woods and flatlands were so bad that the wagon that brought meager supplies of toys and ornaments from the nearby port of Sebewaing was forced to hitch a 2nd team of horses in front of the regular team, to make the last 2 miles into Kilmanagh. The shipment included nuts, candy, candle-holders, a few dolls, some jackknives, a few men's and boy's suits - and that was about all.

Two weeks before Christmas, Mrs. William Schumacher, wife of the young Lutheran minister in Kilmanagh, told 2 merchant-partners in one of the stores that chicken thieves had taken every one of the preacher's hens. There'd be no more eggs for the family and no more Sunday Chicken dinners.

For the pastor who had founded the Kilmanagh congregation 8 years earlier, when he was fresh out of seminary, there was more bad news to come.

He was a storybook country parson, covering circuits first on foot, then on horseback and by buggy. Frequently he encountered Indians and bears, sometimes wolves, on the way to conduct services for tiny groups of settlers who came in gingham dresses and homespun suits.



For 30 years Pastor Schumacher was to use Kilmanagh as a base to found other churches, several of which are still flourishing.

Those events still lay far in the future that bitter cold day in mid-December 1891, when Schumacher, returning from Elkton, encountered another problem. Shivering under the blanket of his cutter, the minister was attempting to guide his horse, Fanny, around the worst mud-holes, freezing up rapidly and forming hard, high ruts that bumped and jarred the cutter back and forth.

Suddenly there was a single sharp snapping sound and the cutter came to a quick stop as the minister saw that the horse's saddle belt had torn, leaving him stranded between farms in the swiftly gathering nightfall. The pastor trudged to the nearest home, where an obliging farmer tied the break with rope and twine, but issued a warning, "That you should get home, but better get a new harness before you try to travel any distance." The Schumachers had 4 children at the time and the minister's salary was \$450 per year. "To help him out," the minister was to receive 2 cords of split stove wood from each farmer, and there was an understanding that when they butchered hogs, they were to bring meat and sausage to the parsonage.

Even the cord wood deal wasn't going well. At a church meeting, one of the members arose to point out that some farmers were bringing big chunks of wood which they themselves couldn't split into firing size. "You shouldn't bring that kind of wood to your minister," he scolded, adding pointedly, "You're doing the same thing they did in the Old Testament when they brought crippled lambs for sacrifice."

The speaker, a woodsman himself, announced that he'd tried to split some

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PIGEON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 P.O. Box 523 • Pigeon, Michigan 48755
 989-453-3242

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Regular Meetings:

Second Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m.

Board Meetings

Fourth Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m.

Meeting Location

Woeke Historical Research Center.

Help!

The historical Society must replace the furnace in the Arthur Woeke Research building before winter. We have money in our coffers, but not enough. In the future we also must install heat in the Depot Museum and complete many maintenance projects that have been put off for too long. If you can, please make a donation today! Call 989-453-3242 today.



to all that trade with us. They get so much for a little money.

Good Things For Christmas Presents
 Perfume, per bottle1¢ to 15¢
 Stereoscope and 50 views69¢
 Post Card Albums5¢ to 1.50
 Rogers Knives and Forks 1-2 doz \$1.48
 Extra nice Photo Albums99¢
 Ladies' gold filled Watches\$8.00
 Boys Watches warranted one69¢
 Cuff Buttons, per pair5¢ to \$2.50
 Fancy Tie Beads10¢
 Boys Suits 9¢ to\$1.48
 Girls wool Skirts48¢
 Girls Coats48¢ TO \$1.78
 Extra Fancy Bear Skin Coats\$1.78
 A fine line of Toilet. Boxes .25¢ to 99¢
 Jewelry boxes3¢ up
 Ladies' Fur Sets99¢ to \$1.68

We have a great many mote things but no room to list.

Nuts and Candies

We bought a lot of fine candies, best of creams and chocolates.

3 lbs. fine mixed Candy25¢
 3000 lbs. good Wall Nuts will sell
 3 lbs. for25¢
 3 lbs. Mixed Nuts25¢
 4 lbs. good Peanuts25¢

Clothing Dept.

We have the finest line of Clothing in the Thumb. Goods that are up-to-the-minute in style. There is no reason why every man, woman or child cannot wear good Clothes.

