

Christmas on the Prairie Frontier

The Story of the Most Unusual Celebration in American History



Old Fort Abraham Lincoln in the wintertime. (From a contemporary photograph by D. F. Barry).

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON
(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

IT WAS the day before Christmas, 1875, at old Fort Abraham Lincoln on the Dakota frontier. In the quarters of Lieut. Francis M. Gibson of the Seventh Cavalry his young bride, Katherine Gibson, was struggling with the problem of decorating the bare little rooms for the Christmas Tree party which they were planning to give that evening.

Soldiers, sent out to scour the neighborhood for anything resembling a tree, had returned with a few forlorn branches of sage and cedar brush. But, undaunted by this poor substitute for Christmas greenery, the young couple set to work. They hung the boughs on stout cords from the ceiling down to within a few feet of the floor.

Beneath they placed a washtub, decorated with gaily painted paper and filled with sand. In the latter they buried what few gifts they had been able to purchase from the scanty stocks of merchants in the crude little frontier town of Bismarck a few miles away.

"We'll call it a Christmas pie!" cried Katherine Gibson with a brave laugh.

But the room still lacked a festive holiday appearance, so they set to work on sheets of plain paper which she had saved. They colored the paper with paints, then cut it into long strips to serve as festoons. To their aid came several young officers of the Seventh, recently arrived at Fort Lincoln from West Point. With silver foil that had been wrapped around cigars, these youngsters covered the few nuts available and hung them on the makeshift Christmas tree.

Other officers' wives contributed old Christmas cards, resurrected from their trunks, and they tied them on the tree with scraps of faded ribbon that had been ironed and freshened. They colored candles with red paint, cut them in two and perched them jauntily on the branches of the tree. They fashioned a big bell out of paper that had been colored red and pasted cut-out pictures of Santa Claus on its edges.

As for refreshments for the party—what if the post trader's store had only a meager supply of such staples as sugar, coffee, flour and the like? Somehow young Katherine Gibson managed to get together some sandwiches, a cake, a small amount of candy and lemonade made from citric acid crystals. But her greatest triumph was . . . ice cream! It was ice cream made from condensed milk, whipped-up gelatin and the whites of eggs. (The mailman had brought these eggs from Bismarck and he had wrapped them in cotton and carried them inside his buckskin shirt next to his warm body to keep them from freezing.)

By late afternoon the young officer and his bride were ready to receive their guests. Soon a laughing throng had gathered in their house for the festivities and . . .

But let Katherine Gibson tell the story of that party and its unexpected and dramatic aftermath—surely one of the strangest Christmas Eve celebrations ever held in America. Here is the story, told in her own words:

Christmas Eve dawned bright and clear, and the temperature had moderated. Someone brought an old banjo, another had unearthed an antique guitar, another a jew's-harp. With such dance music provided we swung into the Virginia Reel with much merriment, and then the old square dances had their turn. What a beautiful time we had!

Finally, before midnight, Lieutenant Gibson, being officer of the day, had to make his rounds of the outposts, and shortly afterward the party broke up, everyone tired but happy.

When the last guest had departed, I thought I would take a peep into the kitchen, now dark and deserted, so, with lighted candle held high, I opened the door. As the flame stabbed through the darkness I suddenly gasped and gazed before me with startled eyes, for on the side porch appeared some strangers huddled together—strangers of juvenile stature, one barely tall enough to see above

the window casement. In short, my uninvited guests were small Indian children who were staring through the glass at the tree in mesmeric entrancement.

For a moment I was held spellbound in surprise, then, cautiously, so as not to frighten them, I opened the porch door and motioned them to enter. At first they covered and shrank away, then a straight-backed youngster in buckskin, dragging by the hand a diminutive squaw about four years old, stepped into the room, the others following warily, single file. How had they gained entrance to the garrison, I wondered? Then I recalled a slight breach in the stockade wall, just big enough to admit the wriggling in and out of one small body at a time.

I turned to the supposed leader of the party and speaking slowly, asked, pointing to the tree, "Some one tell Indian boy about it?"

He nodded, as the little hostiles around the agencies picked up a smattering of English very quickly.

"Who tell Indian boy?"

"Horn Toad."

"Horn Toad was a good-natured Indian scout, adored by all the children in the garrison."

"Oh," I nodded, while the little frozen band huddled about the stove in stolid silence, "and who is she?" indicating the wee squaw.

"Sister," replied the boy, while the little girl clung more fiercely to his hand. My eyes ran over the tiny figure and my heart contracted. The poor tot shivered and drew across the shoulders of her buckskin dress an improvised shawl made of gunny sack and a strip of the same material served as her only headgear. Her moccasins and leggings were clad in whole suits of it, but, evidently, when it came to the female of the species, the supply had given out. It was a miracle that the little band hadn't been frozen to death.

