

The Bethel Journals

The First Living Nativity – December 1964

First news of plans for a living Nativity scene pageant was published in the November 19, 1964 Citizen. A group had met with Sue (Mrs. Charles) Farrar on Monday, the 16th, to hear the plan and offer their interest and support. Mrs. Farrar had already written to the town's clergymen to enlist their church's support. Those who had already signed on as helpers were Bruce Bailey, animals; Mrs. Roland Glines and Mrs. Richard Littlefield, costumes; Mrs. Donald Brown, properties. Others present were Mrs. Robert Keniston, Mrs. John Frankevicz, and Mrs. James Fiske.

A live Nativity presentation has never been attempted in this area and could well become an annual event during the Christmas season,

The Bethel Community Room would be the place to assembly properties and conduct rehearsals. It would also be the "back stage" warming room during the night of presentations.

Each week thereafter the Citizen published news updates to keep townspeople informed on the state of preparations.

Bethel's first Living Nativity Scene will be held on the Bethel Common Sunday December 20, 1964. The pageant was to be 30 minutes long and presented three times at 4:30, 5:30 and 6:30 PM.

The Boy Scouts under the supervision of Ernest Perkins and Stanley Davis are designing the manger and stable.

Crescent Park School children under the guidance of Principal (Ralph) Ryder and Helen Varner are making the stars that will be placed on all roads leading into Bethel to direct all interested visitors to The Manger.

Mrs. George (Faye) Taylor and her son Bruce created life sized hand painted nativity family figures which will be placed in the stable for the remainder of the season after the pageant.

Blake McKay and Fred McMillin were in charge of lighting while Paul Pierce has the responsibility for special lighting effects.

An SOS was put out for a black sheep. Contact Bruce Bailey.

Claus Weise, program director of WMTW TV, expressed interest in televising the pageant (to be shown) on Christmas Eve.

And finally show time arrived on December 20. Bethel's first Living Nativity Scene, was memorably presented Sunday on the Bethel Common was a tremendous success, being viewed

by an estimated crowd of 1,000 people. All Bethel churches participated and the success of this impressive pageant can be attributed to the support of all Bethel people.

Those in the cast included Robert Keniston who gave a running commentary; bell ringers were Mike Tibbetts, Mike Chretien, Lincoln Fiske Jr., Seth Timberlake, Peter Kailey and Steve Hastings. The other participants were Margaret Fiske, Greg Glines, Carolyn Fiske, James Fiske, Lawrence Davis, Roland Glines, James Lowe, Daniel Vogt, Claire Bachelder, Merton Brown, Timothy Hutchins, James Davis, Warren Tibbetts, Allen Walker, Randy Chretien, Roger Buck, Jack Brooks, David Thurston, Larry Jacobs, Peter Burgess, Richard Waldron, William Eames, () and Douglas Farrar.

After the performance was over Mr. and Mrs. James Fiske invited the cast and their families to The New Yorker Restaurant for supper.

Four days later, on Christmas Eve, December 24th, a film of The Living Nativity Scene was presented on Channel 8, Mt. Washington TV, at 5:30 PM and midnight.

In 2011, Carolyn (Carry) Fiske added some more personal memories about the Living Nativity Scene's opening night: Margaret Fiske was my aunt who was visiting at the time. She played the Virgin Mary.

"I was baby Jesus. My mom tells me that she was the only mother in town who would let her baby out in the cold. "

Carry's Mom, Mary Fiske, had these comments about that evening: There were three showings and for the last one a doll was used.....it was very cold !!! And you (Carry) were really bundled up! And you didn't cry! The Historical Society had a video of the event but I don't know if it's still available. (It shows Virgin Mary (Margaret) walking away from the stable in her L. L. Bean Boots!) I remember that it was a very special event in the Community and Sue Farrar was on top of everything! Planning started in early December.

It was a nice moment.

The part of Joseph was played by Greg Glines. My dad, Larry Davis and Rollie Glines were wise men. They really didn't have costumes, but rather they simply wore some heavy velour drapes from my grandmother's attic. According to my mother, none of the costumes were stitched. She says "If you had shiny material you just wrapped it around you and pinned it so it would stay on. Mom thought possibly Mike O'Donnell was involved, too, but maybe that was in the second year.

Mom says the event was much bigger than it eventually became as the years passed. At the time it was new, exciting, and really drew the community together. Sue Farrar managed it with the same attention to detail that she did for her dance recitals. Rehearsals started early in December, and everything was very well orchestrated.

My sister Cindy was baby Jesus the next year in 1965.

Margaret Fiske was my father's sister and if I remember right, she was just visiting. She played the part of the Virgin Mary. I was baby Jesus. My mom tells me that she was the only mother in town who would let her baby out in the cold. Mom, that's all I remember. Anything else?

Carry

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