

Vancouverites celebrated holidays in great outdoors swimming, skating, running

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since a road did not yet exist. Captain John Thain, brother of the sawmill's stevedore, played Saint Nicholas (Santa), handing out presents to the settlers' children.

Matthews also recorded the Christmas celebrations of Angus C. Fraser and his wife, who settled on Burrard Inlet in 1877, carving their home out of "dense forest." Mrs. Fraser decorated the home with cedar boughs and cooked Christmas puddings and fruit cakes. Christmas dinner was a wild goose or mallard, or venison purchased from Indian hunters. Toys for the children were mail ordered in October, and arrived by ship from San Francisco in December. The family celebrated with blackberry wine, taffy pulls, Christmas carols and charades. Homeless men with no families of their own were often invited into the home to share in the festivities.

Over at the logging camp at Jericho Beach, Jerry Rogers treated his loggers to a Christmas dinner of venison, suckling pig, freshly killed turkeys (as opposed to the less desirable cold-storage turkeys) and the "finest of bunch-grass beef."

"Jerry Rogers was always proud of his Christmas dinners. They were high class and put on the table with great ceremony," recalled local historian Dr. W. Wymond Walkem in 1914. "[A] monster plum pudding



Back in the day skaters could count on taking a Christmas Day turn around Trout Lake. Date of this photo is unknown.

Stuart Thomson photo courtesy City of Vancouver Archives CVA 99-1902

with a sprig of holly and aflame with brandy wound up the feast."

By the 1890s, visitors to Vancouver could sit down to a sumptuous Christmas dinner at the Leland House hotel, owned by C. Edwards. The menu for 1892 included such delicacies as leg of mutton with caper sauce, turkey with oyster sauce, stuffed green goose, duck with potato dressing, lobster salad, fricandeau

of veal with mushroom sauce, or apricot fritters au Kirsch. Dessert included Christmas plum pudding in brandy sauce and a selection of pies, fruit and cakes, and the meal was topped off with sherry or port, wine or ale, and champagne or "waters" such as Apollinarus, ginger ale, soda or Harrison Spring Water.

"All kinds of American fancy drinks at the bar," one advertisement

promised. "Choice cigars."

By 1910, Vancouver stores were sending out Christmas cards and brochures promoting presents for kids. In 1914, Sam M. Scott—"boys' clothes specialist"—offered a special treat for boys whose parents bought them a pinch-back Norfolk suit.

"On Christmas morning when you slip into your new suit you'll have another surprise coming," one

ad promised. "In the right hand trousers' pocket you'll find the dandiest little knife that one boy ever told another about. It's a Christmas present to you from Sam Scott—in fact, he put his name on it to let you know it's from him."

In 1928, Spencer's department store's fifth-floor toy department promised an "entrancing array of all that is dear to the juvenile mind." A store newsletter was also full of handy suggestions for gifts for mom and dad.

"For the men folk, we have just the latest in radio ornaments. Small Egyptian figures form a pretty setting for an ash tray and are both dainty and practical." (Clearly, the pitch was aimed at wives.)

"And for the very popular girl who is ours in all sorts of weather, a very appropriate gift would be a corsage of our new rubber flowers."

Those of an athletic bent could celebrate Christmas with vigorous physical activity. In the 1910s, the YMCA held an annual Christmas run through Stanley Park to Lumberman's Arch. In the 1920s, the Vancouver Amateur Swimming Club met at English Beach, snow or shine, for a Christmas Day swim. Winters were cold enough, back then, for skaters to enjoy a day of ice skating on Lost Lagoon or Trout Lake.

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