

The Bandera PROPHEET

December 16, 2020

Frontier Tales

Texas Early Christmas

By Rebecca Huffstutler Norton

The Bandera Prophet

Working at the Frontier Times Museum, I often get my inspiration from the museum's founder, J. Marvin Hunter. Mr. Hunter may have died in 1957, but his spirit is very much alive. He keeps us company and looks over our shoulders while we tend to his museum. He was also the publisher of the Frontier Times Magazine and his writing style was as unique and colorful as the man. If you, dear reader, will indulge me this month, I would like to reprint an article Mr. Hunter wrote in the August, 1931 edition. I believe you will discover why he continues to be my mentor from beyond.

“Ninety-four years ago, Texas celebrated its first Christmas. Religious services were held in the small settlements of the state...Some, indeed, were true “outposts of the wilderness.” General Sam Houston, the idol of his fellow Texans, at a speech at Washington-on-the-Brazos, said a republic could be founded only by a sober and industrious people. The hero of San Jacinto knew the virtue of sobriety, although in his sometimes turbulent and always picturesque career, he frequently forgot to practice it.

There was no prohibition law in Texas then, and after General Houston finished speaking, a big party was held. Eggnog flowed freely and the revelers danced late. Simple presents were exchanged. Even if the toys were few and most of them handmade, the children and the young people had a good time. Christmas was celebrated mainly by eating, drinking and merrymaking.

A single musical instrument, a fiddle, would furnish music enough for a dance that might be rude and boisterous, or even culminate in a fight but the upper stratum of Texas society comported itself with the dignity befitting its position.

The commentators say the Christmas of 1836 was very cold. Rains made the roads more impassable than they usually were and further contributed to the discomfort of travelers. Indoors, however, Texans gathered about roaring fires, sang, danced, and ate wild turkeys and other fair and had a good time.

Transportation had improved somewhat in 1838, so that a Texan could get his favorite brand of liquor from New Orleans, Memphis, Nashville, or some other distribution point. Christmas, 1839, was cold and rainy. Christmas supplies could not be obtained from New Orleans, Galveston or Indianola. In 1840, the French tricolor and the American flag were raised in front of the capitol of Texas, denoting the infant [country] had been recognized by France and the United States. In 1846, Texans rejoiced at the news that United States had ratified the Texas annexation bill.

By Christmas 1850, Texas had begun to put on airs in good earnest. Masque balls and confetti carnivals were the order of the day. Texans danced the square dance, the Virginia reel and other dances of the period. Christmas trees were numerous. The young ladies and gentlemen wore dazzling costumes, the young men going in rather strongly for mustaches and whiskers.

As so Texas celebrated Christmas through the years when it was a young republic, when it was younger member of the American sisterhood of states, through the trying period of the Civil War and reconstruction down to modern times. Texas have ever loved good cheer. They still love it.”