Just how, where, or why at this season of the year these people were abroad instead of under shelter at the agencies did not matter. The fact remained that they and at least some of their tribe had set up their wigwags somewhere nearby. I mentally shook myself. What a unconscionable hour for these children to be up. They must be returned to their mothers at once, and yet as I looked into their timid, expectant faces, pity stirred within me, and my logic went woefully awry. Heaven only knew how long they



Mrs. Francis M. Gibson and Baby Kate who grew up to become Mrs. Katherine Gibson Fougere, author of "With Custer's Cavalry."

had waited out there in the cold, feasting their eyes on the glittering paradise, and that set me thinking.

Quickly I drew them into the living room and towards the Christmas Tree pie which, I was confident, still held a few treasures and, digging into the sand myself, I fished out a Jack-in-the-box which I presented to the little lady. Her black eyes leaped with surprise and joy, and her wee hands trembled as she clutched the toy. Then, making a motion for them to continue, I flew to the kitchen to heat up what cocoa still remained. The striker was just leaving for his barracks when I called to him.

"Oh, Alkorn," I instructed, "go to the nearest bastion and tell the sentinel to relay to other sentinels that, in the event of any Indians hanging around and looking for children, they are at Lieutenant Gibson's quarters and will be long soon."

During my absence my guests had certainly explored the entire contents of the tub. The appearance of the Jack-in-the-box had dissipated their last vestige of hesitation, and they plunged feverishly into the sand, and with each rag doll, toy pistol, or other treasure exhumed they became in fact wild Indians—wild with delight—the boys voicing their emotions in short grunts, the wee ones in squeals of rapture.

It was upon this scene of oozing, scattering sand that I entered, bearing a pot of steaming cocoa, but the children refused to abandon the magic tub until the very last toy had been salvaged. Then, they drank long and thirstily of the refreshing beverage, and soon color returned to their pinched cheeks and warmth crept back into their little chilled fingers.

Noting all this, I communed with myself thoughtfully. I should have sent them home right away, I told myself severely, yet I continued to heap their laps with goodies, popcorn, nuts and candy. Besides, there was some ice cream left over, and cake, too, that were begging to be eaten, and what was a party without them?

So, before they knew it, mounds of pink and white concoction were whisked in front of the little savages, who immediately plunged small eager fingers into the pretty, fluffy stuff, only to recoil from the sudden chill. The tiny squaw was the first to experiment with it by cautiously licking some off her palm, and her cherubic smile would have inspired a masterpiece from Raphael. They needed no further urging and attacked the ice cream, stuffing themselves with all the abandon of healthy, hungry children.

While they were thus engaged, I ran upstairs looking for old blankets, woolen stockings, and socks. I found a short coat of my own, some mittens, and sharp whistles and warm mufflers. Suddenly, queer sounds coming from below sent me scurrying half-way downstairs, where I paused. The noise started with the clapping of hands, accompanied by a weird chant. This was followed by the sound of softly muffled feet and short, sharp whoops, at first faint but growing louder and louder. I sank upon the stairs and peered through the bannisters into the living room, and what I beheld kept me rooted to the spot. My eyes dilated before a picturesque phase of barbaric expression.

The straight-backed boy, evidently wishing to do his part and that of his tribe toward the entertainment, was staging a performance of his own and was directing the others in some kind of a dance. One boy and the diminutive squaw stood at the side, clapping their hands and chanting monotonously, the latter moving her hips and body in imitation of the older squaws, while, circling the stove in single file, the young braves stamped upon the carpet with the firmness of buffaloes combined with the whirlwind lightness of the wildcat, their lithe frames swaying like the prairie grasses and with a rhythm as perfect as a set measure. Backwards and forwards they flung themselves as though made of elastic rubber, bending plant heads and necks and emitting long-drawn-out whoops of joy.

The crunching into the carpet of ruinous sand mattered not, for on the step I sat like petrified wood, not in wonder at the wild beauty and the cadence of that native dance. Why, I pondered, did white children have to spend money to attain anything like the grace these aborigines to whom it seemed as inborn and as natural as a spring of cool, clear water? The dirge changed, and the little redskins swung into a new group motion, each executing fast, fantastic steps. Followed more insistent hand-clapping and drumming. The young bucks quickly flung back into single file, their dance became fiercer, the whoops louder and longer, and with a frenzy that almost shook the floor they fairly leaped about the stove until the leader held up his hand and stopped. The drumming ceased, the embryo braves threw themselves, gasping, upon the carpet, and the wee one slid down beside the young chief.

