Mrs. Vetter Remembers Christmas Like It Was Over 90 Years Ago

By Margaret Ashe
Franklin — (Assumption Parish) — When Christmas was approaching some 90 years ago, the great wish for a particular little girl, was to find a lovely wax doll near her Christmas stocking on Christmas morning — one perhaps two feet tall! That desire was fulfilled during the childhood of Mrs. Stella P. Vetter, now 96 years young and a resident at the local Nursing Center.

In those days, recalls Mrs. Vetter, things were not like they are now. Children had to wait until Christmas to receive the lovely things and exciting toys they had been dreaming of all year. Now Christmas seems to occur every time the parents go shopping since toys are available throughout the year.

Christmas trees were not in use when Mrs. Vetter was a child. Instead stockings were hung from the mantel above the fireplace and filled to the brim with fresh fruit and nuts. The gifts the stockings could not hold were placed near the fireplace for the gleeful Christmas morning discovery.

Of course, her mother’s Christmas dinner was the traditional kind, with turkey, roast, and ham abounding. Christmas afternoon was filled with the excitement of shooting fireworks of every description, carefully supervised by her father.

Big Family
Mrs. Vetter had two brothers and five sisters; and the family lived on a plantation across the Atchafalaya River from Patterson, La., where her father was an overseer. The plantation was called Moreau, but the young people referred to the lovely old home as “Moro Castle.”

Her father spoiled them much as she related her story of the pavilion which he built in the tree-filled yard for the young people to hold dances. There was even a band, in which all of her brothers played. She remembers vividly that one of her brothers played by ear and could play just about any musical instrument he touched. The dances were held throughout the year, with the young folks coming across the river by ferry from Patterson, but the dances which occurred around the Christmas season were particularly colorful ones. Everyone was dressed in their finery, with even the carriages and bicycles decorated for the season.

Mrs. Vetter is the mother of seven children and became a widow while the children were still young. Her husband, William, drowned after falling from a campboat on which he worked as a bookkeeper. Only two sons, Harold and Bernard, survive. She also has seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, many of whom she expects to see during the Christmas holidays.

Time permitting, Mrs. Vetter could easily have written her own Christmas recollections since she is experienced in the field of writing. During World War I, she took over the local paper in Patterson while the editor went off to war, and was also local correspondent for the Times-Picayune and the Beaumont Enterprise. She still writes a column on the happenings at the Nursing Center for one of the Franklin papers.