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### The First Christmas in Webster County

In seeking the facts to write up the first Christmas of Webster County in 1870 our special reporter has received such a variety of reports, many so conflicting, that it is with some difficulty that they are drafted into an harmonious story. The first Christmas of the earliest pioneers is now after thirty-nine years of trials and tribulation, interesting history. We wish to here express to the various early settlers who have so generously contributed to our information on the subject, our public thanks.

On the day before Christmas in 1870 a mass meeting was held in the stockade at Guide Rock and a committee of four was appointed to set out on the four points of the compass and secure game for a grand old Christmas dinner.

The weather was warm and sunny, and there had scarcely been frost enough all fall to brown the beautiful crop of native grass. It had been one continuous spell of typical May weather.

The four hunters set out on foot in their shirt sleeves and at sun down the last one had returned to camp. The electric lights in the stockade were turned on and the game checked over. They had seven buffalo, five elk, three deer, eleven possum, nine beaver and fifteen wild turkeys. The committee could have brought in many more turkeys but their attention was running low and an Indian attack had long been feared.

The game bags of the committee being so well filled it was soon suggested that the whole neighborhood be invited in to a Merry Christmas. Accordingly some one, Al Lathrop or Emanuel Peters stepped over to the phone which was covering the largest loophole on the south wall of the little fortress and rang up Red Cloud, Inavale, Cowles, Blue Hill and Bladen and invited everybody to the feast.

Early the next morning a part of the inhabitants of the little fortress set to work digging a long trench, while others hid for the river with their baskets to pick the dried wild grapes and wild plums. Others, still, waded the river fishing for clams.

The big game were set to roasting and broiling over the trench. The several Dutch ovens were filled with turkeys stuffed with oyster dressing, mince cakes and plum pudding. The feed buckets were cleaned up and turned into great boiling soup kettles, wafting over the warm merry breeze appetizing scents of beaver tail and wild onion. Long before the forenoon was half gone the smouldering fires had done their work, the wagon boxes had been dismounted and spread with the canvas covers for tables, and cross cut block of wood were regularly set around them for chairs back of each tin plate. The tables were artistically decorated with wild roses and bunch grass, and a few odd pieces of old treasured silverware and Damascus steel added to the uniformity of all. Acorn hulls were set around sparingly filled with gun powder, as individual salters.

The dogs and cats lounged about lazily in the sun and the cattle and horses leisurely grazed around the camp. Everybody about the little fort was anxiously awaiting the arrival of the neighboring colonies, as this and that overlooked little detail was being adjusted.

The first train from the West brought in the Red Cloud and Inavale delegations. As the engine steamed up the horses and cattle fled in terror, and the dogs and cats turned to their masters for protection. But the masters had been seized with a kind of stage fright at the sight of that passenger train and started for the tall timber. But Bill Sawyer "stood pat" and in spite of all the entreaties of Peters, McCallum, Lathrop, John Marsh and Irving Crary, with upraised flat command it to halt, which it did and the friendly faces of the passengers poured from the platform.

Owing to lack of acquaintance the different colonies bled together.

Alf. McCall, Charley Hunter, Mac Fulton, Uncle Himan Holdredge and W. J. Vance represented Inavale, and though our records are somewhat incomplete, W. N. Richardson, J. S. Gilham, J. R. Wilcox, Wm. Parks, John Polnieky, J. L. Miller, Joe Carr, C. H. Potter, E. B. Smith, H. J. Maurer, Ed Kellogg, Gus Roosts, Chas. Gurney, C. R. Besse, John Hazzelbaker, Dave Heffelbower, and possibly a few others constituted the representation from Red Cloud. Garrett Olmsted and Ike Hampton swam the river, and boarded the train at Amboy and Geo. W. Hummel walked over saying that he did not have time to fool with any such nonsense as steam cars when he wanted to get somewhere in a hurry.

John Polnieky thinking a small contribution would be acceptable to the host, carried a beautiful sack of flour on his shoulder from his farm to the depot. Hank Maurer took his throw rope and spurs, thinking he might be called on for a cow boy exhibition. W. N. Richardson took with him a fine roll of high grade bacon rinds that he had carefully saved up, tagged with his Christmas greetings. Dave Heffelbower took with him a half dozen hand-some watermelons tied up in his linen duster. Alf. McCall carried with him a pocketfull of beautiful pumpkin seeds of large variety. Char. Gurney wore his dancing slippers and white vest and Col. Besse wore no shoes at all. Ed. Kellogg had a few pictures which he had torn from his text books, in rustic frames of original designs, and Ed Smith carried a handful of beautiful ox yoke keys of his own making. Gus Roosts took for donation a few pretty, shiny brass buttons and C. H. Potter and Billy Holsworth went partners on a vial of finest quinine. John Hazzelbaker went armed with a beautiful paint brush he wished to trade for cabbage seed. Wm. Parks and Joe Carr donated a handsome mastodon's tooth in havers. J. L. Miller, John Wilcox and J. S. Gilham showed their appreciation of the occasion with a partnership package of five yards of beautiful white thread and half dozen pins.

These presents were laid out on the grass amidst the tearful rejoicings of the stockaders. Uncle Himan Holdredge clad in a buffalo robe, acted as Santa Claus, and Charles Hunter his secretary.

The Bladen, Blue Hill and Cowles colonies not being able to make train connections hiked across to Guide Rock in automobiles. Reese Thompson, Uncle Todd, Paul and Charley Fuller sailed up the fortress and stopped before anybody had noticed them. The crowd excitedly looked over the occupants of the horseless carriage to see if they had been injured in anyway, then one party set out to hunt their runaway team, while another rushed for the river with axes to repair up a new wagon tongue, neck-yoke and whipple trees. Reese Thompson explained to the crowd that his team had ran away, but before getting loose from his wagon had developed sufficient momentum to land the rig at the fort.

Bill Walters, George Cather and John Peterson got well started across in an automobile but were turned back by washouts on Crooked Creek. While they were debating about turning northward and going around the heads of all the Creeks, a stampeded herd of buffalo caused them to run their machine off the grade and capsized in the gutter. They phoned their regrets from Holsworth's home. Bill Thorne kept to the smooth, well traveled roads and whizzed into the meeting on his motor cycle like a scared Sioux and ran his machine nine times around the stockade before he could stop.

By this time it was noon and everybody congregated about the tables. The feast lasted until three o'clock, when everybody arose from the tables and joined in the various games.

Wrestling, foot racing, jumping and target shooting occupied the next hour and as near as we can learn Alf. McCall and George Hummel swept everything in athletics. Jas. Gilham broke the automatic spring on his trusty double barreled rifle and Deane H. S.

bower lost his six shooter. Hank Maurer's courage failed him on the show down, and Charlie Gurney borrowed his togs and set the first great world's record by roping and tying a wild buffalo in 49 3/5 seconds. Jim Vance and Mac Fulton gave an exhibition by riding an elk tandem. Friz Richardson happened along after everything was over hunting a horse race. About sun down everybody dispersed for their homes singing "My Country 'tis of Thee." The next day a band of friendly Indians were invited in and cleaned up the feast.

When we stop and think of the terrible severe weather we have been having in 1909 and the cold snowy Christmas it promises, we cannot help but think of the good old times they used to have even as far back as the first Christmas in 1870.

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**We wish you all a Merry**  
**Christmas and a Happy New Year.**

**PAUL STOREY**

THE CLOTHIER