contamination. No one else we knew of had diphtheria, either before or after our case. Camilla and I were sick first and when recovered were left with infected tonsils (later removed), but Aaron and Byron had great difficulty breathing, but the Doctor said Aaron had a weaker heart. Fumigation followed and we could again associate with others, but how our Mother mourned for her first born son — the sorrow never left. She often said, "How well my little boy is taken care of in heaven, I know, but it leaves an empty chair" ... Aaron was nine, a slender lad, so obedient. Alice was twelve, I was seven and Byron, six; Camilla was four, Marcus, two and Minuel was a baby.

"A CHRISTMAS IN THE NINETIES"

It was the year that snow came early in the fall. The wheat harvest in the Red River Valley of Minnesota had been heavy. All the grain was cut and the bundles piled in conical stacks ready for threshing.

Threshing machines were large, expensive and few in number, so each farmer waited his turn when the machine moved into the neighborhood. We had made preparations to house and feed the twenty-man crew. The summer kitchen had been cleared and straw and bedding had been placed on the floor for sleeping quarters. A hog and a beef had been butchered and stored in a deep well.

Just as the threshers were finishing in the south valley and preparing to come north to us, a heavy snow fell, followed by cold weather. This retarded threshing operations and as the cold weather continued, the crew became discouraged and left for their homes. Then the boss decided to cease all threshing for that winter.

Father and mother held serious conversations with the children listening in — Where would they get the money to pay the year’s grocery bill? (It was paid only once a year when the grain was sold.) Our family of eight should have shoes and overcoats. The taxes added up to a thousand dollars for another year — also the interest on the farm mortgage, but Dr. Lancaster, the kindly gentleman who was so sympathetic when little brother died and who made so many trips with his one horse and topless buggy — he must be paid. Then there was our church pledge to be met.

Early one day father went to the little village of Fisher where he stopped first at Sam Torrison’s, the grocer. Sam knew the situation and said to father, "My grocery bill can run until spring when you get threshed. Anything you need in the store is yours for the asking. Here is a new passbook" (an account book listing groceries purchased each time). Father next called upon Mr. Kingsland, the banker. Yes, Father could borrow money at ten percent interest. When he came to the doctor’s office, father found the bill reduced to half.

Grandmother at Manitowoc sent us a box of coats and dresses to be made over. Mother always planned so each of us had a new “outfit” for Christmas. She, being a milliner by trade, fashioned bonnets for us and I know we were prouder of them than of any expensive hats worn since.

In those days all of the religious instruction and much of the common school education was given by the parents in the home, for the district school offered but four months a year. That fall, as usual, we rehearsed the Christmas songs and poems as we performed our household duties. Mother repeatedly said she couldn’t sing, not even lullabies for the babies, but nevertheless, we found when we grew up that we had the right melodies for the Norwegian carol, "Jag er saad hver Jule Kveld" (I am so glad each Christmas Eve), and "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" and "Darling Nellie Gray." After the lamps were filled and cleaned and the lantern ready to take to the stable for the evening chores, we would sit awhile in the dusk and make plans. We knew there couldn’t be a tree or gifts this year, but mother suggested that if we agreed not to eat butter until Christmas, she could sell enough to buy nuts, candy, popcorn and maybe oranges. We entered into the agreement wholeheartedly.

When the woodboxes had been filled and supper was over, we gathered in the “front room” or parlor — such a little room with wall to wall carpeting, and a "Welcome" sampler over the door. A hanging lamp with a white shade hung over the oval mahogany table and in some way we all managed to sew, read or write by the light of this one lamp. Father carved and polished a pair of wooden shoes which were to be filled with oats and placed on the hearth for Santa Claus’ reminder on Christmas Eve. Nearly sixty years have passed but it still seems I can hear the ending of Father’s evening prayers, “Heavenly Father, we pray Thee to take care of our sailors out at sea.” He knew how safe and secure he was in our little farm home, but he had not forgotten the perils of the sea as he experienced them in his younger days.

Christmas Eve came at last. Early in the afternoon the wash tub was placed near the kitchen stove and each in his turn took a bath, beginning with the smallest. Then to dress in our new clothes!

The dining room had been closed for over a month to save fuel, but tonight it should be heated and the doors opened. We children were to stay in other rooms until called for supper. Then the surprise — when we entered the dining room, we were speechless. Right there in the corner was a beautiful tree decorated with strings of white popcorn and red cranberries and dozens of colored candles, and — most wonderful of all, underneath the tree were presents! For me there was a doll crate which I still have. There were two pairs of homeknit stockings for each of us from Grandmother in Wisconsin and also from her brother in England. We were almost too excited to eat, but the Julekage with butter for which we had been mouth-watering all afternoon, the spareribs, the rice pudding and even two kinds of cookies were a feast I shall never forget. Then, with supper over, father read the Christmas story and we had our little program of carols and recitations after which he made an extra trip to the stable to give the stock an extra measure of feed as a holiday gesture.

Our happiness seemed quite complete but still we thought we should hang our stockings by the hearth in spite of the fact that father said he didn’t think Santa Claus could find our house on such a stormy night.

Early the next morning we came downstairs before the fires were started, and there we saw the oats gone from the wooden shoes and, our stockings filled! Santa had brought me a little piece-quit, sheets and a pillow case to fit my new cradle. How could he know what size to bring? No matter, I had them, and that was enough. My happiness and that of my brothers and sister was that each of us was a part of the Christmas that had loomed ahead with prospects none too bright but instead brought us added pleasure because we did not expect it. Blessed is the memory of my parents and the many other Christmases we spent together.

— Written in 1949

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY CLIMBERS

On February 8, 1901, a number of young people met for the purpose of organizing a youth group. Their meeting place was the schoolhouse of District #4, Byland Township. The chairman at this first meeting was S. Momb, and it was decided that he appoint a committee to draw up a constitution to be submitted for approval at the next meeting. The constitution which was finally adopted contained the following: I. Name of society — "Twentieth Century Climbers". II. Object — General improvement of its members in literary work. III. Membership — Any person — by signing the constitution and paying the initiation fee (10c). IV. Officers — President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Marshal and Literary Committee.

The officers were to be elected by ballot to serve four regular meetings, except the Literary Committee to be appointed by the President each meeting. Officers were to perform traditional duties (listed), that of the Marshal being "if necessary he shall by order of the President, restrain nuisances or disturbances." The By-laws stated that regular meeting be held every two weeks, Friday 8 p.m. (sometimes changed to Saturday); and there were regulations concerning dues, attendance and "willingness to perform according to the assignments of the Literary Committee".

The first officers were: President — S. Momb, Vice-President — Annie Danielson, Secretary — Severina Thompson,