Boys Knee Pants suits 8y to 16y99¢, \$1.29, \$1.48, \$1.78,\$1.98
 We have 85 Suits that got wet, will make good Suits\$1.68
 Other fine all wool goods \$1.99, 2.48, 2.98, 3.48, 3.98, nearly 1-4 others ask
 Men's Suits, some all wool58¢
 You can buy good Suits at..1-98 to 3.98
 All wool Suits that are up to the latest good enough for the governor. \$4.48, \$5.48, \$5.98, up to \$9.98,
 Boys overcoats, 8 to 20 yr. 99¢ to \$1.98
 Men's Overcoats\$1.99 to \$4.98
 We bought a lot of Astrican Cloth men's Overcoats, rubber lined worth \$12 00, our price\$6.98
 A lot of Men's fur and fur lined Overcoats\$9.75 to \$15.08
 Men's heavy Reefers\$1.98
 We bought a lot of U. S. army Overcoats, finest of cloth, with cape \$1.68
 We bought sample line of Men's Hat Caps, they are made of Cravenette cloth with fur lined ear bands, worth \$1 50, our price 48¢
 39 men's all wool vests, size 22 to 36 for 15¢
 All-wool Blue Coats and Vests, made for motor men, size 34\$1.68
 Sweaters25¢ up
 Men's odd Coats79¢ up

Ladies' Clothing

We bought the goods less than the cloth cost. Everyone should be dressed good

and warm Misses heavy wool Skirts 48¢
 Ladies' heavy wool Skirts 90 to 1.48
 Ladies' Suits worth from \$1.20 to 8.25 your pick for 2 98

Grocery Dept.

6 lbs. Gun Powder Tea\$1.00
 5 lbs. 200 Ceylon Tea\$1.00
 3 packages Yeast;10¢
 100 can Calumet Baking Powder8¢
 1 lb. can Baking Powder19¢
 4 packages Raisins25¢
 9 packages Raisins50¢
 20 packages Raisins\$1.00
 8 bars Jackson Soap 25¢, 1 box\$3.00
 Calumet Soap 12 bars 25¢, 1 box\$2.00
 6 bars Galvanic Soap 25¢ box\$4.00
 2 lbs good Coffee 25¢, 9 lbs. for ..\$1 00
 All kinds of Spice per lb.19¢
 7 lbs. Oatmeal 25¢, 5 lb. Boxes20¢
 8 lbs Rice25¢
 Ginger Snaps, per lb6¢
 by the box2¢ per lb.
 2 cans best Red Salmon25¢
 3 cans Tomatoes25¢
 2 cans fancy Peaches25¢
 We always sell Sugar and Flour at the lowest price delivered. Sugar now is \$5.00 per hundred, best granulated Best spring wheat Flour, bbl.\$5.75
 Sack finest Buckwheat Flour28¢

Tinware Dept.

14 quart heavy Pails22¢
 Large double Roaster25¢
 Pie Tins3¢
 Kettle Covers2¢ up

Dust Pans5¢
 14 quart Dish Pans10¢
 Copper Boilers No. 9\$2.65
 Copper Boilers No. 8\$2.50
 Fire Shovels3¢
 Graters6¢

Glassware Dept.

Sauce Dishes, dozen25¢
 1 dozen Tumblers15¢
 4 piece Table Sets25¢
 A large line of Fancy Lamps for Christmas presents90¢ up
 Small night Lamps complete15¢
 Large Water Pitchers19¢
 6 sauce Dishes and Fruit Dishes25¢
 Salt and Pepper Dishes4¢
 Nice Water Sets39¢
 4 Cold Blast Lantern Globes25¢
 6 common Globes25¢

Crockery Dept.

White Sets\$1 00
 1-2 doz, cups and saucers20¢
 1-2 doz cups with handles25¢
 Plates 1-2 doz10¢, 15¢, 20¢, 25¢
 Bowls3¢, 11¢
 Potato Dishes5¢ up
 Meat Platters3¢ up
 Chambers15¢
 A nice decorated Set\$2 00
 1-2 doz imported China cups and Saucers75¢
 1-2 doz decorated cups and saucers 60¢
 Decorated bowls2¢ up
 1-2 doz decorated Plates .26¢, 30¢, 40¢
 Decorated Potato Dishes10¢ up

BLACK'S DEPT. STORE. BERNE, MICHIGAN

Family Photos Part Of Community's Heritage

The Pigeon Historical Society has a large collection of historical postcards and photographs. Many of these images have been enlarged, and are on display in the Depot Museum and the Arthur J. Woelke Historical Research Center. We are always on the look-out for other pictures that are not in our collection. It is true that a picture is worth a thousand words, and we are in search of those images.