I drew a deep breath, hurried back upstairs, and brought down an armful of clothing and blankets. Then I bundled up the wee squaw like a bale of cotton, tied my too-big mittens on her warm little hands and gave the rest of the blankets, mufflers and galoshes to the boys. After that I stripped the tree of its remaining gifts, put candy and cake in a bag, which I consigned to the care of the straight-backed boy, and very reluctantly let my guests out again into the night.

I glanced up at the clock in the hall. Already it was Christmas. The snow crunched crisply beneath light, retreating steps, while again and again the happy chink, coming from their cherished toys, turned radiant faces over their shoulders for one last look and smile.

Finally the small, straight-backed Indian boy, bringing up the rear with his Christmas burden, put his mouth with his slim hand and emitted the farewell call of his tribe, which seemed to linger on the air even after the little band had faded from view.

I smiled to myself, blew out the kerosene lamp in the hall and trudged wearily upstairs, while, drifting through the still, approaching dawn, and echoing from bastion to bastion, came the comforting call of the sentinels, "One o'clock and all's well."

So that is the story of the Christmas Eve celebration at old Fort Abraham Lincoln on the Dakota frontier—a traditional observance of the birth of the Prince of Peace which came to an unexpected climax in a barbaric war-dance! You'll find the story in a book published recently by the Caxton Printers, Ltd., of Caldwell, Idaho—"With Custer's Cavalry" by Katherine Gibson Fougere, the daughter who was born a few years later to the young Seventh Cavalry officer and his wife at Fort Meade in the Black Hills of South Dakota, and it is reproduced here for your enjoyment by special permission of the copyright owners.

Fragrant Flowers Bloom Again To Enhance Winter Ensembles

By CHERIE NICHOLAS



ADORING beaux, brothers, uncles and husbands please take notice. According to latest fashion news that gracious, lovely-lady custom of wearing fragrant flowers in her hair, pinned to her bodice or adorning her fur coat at the game has been revived.

If you long to add happiness and midwinter joys to the one you love best, and of course you do, send her flowers. Should an unkind fate take you out of town on the day of her coming out party or on the night of the college dance she had counted on attending, simply wire her flowers and friend florist will do the rest.

If she is a sophisticated beauty, send her a stunning new oriental headdress of fragrant carnations and rose petals. The appearance created by the black wool evening coat with lavish embroidery pictured to right in the illustration is greatly enhanced by a matching bouquet pinned on the evening bag.

Perhaps she is a swing addict or a girl who adores waltzes. In this event you will be sure to win her heart if you send her a glamorous romantic headdress of rubrum lilies to wear to the holiday party down on her social calendar. A matching bracelet of blossoms to wear with her airy-fairy dress of silver striped tulle as shown to the left in the group would be very welcome.

The center figure above aptly shows how well-placed flowers can

"dress up" a sports ensemble. When it comes to the masterpiece of flower accessories, see the adorable lei formed of blue cornflowers festooned about the slender young throat and pretty shoulders of the lassie pictured in the oval inset. Small wonder is it that flower necklaces such as this one inspired by the picturesque Hawaiian leis, are coveted by every fashionwise sophisticate who would add more feminine allure to her young charms. Be sure to order this adorable flower lei made with a side clip of pink camellias which as you see by the picture, adds a rapturous note. A necklace of tiny orchids or gardenias would be an equally glamorous choice. To fill her heart full to overflowing with joy, give her a matching flower bracelet.

This trend to flowers bespeaks a new motivating thought in the minds of designers. They are playing up "style" in costume flower arrangements that will prove as flattering and versatile and just as dramatic as most sumptuous jewels or other accessory items. For example, there is the present fad of pinning fresh flowers on your muff or to the cuff of your glove. Diadems of flowers make lovely coiffure adornment, while red, white and blue flowers sound the patriotic note.

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

Knit Suit



For good skiing weather here's a sports set which will keep you snug and make you look charming all at the same time. It is a real piece of artistry in every detail. The baby-bonnet, mittens and sweater are trimmed with rows of heavy cable stitch, accented with rows of colorful embroidery. Knit them in sturdy, white knitting worsted for warmth and long wear. The embroidery gives high-color to the entire combination. The buttons repeat the coloring of the embroidery.

Novel Coiffures Traced To Oriental Influences

If you have kept step with the millinery parade your coiffure is concealed under draped fabric contrivances that form part of the brim. Hairdresses worn under draped turban should fit snugly down over the back of the head to the very nape of the neck. These new and fashionable turbans trace their inspiration to Oriental influences. The smartest completely conceal the hair.

