



PHOTOS PROVIDED

At left, is L.L. Stearns department store pictured in 1945. A popular gathering place for women also was the Lucille Tea Room.

Remember, Christmas still is Christmas: Women, the home front and WWII

Williamsport
Women



By JANET McNEIL
HURLBERT

A news article in the Williamsport Sun-Gazette published on Dec. 20, 1943 reminded readers that, despite the country's being at war, "Christmas still is Christmas... so much sorrow, so much tragedy, so much disappointment in the world... opportunity to send rays of happiness into otherwise dark spots ought to be seized upon."

Although the women's section of the Williamsport Sun-Gazette was titled "Social Events and Women's Activities," the war was always in evidence, amidst wedding announcements, ads for corsets and recipes for frosted molasses coffee bars. The reader might be reminded to buy war bonds or informed that a mother had received a postcard from her son in a prisoner of war camp. There were notices that local women in the military were home on leave, and that graduates of the Williamsport Hospital School of Nursing had been assigned to foreign posts.

A December 1943 article reported that a local female second lieutenant was missing in

ing, followed by caroling, games, gift exchanges and perhaps a visit from Santa Claus. Some groups met in churches, but others gathered at the Women's Club or in local tea rooms like The Lucille, 404 W. Fourth St., run by Arnold and Lucille Andrews.

The halls of the YWCA were filled with activities during the holidays. In 1944, the board gave a party for residents in the West Lounge and the Cosmopolitan Club entertained 65 members and guests who sang carols and listened to a lecture on Christmas customs in different countries.

The Industrial Club was entertained by a tap dancer and an electrical Hawaiian guitarist, and the Industrial Girls Club had a tureen supper. Thirty members of the Williamsport Music Club attended a holiday gathering that ended with a game of charades. In 1943, the Music Club had held a candlelight carol sing, with participation from its Junior and Juvenile Music Clubs.

Some of the festivities were related to war efforts. The local chapter of the American War Mothers held a Christmas party. Members of the Women's Guild of Immanuel Lutheran Church gathered old pocketbooks and filled them with notions to be sent overseas, and the Junior Auxiliary of the Royal P. Steinbacher Post collected packages for "a gift to the Yank who gave."

Food and presents

Rationing made shopping for special Christmas meals and gifts especially challenging, but occasionally the newspaper carried some good news. In December 1943, rationing restrictions on grapefruit juice were lifted, as was the "freeze" on the sauerkraut and cluster raisins so popular during the holiday season.

Stroehman Brothers encouraged Williamsporters to eat more bread at every meal, saying that this is what Uncle Sam wanted them to do. And a hostess could still feed guests at a small dinner party by buying an Armour's Star smoked beef tongue.

Throughout the war years, there were numerous announcements in the paper advising readers to "Shop early and shop patiently." A shortage of personnel and supplies due to the war made the usual holiday rush even more complicated.

But you could still shop for that woman in your life. An ad for Stearn's Department Store directed those looking for the perfect gift to go to the second floor. There they could find toiletries priced from \$3 to \$11, handbags for \$3 to \$17.50 and knitted bed socks for \$1.50.

An article in the Sun-Gazette on Nov. 29, 1943, reflected on how the war would change the lives of women in the future. The article asked whether a woman who had walked a narrow plank on high