



Karen Darch and Barbara Benson



BHS Madrigal Singers



News in the 1921 Barrington Review

LIGHT THE VILLAGE

A CENTURY OLD TRADITION IN DOWNTOWN BARRINGTON

LAST YEAR, on December 2nd, I was honored to be invited to “Light the Village,” an event that brings the community Christmas tree to sparkling life. It is a magical occasion as crowds converge on the triangle by the crossing at Main Street. Excited children dance along beside their parents towards the tree. First, they will listen to the Barrington High School Madrigal singers who serenade the season.

Village President Karen Darch reads a Proclamation to honor the Tree-lighter, and the countdown begins. Promptly at 6 o’clock, the lights come on to applause and cheers. It becomes a happy social occasion as families, friends, neighbors, and Village residents mingle around the tree.

Just a few steps along Park Avenue, Santa is waiting in his residence to hear the children’s Christmas wishes. A train arrives at the station; the crossing gates go down, and the bell clangs as it continues its journey northwestward, steady and reliable since 1855.

I wanted to know when this historic crossroads had first held the community tree event. I turned to a trusted research source, the Barrington Area Library’s Local History Collection and its digitized copies of the Barrington Review (now the Barrington Courier Review) since its first issue in 1889.

After several evenings scouring the fine print (a favorite pastime!), I found two reports about Community Christmas Tree events during the First World War, but then, on December 8, 1921, there was an exciting front-page headline:

“COMMUNITY TREE FOR BARRINGTON – Legion Plans Big Christmas Tree for Children - WILL BE IN TRIANGLE.” Then the

following: “Invite Santa to Make Personal Appearance and Meet Local Kiddies.”

The column reported that the local American Legion, under its commander, Spencer Otis, Jr., was determined that the children of the community were to have a Christmas tree and share in the holiday season’s joyousness like never before. The tree was to surpass anything that had ever before been attempted locally. The Village board had to give final permission for its location “perhaps in the flower triangle.”

The report continues: “The tree will be erected several days before Christmas it is planned, and may be lighted up for several nights, but Christmas Eve will be the big time for the kiddies. For them there will be Christmas carols and a cantata, and each of the children of the community will find on the Community tree a stocking of candy and nuts from Santa’s northern warehouse, while the jolly old saint will be present in person to distribute them if he can spare the time on that busy night.”

In the December 22, 1921 Review, further arrangements were announced, and the following message echoes down the years: “The tree will be brilliantly lighted and decorated in harmony with the Christmas spirit and will be a sight to delight the heart of every kiddie. It will be left up through the following week as an emblem of Christmas cheer and good fellowship.”

Over a century later, the magic of the community tree will once again light the village for a few precious days in December. 