If you have family photographs which show something that you would consider of interest to the community, please contact a board member. We will be holding scanning events again this summer.

We are always looking for old photographs, negatives or slides. If you have any old boxes or albums of pictures, don't throw them away until we are given the opportunity to view them for potential inclusion into our collection.

Call the museum at: 989-453-3242, Duane Wurst at 989-545-5240, or any board member for more information.



Christmas Story



of the chunks that had been delivered to the parsonage. "Even with my own wedge and sledge, your chunks were so big and hard that I couldn't split them," he thundered at the members.

Keenly aware of Reverend Schumacher's chicken and harness problems,

the 2 young merchants offered their store as a collection center to raise money to help recover some of the minister's losses. They asked farmers to donate feed and money, but times were hard and cash was scarce. Eventually the fund reached \$8.

The merchants knew where they could buy a harness at the wholesale price of \$10, but the fund drive was still short and each day Christmas was coming nearer. Then the Ladies' Aid got into the campaign contributing egg money, saving a few cents here, a nickel there, even cutting their own Christmas buying. They brought coins from where they could find them, and finally raised \$4 more to total \$12.

Came Christmas Eve, and the ladies of the congregation and a committee of men finished decorating the tree in the little 18 x 36 foot church

that doubled as a school during the week. When the children's Christmas Eve service was over, the men and women took the minister and Mrs. Schumacher out to the barn behind the adjoining parsonage. They then opened the door to the horse barn, and there stood Fanny, resplendent in her beautiful black harness, the brass rivets shining and sparkling in the reflected light of a dozen kerosene lanterns. Surprised and full of appreciation for the generous gift, the Schumacher's were then walked to the adjoining chicken coop where they found double the number of hens they'd lost to the thief, all perched contentedly, looking up warily as the delegation entered. Besides that there were bags of oats for Fanny, and wheat and corn for the chickens.

"What a Christmas gift," the pastor murmured, eyes filled with tears. His wife sobbed openly as she nodded to the members and shook their hands. "How generous, how lovable you all are," they said repeatedly.

That was Christmas in Kilmanagh, 1891. Just a simple outpouring of love and appreciation at a period when the richest were poor by today's standards, and yet, the poorest could find a few pennies or a clutch of eggs to donate to a minister who was in even greater distress.

In 1915 Pastor Schumacher became minister of the Holland Lutheran Church, starting young congregations in nearby communities. The Schumacher's raised 6 boys and 5 girls, and some years after his retirement in 1938, the pastor moved to Detroit to live with a son, since his wife had died. He was an active minister for 55 years, and even

after retirement, he was strong and alert, accepting assignments to preach most Sundays. In his 90th year he was injured in a fall, and after lengthy hospitalization, he passed away November 15, 1949.

Today Kilmanagh is but a shadow of its earlier self. The 2 general stores have been closed for decades, one has been razed but the other still stands and is sometimes used as a reunion center. The grist mill is but a memory, and the one time hotel was torn down a quarter century ago. The bank building still stands but is no longer used as the one-time reunion site and clubhouse to which it had been converted. Blacksmith shops exist only in museums and the last combination gas station-service station closed years ago. Of the 3 bars that once were social centers and community gathering places, only Kelly's Bar still operates.

The Kilmanagh Lutheran Church, known as St. John's, is still active and a pillar in the small residential community that stands at the junction of Sebewaing, Fair Haven, Winsor and Brookfield Townships. The parochial school, known as Bach-Kilmanagh Lutheran School, is modern and well-staffed, training 38 students. One mile north stands Kilmanagh United Methodist Church, with its pleasant parsonage. (Please note this was written 1979. Since 1979 Kelly's and the School have been closed. St. John's is still very active and it is hoped that the Kilmanagh General Store can be saved as a museum. An organization, The Kilmanagh Historic Preservation Group, has been established and will soon announce plans for the Museum. If you would like to be involved in this effort contact Duane Wurst at 989-545-5240 or Susan Schweitzer at 989-453-3638.

