

# Christmas in 1912, 1962, Now

## *Tales of Earlier Days*

By **Bob Dewel**

Has Baraboo ever had as busy and active a public holiday season as we have enjoyed this year? It is not even over yet--we still have Christmas Day and New Year's Day to go. In this article we'll compare the holiday season to the way it was both 50 and 100 years ago, back in the "Good Old Days". You may be surprised!

First, the holiday season today, in 2012. It really began back in November. It is hard to explain to our Florida and California friends, but we Wisconsinites are a really hardy bunch, especially in Baraboo. Where else would you find a parade in November, in cold weather, not to mention that it is lighted, and is at NIGHT? There were marching bands and huge floating gas figures, plus lighted floats. It's a great way to jump start the Holiday Season, especially with Santa in a huge sleigh.

The well-attended parade was only the beginning. After a short break for Thanksgiving, a full schedule of holiday events began. At the risk of failing to list a performance, we list the public events as we recall them.

Dec. 2, Madison Brass Band and Ringling Mighty Barton Organ together.

Dec. 6, Tonic Sol Fa at Ringling Theatre, a nationally recognized male quartet.

Dec 7, Simply Saxes and the Cheddar Chicks at Booksmith.

Dec. 7 and 8, Very Merry Holiday Fair.

Dec. 8, Ringling Theatre and Sauk Co Historical Society, Edwardian Christmas Event.

Dec 9, Handel's Messiah, Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra, at Ringling Theatre.

Dec. 11, Schubert's Excelsis, UW-BSC and 62 vocalists, piano, harp, Methodist Church.

Dec. 12, Living Crèche at Ringling Theatre.

Dec. 15, Elk's Children's party, a traditional for 60-70 years.

Dec. 14 and 15, movie, It's a Wonderful Life movie.

Dec. 16, High School Holiday Concert

Dec. 21-23, The Muppets Christmas Carol, movie at Ringling Theatre.

Dec. 21, Caroling, Caroling organized by Booksmith.

Dec. 31, New Year's Eve, Theatre and Booksmith.

### Events in 1912

To research 1912, we scanned the news columns of the Sauk County Democrat and the Baraboo Republic starting on December First. To our astonishment, the only story about holiday activity was of the usual holiday concert at the school. This was in the small assembly room of the old red brick building on First and Oak, with no auditorium or gymnasium. Total proceeds were "about \$35".

There was also a short 1912 article from the town of Franklin headed "Young Man...laughed too loud at Christmas Exercise...having imbibed too freely in the fountain of joy, he thought he was Santa Claus." Hauled to Baraboo, he "dropped \$21.42 into the stocking at the justice court." The only other mention of Christmas or the holidays was in the merchants' newspaper advertising.

### Events in 1962

We now turned to the News-Republic files for 1962 in hopes of finding greater mentions of the holiday season. We were rewarded with only two public events, despite a lot of local news. Along with profuse mention of Christmas in the merchants' advertising, there was a massed carol singing on the square, and a program

in the gymnasium of the brand new high school. On Christmas Day, the temperature dropped to minus 25 degrees!

It appears that there is much more emphasis on the Christmas story and other holidays today than the old days, despite claims by some of a "War on Christmas". The Holiday Season includes not only Christmas for Christians but recognition of the winter solstice on Dec. 21, the start of a New Year, and the advent of snow. Winter is recognized by the popular songs "Let it Snow" and "Walkin' in a Winter Wonderland". There is plenty to celebrate for everyone's taste.



The Booksmith Carolers

Strolled the Downtown Area