

A sickly green by comparison

We were invited to a friend's farm last weekend to cut our Christmas tree but something came up and we couldn't go.

"Geez, that's too bad," Steady Eddy commiserated, "because the way they're priced on the lots, you'd think they were shipped from the OPEC countries. God knows, they cost an arm and a leg last Christmas. This year you could throw in a kidney."

He had the same look he got when The Indian won the crib and the points in it were thicker than woodticks.

"And the colors," he moaned, "you ever see somebody's face

"Damn," he said. "That's great."

I remembered all the Christmas trees of Christmas Past.

- The huge dark firs that towered over the Nativity scene at Holy Assumption and sometimes when you were alone at the sanctuary rail you would swear the dead clay figures moved and watched you.

- The "Kristie Tree" that the German Shephard puppy of the same name pulled down overnight, entangling her leash in the wreckage and peeing in panic when Christmas morn arrived and the children stacked in the hall like planes at O'Hare.



**North Country
Notebook**

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By George Vukelich

after they swallowed a chaw of tobacco? A nice juicy quid? You talk about green around the gills. That's a sickly green and they got those trees chewing something this year."

We shot the breeze and talked about the Good Old Days when you bought presents for everybody on your list with what you could now blow on the tree alone. That reminded me of Robert Frost's A Christmas Circular Letter in which he tells of a city slicker coming to his farm and wanting to buy his balsam trees: A thousand of them.

He sat and waited till he drew us out, Frost wrote,
A-buttoning coats to ask him
who he was.

He proved to be the city come
again

To look for something it had left
behind

And could not do without and
keep its Christmas.

He asked if I would sell my
Christmas trees;

My woods — the young fir bal-
sams like a place

Where houses all are churches
and have spires.

I doubt if I was tempted for a
moment

To sell them off their feet to go
in cars

And leave the slope behind the
house all bare

Where the sun shines now no
warmer than the moon.

"Did he sell?" Steady asked.
I told him no.

- The "Old Man's Tree," a balsam planted by himself, never decorated except for living cardinals in the winter and living humming birds in the summer. We used to look down on it. Now it looks down on us.

"You start hanging out with trees," Steady says, "and the squirrels will find you eventually."

And the other way round likewise.