Overshoes Have High, Low Heels

Overshoes don't change much from year to year. They just become a little neater looking, a little more streamlined and a bit more decorative. But this year the principal news is that the makers of galoshes have finally realized that many women wear low-heeled shoes during the winter months.

So this season you will find even the velvet carriage shoes trimmed with black bunny fur, available in three heel heights—low, Cuban and high. These are extremely smart worn with a velvet trimmed cloth coat or one of fur.

The familiar all-rubber galoshes are also made in the three heel sizes this year, and the toes are given a boxy look. You'll find a black on black contrast in these, with shiny rubber applied in a pattern over the arch, and in a panel around the toes, and on the heels.

There are low overshoes that look like grown-up rubbers. These are styled to cover the entire shoe, but stop below the ankle. In order to make these look like shoes they are given a smart suede finish and trimmed with shiny rubber for a suede and patent look.

Coats Can Serve As Warm Capes

Leave it to the smart young set to do the unusual. At the moment they are wearing their fur or cloth coats to look like capes. Here's their technique. They turn the sleeves in if coat is of soft wool or if this is not feasible they throw the coat about their shoulders nonchalantly entirely ignoring that it has sleeves.

It is a practical gesture, for with the tailored jacketed wool suits now so fashionable it gives not only a "new" look to add the fur-cape touch, but worn in this easy manner there is comfort without a cumbersome "feel."

Iodine Alone Aid in Many Goiter Cases

By DR. JAMES W. BARTON

IN MY student days the severe type of goiter—exophthalmic goiter or Grave's disease—was a serious matter to the patient and his family. It often meant traveling hundreds of miles to some outstanding surgeon and often the case was too far advanced to obtain successful results. Today, while practically every hospital has one or a number of surgeons skilled in this operation, it is known that many cases can be successfully treated by X-rays, and still others are relieved of their symptoms by rest and medicine.

There are, of course, certain cases in which operation should be performed as pointed out by Drs. Walter Redisch, New York, and William H. Perloff, Philadelphia, in Endocrinology.

1. Those cases in which there is mechanical pressure present, aside from the regular symptoms of severe goiter.

2. Cases in which one or more nodules or lumps can be felt, firmer than the remainder of the gland.

3. Those cases in which other forms of treatment such as rest and iodine have failed.

4. Wherever there is immediate danger from heart and blood-vessel disturbances.

Record of Results. In recording the results obtained by use of iodine alone, Drs. Redisch and Perloff state that iodine causes a great improvement in some patients, has no effect in others, and makes still others worse. By using sodium iodide with the pure iodine, instead of potassium iodide, results showed about 10 per cent of the cases completely and permanently cured, 40 per cent free of symptoms so long as iodine is used, and almost 50 per cent "almost" free of symptoms, but with some signs and symptoms still present.

The thought then is that while many cases must undergo surgery, and others treatment by X-ray, there are many other cases in which iodine alone, or iodine with rest, brings relief of symptoms.

Dizziness Often Due to Allergy

AMONG your friends and acquaintances you likely have a number who are sensitive or allergic to various foods. They will tell you that a certain food brings on an attack of hives or an upset stomach or an attack of asthma, or a head cold. The eating of foods to which one is sensitive is now believed to be the cause of attacks of dizziness that were formerly blamed on the liver. Just as foods inflame the lining of nose, throat and bronchial tubes, the lining of the stomach and the surface of the skin, so can they cause an inflammation of the inner ear, thickening the lining, upsetting the balancing canals and so causing dizziness.

Dr. L. H. Crip, Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania Medical Journal, Harrisburg, states that the number of cases of dizziness due to allergy is greater than suspected. That allergy causes swelling and puffiness of the inner ear, just as it causes swelling and puffiness of the skin, lining of nose and other parts, is logical or reasonable particularly when all the other conditions found in allergy are present in these cases, such as family history of allergy and other allergic symptoms (asthma, hay fever, eczema and the like) and the tests for allergy are positive.

Dizziness (vertigo) due to allergy may be the only symptom present or there may be other symptoms such as deafness, ringing in the ears (one or both sides), and stomach upset.

Dr. Crip points out that similar symptoms—loss of hearing, ringing in ears, dizziness, headache—may be due to tumors, infections, poisoning and bleeding into inner ear, so that all these conditions should be considered and searched for, before blaming the symptoms on allergy. If none of these conditions is present, it is reasonable to believe that allergy may be the cause.

QUESTION BOX

Q.—Is high blood pressure dangerous to anyone getting a stroke?
A.—The family physician who knows the patient's condition best after a stroke or after each stroke gives the patient a complete rest in bed for some weeks. He is then allowed to take a certain amount of exercise according to his condition. He is given small meals four times a day instead of the usual three. The physician may give medicine to give relief of symptoms.

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