

An Illuminating Idea For Christmas

by Lynne Belluscio

I've had our history sleuths looking for information about the early Police Department in LeRoy. It's been a surprise to me that there isn't that much information. Obviously when we find more, you'll be the first to know -- or if someone out there has any information about the early police department, give us a call.

Anyway -- Ruth Harvie was reading through some of the files and when I came in today she said she had found a great Christmas story. It was about a gas lit tree. "Well, I wrote about a gas lit tree a long time ago, (Actually it was the third article that I wrote for the *Pennysaver* in November, 1988 to be exact) but I never knew that LeRoy had a gas lit tree."

Sure enough, H.A. Parmelee, who was living in Honolulu, sent in to the *LeRoy Gazette* a story about a Christmas tree in LeRoy that was lit by gas. "I think that here is a good place to speak of a certain Christmas tree that I took particular interest in. I am not sure of the year. Was it '65, '66 or '67. (That's 1865, 1966 or 1867). But we had it in the Starr Hall. One year it was in Central Hall and afterward in the church. This particular tree in Starr Hall was my pride. It was the first



Fig. 1. TREE LIGHTED WITH GAS.

Christmas tree in LeRoy to be illuminated by gas. The idea was evolved through many consultations and discussions with James McKenzie.

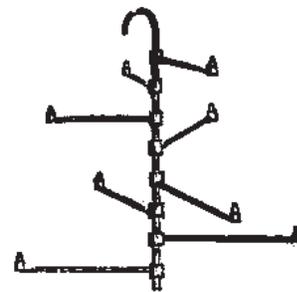
A lead pipe leading up beside the trunk of the tree and branches of small lead pipe that could be twisted among the branches. I spent an entire day in Rochester searching for the small pipe, of such a size that the ordinary gas burner would screw into it.

James McKenzie did the plumbing work and Gideon Fordham superintendent of the gas works, kindly loaned the

burners and assisted in installing the apparatus. I looked on. Thus we were enabled to do away with the dangerous and dripping wax tapers and at the same time obtain the proper effect of simultaneous lighting, the gas being turned down to its lowest limit and at the proper time turned on with the instantaneous light. I am now wondering if that idea was original with us." I don't think Parmelee's tree was the first gas lit tree.

have gas out here in the country and so have a Christmas tree drop light, like the one cousin Tom has in Liverpool. (England) The most vivid imagination could scarcely convert our little candles and lamps into fifty bright jets which illuminated the tree..."

The article also had illustrations for building the gas pipe system that fitted inside the tree. Somehow, I can't imagine a gas



lit tree -- actually, I can imagine the tree going up in flames. Forget about the dripping wax and the candles that Mr. Parmelee mentions. Open gas jets sound a lot more dangerous. I have lit candles on a tree -- for a few minutes, with a trusty fire extinguisher in my hand, but open gas jets would really make me nervous. So here's to a Safe and Merry Christmas to all of you.

The 1839 *Universal Traveler* gave an account of Christmas in New York City: "whole rows of confectionary stores and toy shops, fancifully decorated with festoons of bright silk drapery, interspersed with flowers and evergreens, are brilliantly illuminated with gas-lights." And a little later, the *American Agriculturalist* carried a story by a Miss Collins: "What a pity we cannot

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on her behalf.

It was truly
remarkable to see
how many lives
she touched.