

Pomp & Ceremony of Middle Ages Lives Again at Cranbrook Christmas

CRANBROOK—Christmas at Cranbrook school is celebrated in a very special way. There is no Santa Claus or reindeer motif—there is very little horseplay to "Jingle Bells". Instead, the faculty and students combine their talents and resources to produce an impressive Christmas pageant.

Today's television-conscious audience might call this Yuletide celebration a "spectacular". The pageant is full of pomp, music, and colorful costumes; it is straight from the Middle Ages and the traditions of old English manor halls.

Complete in every detail, down to the real boar's head, as was the custom on feudal estates, a casual visitor to this Cranbrook "spectacular" might well wonder where the color TV cameras are.

THERE ARE NO cameras, of course, and incidentally, there are no visitors to the Pageant. Since the first celebration 28 years ago when the school was founded, there have never been any outsiders in attendance. The faculty and boys pride themselves on the "specialness" of the Pageant, and cherish the privacy of their school Christmas, which is always held at dinner on the evening just before they go home for the holidays.

The occasion is a formal one, and as the boys dress in their best suits, the school chefs are brewing up a real old-fashioned English banquet. Hundreds of red candles are lit in the long dining hall, and the pageant is ready to begin.

THREE HUNDRED voices sing out "Adeste Fideles" while the shepherds move across the big hall to the manger scene. With their crooks and lanterns they kneel and worship as the chaplain conducts this religious portion of the pageant. He tells the Christmas story from St. Luke and the tale of the three kings from St. Matthew. As he does so, the three Wise Men appear bearing gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The service is completed with the singing of three ancient carols. The scene changes—trumpet blasts announce the arrival of the jester! He leaps upon the table, and shouts his wel-

come to the feast. . .

"So now is come our joyous feast
Let every man be jolly
Each board with ivy leaves is drest
And every post with holly."

The meal begins, and it's time for the Procession of the Boar's Head. In it comes, carried high on a platform, escorted by 40 young Robin Hoods, and bedecked with spices and garlands of fruit. (A real boar's head, such as this one is, is fairly hard to acquire in Bloomfield Hills. The Cranbrook kitchen begins searching in October until they find a meat house that can secure one. There's a papier-maché stand-in just in case boar's heads get too rare.)

BUT EVEN MORE fanfare accompanies the Plum Pudding. Enscensed in flame and with a mighty entourage of students in costumes, it arrives! "In the air, high we bear, pudding stuffed with confirs rare," its bearers sing as the masterful dish is carried across the hall.

Dinner is over, and now it's time for the yule log. Two of the largest boys in the school tote in a massive tree trunk, and place it on the fire. Flames leap high, for this is a log that has been specially selected and cut by the students.

As the fire burns, the little mummings don their costumes. They are to be akin to the youngsters found on the feudal manors who entertained centuries ago by giving a short play to express their thanks for the hospitality extended to them during the year.

Dressed as St. George, or perhaps, the dragon, or a knowledgeable doctor, Cranbrook's youngest boys enact the very stylized medieval play, St. George, as the tale goes, emerges victorious. The dragon, and horrible giant have been slain. Right triumphs over wrong—in the spirit of Christmas.

Just before the pageant draws to a close, the headmaster gives his holiday greeting to the faculty and students, and then, in a mood of camaraderie, the entire group stands to sing the school hymn.

The candles are snuffed, and Christmas, 1956 is over at Cranbrook school.—MSM.

We are in the midst of the Christmas shopping season . . . days when most of us seem to be rushing hither and yon in pursuit of suitable gifts for others. To be sure, this requires time and energy . . . but should not one loosen this activity with a real feeling of love and affection to go with the gift!

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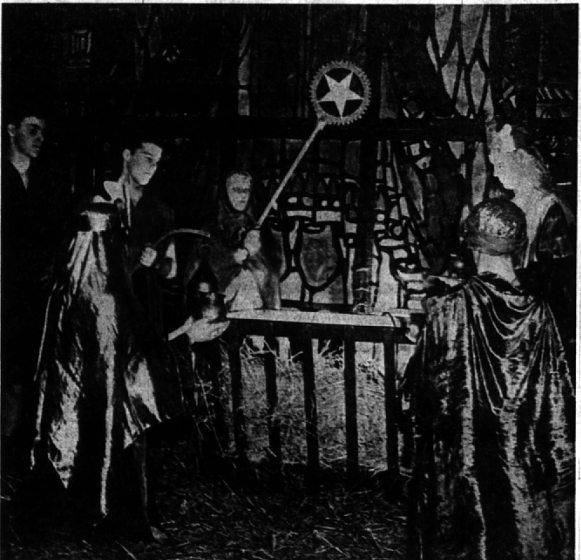


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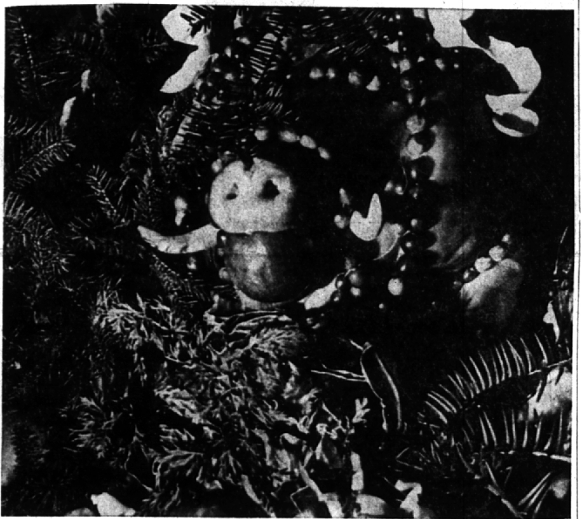
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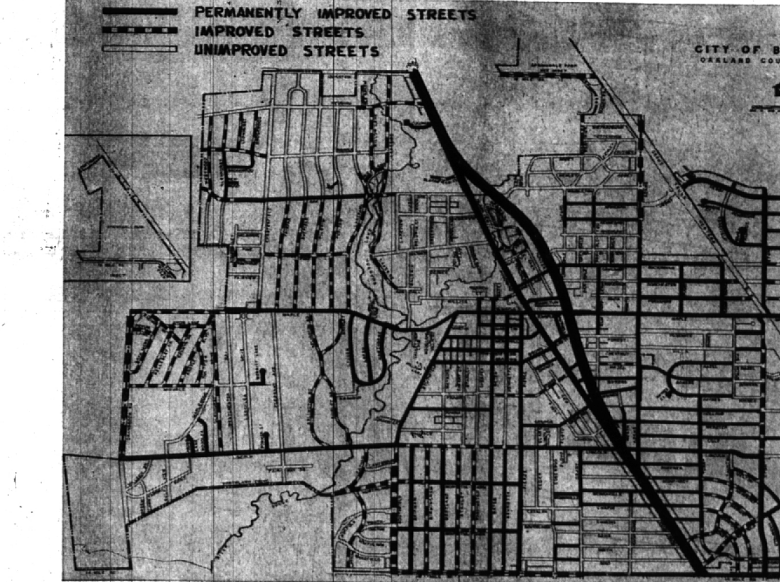
Shepherds and Wise Men with gifts come and worship at the manger, while Old World carols are sung softly in the background.



An honest-to-goodness Boar's Head offers a special attraction to the Pageant audience. It's covered with spices, garlands of fruit, and has the familiar apple between its teeth.



The Jester arrives! Borne through the great hall by a large retinue of costumed Robin Hoods. His arrival keynotes the secular portion of Cranbrook School's holiday Pageant.



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