



# The Salemite



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## A Salem Christmas Memory

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Christmas is one of the most beautiful and exciting times at Salem. Despite the anxiety about upcoming exams and the mad scramble to complete term papers, book reviews, and final tests, students and faculty alike find time to participate in and enjoy the many wonderful Christmas traditions that make Salem special. But Christmas at Salem is only the beginning. Most Salem students take for granted that they will go home for Christmas with their families following the festivities (and exams) at Salem. However, Salem students have not always had the luxury of going home for the holidays.

During the late nineteenth century Salem was a thriving female academy for young women from all over the country. Without the modern modes of transportation that we all take for granted today, however, traveling home for Christmas was often impractical and unaffordable. Thus, many Salem students (close to one hundred in any given year!) stayed on campus for the holidays.

The Christmas season at Salem Female Academy began on the day after recitations ended (the nineteenth century equivalent to final exams). Recitations were usually over on or about December 21. During the following few days, Salem students and their teachers busily made last minute holiday preparations. They quickly completed hand made gifts for family and friends, and they decorated their living quarters, transforming study parlors with Christmas trees, mistletoe, and boughs of holly.

On Christmas Eve students attended

the Love Feast at Home Moravian Church. This church service must have been one of the most beautiful services of the year. The church was decorated with holiday greenery and everyone was given a lighted candle to hold. The students and teachers listened with the other residents of the Salem community to the story of the birth of Christ.

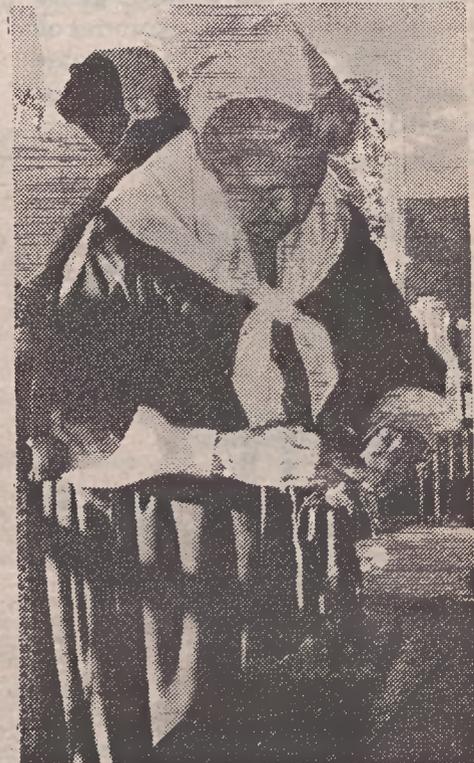
Following the Christmas Eve service, the students and their teachers made their way back to their rooms. As the students settled in for the night, the teachers arranged packages from friends and family on long tables in the beautifully decorated study parlors.

Christmas morning was, no doubt, unlike any other morning at Salem. Students (for a change) probably jumped out of bed in great anticipation. The morning was spent opening gifts and enjoying nuts, candy, cakes, and other treats sent to the students by the principal in celebration of the holiday.

Later in the morning the students and their teachers attended the Christmas morning service at Home Moravian Church.

After the Christmas service, the students anxiously awaited the bell that would call them to dinner. Christmas dinner at Salem in the nineteenth century was a special feast, enjoyed by students and teachers alike. The tables in the dining hall were arranged in the shape of a star, and a lighted candle was placed at each plate. The whole room must have glowed. Dinner consisted of turkey, cranberry sauce, and mincemeat pie.

When the students had eaten all they could at Christmas dinner, they made their way to the principal's house where



they spent the rest of the afternoon playing games and admiring the Christmas putz.

Christmas day was brought to a close with the Home Moravian Sunday School Christmas Concert, but the holiday spirit lingered on. The students spent the week following Christmas relaxing and admiring their new treasures.

On New Year's day the students once again enjoyed the company of their principal and his family at the annual New Year's reception held in the Dining hall. The students, teachers, trustees, and other special guests year that had passed. The evening was topped off with a New Year's buffet of oysters, olives, and relishes.

But just as all good things must come to an end, on January second the holiday festivities at Salem ended and the students who had traveled home returned. The study parlors were stripped of their holiday disguises and the class rooms at Salem were once again the centers of activity.

We still enjoy variations of many of the old Salem traditions, and over the years we have added a few new ones. The big difference is that Christmas at Salem comes a lot earlier than it used to. This is a busy time of year, but I hope that everyone will make time to take part in the Christmas celebration at Salem. It's an old tradition worth hanging on to. Happy Holidays!



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