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Letter From Harold C. Shank to Alfred L. Shoemaker, January 18, 1961

Harold C. Shank

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Inhanton R. D. 2, Pa.

Jan. 18, 1961

Dr. Alfred L. Shoemaker
Penna. Folklife Society
Lancaster R. D. 7, Penna.

94-31

Dear Sir:

I have just finished reading your book "Christmas in Pennsylvania" which I enjoyed very much.

While reading a few incidents about Christmas came to my mind which I feel bear repeating.

This story has been told to me by my mother who is now 61 years old.

Christmas Eve was the "biggest time" of the year in the village of Brownstown, Lancaster County. Supper was eaten early after which the town folk would gather at Harry Keith's store (on the square) where his annual auction was held. After the auction became tiring, the younger folk would go outside and watch the "belsnickles". This auction was held until 1917. Mr. Keith died during the "flu epidemic" in 1918.

"Wild Cherry Christmas Tree"

This information was received from a son in law of Harry K. Yost. A few weeks before Christmas Mr. Yost would cut down a small wild cherry tree or the top from a larger one. The tree was wrapped with cotton wadding and then placed in water and put in a warm

room, water is added as needed. After a while leaves start to shoot and some years blossoms also appear. ~~Ornaments are~~ ornaments ~~are~~ placed on the tree. Aiken or where this originated I do not know, but I am sure Mr. Yost would be glad to talk to you. He lives at Lauer's Lane, Wyoming. He had a wild cherry tree this past Christmas.

I am a young man (35 years old) and recall one ~~notable~~ incident concerning Santa Claus. This occurred in the early 1930's. Santa was scheduled to arrive at Sprecher's Hardware Store in Ephrata. He arrived by train dressed in the traditional red suit but there was something unusual about him. He was a thin man, wore glasses, and carried a buggy whip. He stamped his feet & cracked his whip at the children. This has always impressed me for I always thought Santa was kind & gentle.

Sincerely yours,
Harold C. Shank