

Christmas in Woodland Park, 1960s

By Steve Plutt

In years past, the greatest of all holidays in Woodland Park was Christmas. It was a wonderful time for adults but for the kids, it was an incredible experience. As recently as the early 1960's the spirit of Christmas was unique in Woodland Park when the population was but 700 souls. The houses around town were decorated with wreaths and Christmas lights and back then, Woodland lacked all the light pollution that exists today, so all the houses had a nice warm Christmas glow cloaked in a snowy darkness.

The stage at the old school gymnasium (now the Cultural Center) was perfect for the Christmas plays and the school band and choir. Christmas cheer was everywhere but ice skating at the pond was a special time during the holidays. We even had a yule log in the pond fireplace that was perfect for warming up and drinking hot chocolate. Bert Bergstrom always would dress up as Santa and would provide stocking filled with Christmas goodies for every child in town.

Hay rides were not uncommon and were fun times with lots of Christmas songs being sung. Johnnie Wondergem (former mayor of Woodland) made Christmas wreaths every year for the town. The local Lions Club sold trees at the Go-kart track at the Green Mountain Falls exit. The Manitou Park Grange, the Eastern Star and Mason's always had their holiday dinners and most of the church organizations had their Christmas plays and get-togethers. Ute Pass Courier owner Aggie Schupp put on a Christmas Light Contest every year with prizes to the winners. The Progressive Dames Extension Club would fill baskets and deliver to the nursing home in Cripple Creek and shut-ins living in Woodland. Yes, it was a Norman Rockwell place to be!

The Pond

The Pond as we called it, was a fun place in the winter time. It is where Eric Dickson helped me to learn how to ice skate years ago. As I got comfortable on skates, I would join in the games with the other kids. We'd play games on the ice like tag and black snake. We'd have a big ole fire in the fireplace that used to be close to the waters edge. Roasting hot dogs and things like that were always fun. Especially since we didn't have adult supervision, we were all on our own.

It was really great whenever the town would send over the fire truck and flood the pond because then the ice was a lot smoother and easier to skate on. Then one year, Chet Koons put up lights and it was fun skating after dark. I never did say it, but "Thanks Chester!"

This is also one of the places where all of us kids would be in the summertime to do nothing but have fun. We'd fish there a lot and wade out into the water. Once you got out though, you had to pick leeches from your legs. It was a good place to go with your friends to just screw around and do nothing or see how many skips you could get with a rock across the water. I remember we were fishing one time off the dam. Terry Register had a brand new spinner he just paid 65

cent for. He was really anxious to see how it'd do, he cast it out for the first time and suddenly you heard a yell coming from Mike Hamm. The spinner caught Mike by the ear big time. We had to cut Terry's line and take Mike down to the drug store where Tom Bonifield (the pharmacist) got it out. Terry never did see that 65 cent beauty again.

When we got into our mid-teens, it was one of two places we'd go to smoke cigars or cigarettes; the rodeo grounds was the other. One time we were all by the fireplace, smoking up a storm when all of a sudden a big blue 1956 Chrysler, that was the size of a small ocean liner, came driving across the dam, it was my dad (there used to be a road that came across the dam, from Park St cutting over to Henrietta). You should have seen all the cigarettes flipped out into the water in record time. We didn't get caught as he was just headed to Berts for a beer and didn't even appear to notice us.

The Pond is where I first found out what it means when your horse starts pawing at the water when you ride her out a little ways. Good thing it was a hot day. The Pond is also where you went in the summer when the pop truck delivered at the Ute Café. We'd be lurking in the shadows by Terry Regester's house and after the delivery man would go inside, we'd run by the truck and each grab a bottle of pop and run up to the pond. Nothing like sucking down a hot bottle of Coca-Cola, ick!

Right by the pond was a baseball diamond. It was where the City Hall buildings are today. It was also a good place to be in the summer along with the rodeo grounds. Or hiking up Goldie or Baldy, riding your horse down the old road to Green Mountain Falls to go swimming. Riding your horse out to Manitou Lake or Temple Hills or Red Rocks. And all the other things we'd do in Woodland Park years ago.