

## **The Christmas Tree**

*by Bob Boucher, May 2013*

Our two story Victorian house that my Grandpa built in 1911 sat on a one acre corner lot at the intersection of Birch and Valley Streets. The house was set back about twenty feet from Valley Street with a wide welcoming sidewalk leading up to the front porch and main entrance. Both sidewalk and front steps were a proper ten feet wide, not like those narrow constipated sidewalks used on many model homes these days. Our house was painted in earth tones; raw umber with burnt sienna trim, the porch deck and stairs in battleship gray. To complement the front elevation two majestic maples defined each corner of our lot and a shoulder high blue green \*Arborvitae hedge rimmed the porch.

Our solid oak front door, featuring a large oval beveled glass window, lead directly into the front Vestibule. Modern homes no longer have Vestibules, but they were valued in turn of the century Victorian homes; they kept the cold outside air from coming into the house, they provided coat hooks for hats and overcoats, a large vase to store wet umbrellas and a rack for wet overshoes and galoshes. An inner door leading to the interior was kept closed until the front door was closed and the visitors had removed their outer garments. In the back, our house had a second Vestibule leading into the kitchen. Besides the coat hooks it also housed the Ice Box. Grandma did not have the new-fangled GE Monitor Top electric refrigerator. When the ice ran low she would put up a square red and white sign in our front window, asking the ice man to deliver the appropriate size block 5, 10, 15 or 25 cents. When we were kids we would sometimes sneak into the back vestibule to steal a fistful of Grandma's fried potatoes or a yummy slice of apple pie.

There was a second heavy oak door with a beveled glass window on the side of the house that led directly into the dining room. The front porch wrapped around left side of the house to service that side door.

At Christmas time we always had a six foot Christmas tree. It was habitually located in the parlor next to the central front window and decorated with lights, glass balls, and tinsel with an Angel on

top. But for some unknown reason, this year my mother decided to place the tree just behind the side door. That Saturday night my brother and I decided to walk the few blocks to the nearest bar for some Christmas Cheer. After we both had a bellyful of Cheer we walked back home about midnight. We both forgot all about the new location for the tree. My brother Roland unlocked the side door and stepped right into the tree. He fell down and was rolling around all tangled up with the Christmas lights while the glass balls were popping and he was yelling and swearing. That awoke Mama who was also screaming The Tree! The Tree!

She accused him of knocking down that tree on purpose just to be mean.

*\*Arborvitae was given that name by the French settlers of Quebec in the seventeenth century after the native Algonquians showed them how to brew Arborvitae herbal tea to cure their scurvy.*