



NEVADA

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This was Nevada Series

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Christmas in Candelaria

In the mining camp of Candelaria, now erased from the face of the earth by a modern mining operation, the Christmas holidays were eagerly anticipated in 1880. The town was a mere four years of age at that time but was prosperous and booming with some 250 men employed in the mines. In previous years, Christmas had been an individual family matter, but community leaders in 1880 figured that it was time to put on a public celebration, invite people in from surrounding communities and "do it up right."

The ladies of Candelaria took over the planning shortly after Thanksgiving and invited their sisters in Belleville, Columbus, Metallic City, Pickhandle Gulch and Marietta to join them. Arrangements were made to rent Capitol Hall in Candelaria and put on a community Christmas tree where parents could bring their gifts. The ladies were also planning a grand ball, which was to follow the opening of the gifts, and a midnight buffet.

As plans went on, it soon appeared that the weather was going to cooperate and the community would have a real "white Christmas." Snow began to fall on November 23 and children were soon out snowballing, sledding and generally making the most of the occasion. As temperatures continued to drop, the reservoir up at Metallic City froze up and became a skating rink. Another sixteen inches of snow fell on December 2, enough to carve out a sled run from the Northern Belle Boarding House to Main Street. Children were out in swarms and even some adults gave it a try, but most found that they had forgotten how to manipulate a sled. Among those also on the run were children from a nearby Indian camp who had nailed together some barrel staves.

Several women from Candelaria trudged up to Metallic City on December 3 to collect gifts for those children who would not be getting much and Charles Sears hauled them back down Pickhandle Gulch in his sleigh. Candelaria merchants were also donating gifts and the men of the community were planning on making a trip to the Excelsior Mountains west of Marietta to get a tree.

The women were making decorations and all appeared to be in readiness for a first-class celebration, but two events disturbed and saddened the community in early December. On December 9, one Charley Marshall was summarily lynched in nearby Belleville for the murder of Jack McCann. Scarcely a week later, December 16, Bert Greeley shot saloon man Tom Logan at McKissick's Saloon in Candelaria and Logan died two days later. Rain had begun to fall the day before the shooting and the snow quickly melted. The streets were soon quagmires and the sleds were put away as housewives scolded their men folks for tracing in mud.

The upcoming Christmas party and a New Year's dance planned at the Belleville Hotel on December 31 lightened most spirits, however. At 7:00 p.m. on December 24, the doors of the hall were opened and young and old alike burst in upon a scene truly to be remembered -wreaths of evergreens, multi-colored festoons, mirrors and, best of all, the decorated ten-foot tree beneath which reposed a virtual mountain of gaily-wrapped gifts.

After the first hum and buzz of admiration had died away and all present were seated, the program began. A male quartette offered several traditional holiday songs and E.W. Taylor spoke of the meaning of the occasion. Mrs. B.F. Everett and a Miss Fannon followed with a duet of several carols and editor John Dormer of Fissure, the local newspaper, recited "The Drunken Friar." Master Willie Ramsey then offered a second recitation, "Hezekiah's Courtship." The Candelaria String Band then played a few numbers before Santa Claus came on the scene.

Santa, in the person of Dave Cochrane, appeared to one observer as something of "a cross between a Laplander and a sagebrush tramp," but the children loved him and eagerly came forward when their names were called to receive gifts. The chore was completed within an hour and not a child or an adult was left out.

The floor was then cleared, the children sent on home and the musicians tuned up for the dance which lasted until the sun peaked over the horizon in the east. As couples made their way home through the muddy streets, all agreed that the town had outdone itself, a joyous occasion to be remembered now and forever.

Nevada Historical Society

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