



STACEY LAUREN-KENNEDY/GAZETTE PHOTOGRAPHER

Andrew Krystopolski, left, musical director at St. George's church in the Stockade, leads neighbors in a Christmas carol at the annual Christmas tree lighting on Sunday.

SCHENECTADY

Stockade residents celebrate tree lighting amid raindrops

BY JOHN ENGER
Gazette Reporter

Colleen Macaulay offered up a silent prayer that the rain would hold off long enough for the annual Stockade Tree Lighting ceremony to finish in relative comfort.

"If it could just wait a little while," she said Sunday night.

Her prayer was not answered, and as candles were passed out to a small, happy crowd of mostly Stockade residents, rain started to fall. It was cold and only a lucky few had umbrellas, but no one seemed to mind.

People laughed, calling each other by first names as they lit tiny fires under sheltering palms.

"This is the only place to be," said nine-year Stockade dweller Frank Gilmore. "You actually get to know your neighbors here."

Water dripped from the brim of his leather cowboy hat as he described the origin of the neighborhood. He said the houses were built as close together as possible to fit within the protective walls that ringed the settlement in its trading post days.

It might be bad for parking, but the closeness makes for a tight community.

Shouts of "5 o'clock at the In-

dian! Tree lighting!" and ringing bells came through the rain as the town criers returned from their rounds along Green, Front and Ferry Street.

"We enjoy all our old traditions down here in the Stockade," Macaulay said, "We're steeped in history. That's why things like this still work here."

She moved to the Stockade 35 years ago. A tall Christmas tree has been lit just to the left of the Lawrence the Indian statue every year since, and probably many years before.

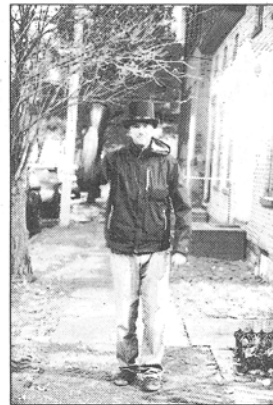
"It's got to be over 50 years by now," she said, and the ceremony hasn't changed much.

Past Stockade Association President Joe Fava announced the start of Christmas carols as he has for 20 years, and Andrew Krystopolski played those carols on an accordion as they would have been 50 years ago.

Mayor Gary McCarthy said a very few words about undampened enthusiasm, his own shoulders hunched against the rain.

The Rev. Paul Blanch of St. George Episcopal Church even blessed the new tree in Latin.

"The light of Christ has come Halleluiah," he said by way of translation, and the whole crowd



Charles Gelarden, Stockade resident and town crier for the evening, alerts neighbors to the tree lighting.

followed him in blessing without hesitation.

A few small children pressed a large red button, the tall evergreen glowed, and the bundled onlookers retreated happily to warmth.

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