A Kid Growing Up On Saginaw Bay Rescue In The Rush Lake Quicksand

Part II in a series by Jim Leinbach

Man is no stranger to conflict and it can come in many forms; however, man vs. nature is often times the most dramatic, and it can change our lives in an instant. Nature, in its attempt to balance itself, can bring serenity one moment and chaos the next, only to quickly return the scale back to serenity again. As humans we cope with this pendulum of nature with acceptance and trust in God. But the conflict experience can be traumatic leaving us shocked and shaken

On this particular day man had responded to his survival instincts and without thought to his own safety. Two children trying to find a good fishing spot had gotten mired in the quicksand on west Rush Lake. Their screams had alerted the adults on shore who immediately responded by running wildly through the rushes and brush tangles in an attempt to rescue them. Their decision was a bold and courageous response, but it was fraught with danger, for almost immediately the men and women rescuers were themselves trapped in the muck and were in a struggle for their own lives.

Our boys, floating amongst the lily pads on the lake and pulling up bluegills and bullheads, were alerted to the screams of the adults and children. Instantly they determined that something had gone terribly wrong on shore and began paddling frantically toward the anguished sounds. They had figured correctly that the kids seen earlier with their fishing poles had gotten stuck and what they were witnessing was the adults frantically running to help them. Anguished screams rose on the summer air as our crew began to witness the futility of the adult's attempts. Through the brush and weeds the boys could see a man and a woman who had sunk chest-deep into the mud and paddled madly toward their outstretched arms. Plowing through the rushes the kids reached the two at a crucial moment as only their heads and arms were now

visible. Two of the crew grabbed the hands of the woman while the boy in the bow grabbed at the man. Oh, it was a wonderful attempt at salvation, but the panicked adults, wide-eyed with horror and screaming maniacally pulled too hard on the kids and the flat-bottomed boat tipped crazily to one side and then flipped over into the mire.

Man's conflict with nature had reached a pinnacle. As the adults slipped deeper into the mud they dragged with them the young rescuers and an immense disaster was at hand. The only hope left for all was the upturned boat, and with the Grace of God those in the water were able to grab a hold onto the craft and hang on for dear life. The man and woman had relinquished their hold on the kids and for a moment ceased their downward movement into the quicksand. The strength and agility of the youths allowed them to crawl onto the bottom of the boat but the adults remained in great danger. True, their heads were above the mire but the denseness of the mud prohibited their movement. Tears streamed down their cheeks and panic and horror contorted their faces.

This was an era where cell phones were non-existent, so a call for professional rescue was impossible. However, on shore some of the people had gotten to their cars and were racing wildly out of the woods to find help. The boys perched on the boat's bottom were hanging on to the adults with all their might and one of them had managed to pull up the cinder-block anchor and with his knife cut the block loose. Now, with the anchor rope at hand, they were able to tie it to the wrists of the floundering two and a bit of stability for them was obtained. But close by in the rushes intense screams and cries continued to fill the air. People other than the immediate few at the boat were in extreme peril. Chaos and pandemonium filled the summer air.

Next: Salvation for some, death for others

"If Only The Walls Could Talk" "Christmas As I See It"

By Denny Esch, Pigeon Historical Society President

It would have been fun to have several people, a half dozen or so, from the age of 8 to 80 give us their perspective of Christmas and what it means to them today. I think at different ages Christmas time would take on a different meaning. Of course I think of these great ideas when the deadline for this publication is due and in this case overdue. So here we are, this is my take on it. . .

When I was eight, give or take a year or two, Christmas to me was seeing the Jolly St. Nick walking the streets of downtown Pigeon. He would be carrying a "big bag " over

his shoulder, and that bag was full of small bags of peanuts and candy (it was before there were any peanut allergies) and of course there were tickets given out to put our name on for the weekly drawing. I don't remember if I ever won anything or not but I do remember a gazillion people walking the sidewalks and packing the stores. Remember the Polewach's Store and their Red Goose Shoes. What ever happen to that Goose that laid an egg for a prize? The Gamble Store was where I saw my first Daisy BB Gun and it was a great place to buy mom a new iron or fry pan. But my dad thought it would be better if we went to Ors Drug Store and got mom some perfume instead. As I got older

I realized it really was a better choice. Christmas or not, it was always a treat to stop at Schumacher Meat Market as kids always got a free Koegel's Hotdog. What a trademark that turned out to be. The last thing before Christmas was a stop at Heckman's Barber Shop. There was always a wait even with two and three chairs going on a busy Saturday. The big moose head hanging high on the wall was really impressive to a kid like me.

