



Do-it-yourself Winter Sports

Wintertime in northern Wisconsin at the turn of the century is shown in this reproduction of one of Walter Kuse's Christmas sketches done in 1955. This scene is an event from his boyhood.

The children (possibly Walter and his Bolz and Kuse cousins and some of the neighbors) skied on the hill near what is now the corner of Wheelock Street and Billings Avenue in Medford.

Cousin Harry Kuse had “store-bought” skis but the rest had made theirs by steaming barrel staves until they were bent into a reasonably proper shape. (Barrel staves were the curved wooden boards held together by hoops to make barrels.) Leather straps were then attached and trial runs conducted. These devices required rather expert maneuvering if the owners were not to be propelled headfirst into a snowdrift.

After such snowy adventures, the children came into the log house to warm themselves around the glowing wood heater in the front room. There was the aroma of spruce boughs and candle wax from the “Tannenbaum” that stood in the corner. Its branches held tinsel rope, tissue paper roses made by Aunt Minnie and, best of all, edible decorations such as candy cherries and strawberries, and decorated Christmas cookies cut out with hand-soldered tin cookie cutters. Sometimes, when the children played games indoors, the winner was given a prize to munch from the Christmas tree. Some of the “children” of those days also remembered looking at pictures in the big German Bilder Biebel or illustrated Bible or reading the storybooks received as Sunday School Christmas gifts.

Creativity was necessary and evident in the simple holiday activities of pioneer families.