It is time as Santa makes his way to the old hay wagon in front of the town hall. How he got up there I couldn't see, but soon he would reach deep into a big box and pull out a small piece of paper. Then hand it to someone else to read the name. Oh how I hope they

would call my name. The Christmas prizes were great!! Football and helmet, board games, baseball glove and bat, paint by number sets, etch-a-stench, potato head and of course all that girl stuff (Dolls and whatever else they play with) and the grand prize being two new boy and girl bikes. . . did they call my name?

In the big picture of life, it really doesn't matter if I won a prize or not. What does matter is the true meaning of Christmas. "If only the "old farmhouse" walls could talk", you would hear dad reading the real Christmas Story.

Have a Merry Christmas and a Great New Year!!



1966 Pigeon Christmas Drawing

Bicycle winners in the final children's drawing of the 1966 Christmas season, sponsored by the Pigeon Chamber of Commerce, were Rodney Stalter, son of Mr. and Mrs. Darwin Stalter, Pigeon, and Renee Born, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Henry, Born, Elkton. This brings to six the number of bicycles given in this year's prize drawing for area youngsters.

Also winning prizes in the drawing held Saturday were Sue Anderson, Toni McArdle, Pattie Buchholz, Clarence Eisinger, Connie Damm, Philip Klein, Ricky Fritz, Elizabeth Good, Linda Geiger, Carl. House, Rodney Fluegge, Cindy Buchholz, Karen Wisenbaugh, Shelly Elenbaum, Tommy Diebel, Mary Hamilton, Jill Chiotti, Michael Fritz, Cathy Kretzschmer, Connie Joe Fritz, Beth Foy, Joe Good, Dennis Nieschulz, Sheril Buchholz, and Wendy Dast.

Adult cash prizes of \$25, \$15, and \$10 went to Wayne Schember, Orville Yackle and Vincent Strum, respectively.

Thursday, December 22, is the date of the final Christmas drawing in Pigeon, when merchandise prizes with a total value of \$1,250 will be awarded.

December 22, 1966 Pigeon Progress

Thanksgiving Morning Fire

Stock of J. Trunk and Mrs. Hess Destroyed; Cramer Building Nearly Total Loss.

A fire which started in the store of J. Trunk in the Cramer Building was discovered by a passing motorist about 2:30 Thursday morning of last week and resulted in the complete loss of the general stock of J. Trunk and also a complete loss of the millinery stock of Mrs. E. F. Hess.

Mr. Trunk's stock was destroyed by fire, smoke and water and the loss by Mrs. Hess was caused by smoke.

Mr. Trunk places his loss at between \$4,000 and \$5,000. The Trunk loss is partially covered by insurance. The loss to Mrs. Hess is about \$500, covered by insurance. Mr. Cramer who owns the building places his loss at \$3,000, covered by insurance.

When the fire was discovered and the fire department appeared on the scene the entire interior of the Trunk store was in flames. The fire fighters succeeded in confining the fire to the interior of the building. It is believed that the condition would not warrant its repair. The cause of the fire is unknown.

The building was erected in 1893 by Herman Kleinschmidt and was later occupied by the late Joseph Schluchter for a general store. In the late nineties E. F. Hess used it for a clothing store and following him for a number of years it was used for a bar by both George C. Powell and William Karr.

Pigeon Progress - December 4, 1931

We'd love to see you on our Team!

An individual or business can become a member by contracting any active member or by sending your tax deductible cash or check to Pigeon Historical Society, 59 S. Main St. / P. O. Box 523, Pigeon, MI 48755. Dues are renewed at the annual meeting each year.

Individual Membership: \$10.00 (active member with voting privileges)

Life Membership: \$120.00 (active voting member with lifetime privileges)

Supporting Membership: \$15.00 (non-active supporting member)

Business Membership: \$20.00 or more (contributing member non-voting)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Everyone is welcome to attend our meetings. Be our guest and become a member!