

# CHRISTMAS

IN PIONEER

UTAH



## Emmeline B. Wells

*Young Woman's Journal*, 12 (1901): 539-42.

Concerning Christmas in 1847 in the "Old Fort", there was no departure from the regular routine except the mere Xmas greetings, wishing each other "A merry Christmas," etc. This was the extent of their celebrating the day; the people were living on rations, and would not dare indulge in any extra cooking. However, I imagine there might have been in some homes, a little merriment, anecdotes, songs, and simple games, if not dancing.

The next Christmas, 1848, Heber C. Kimball gave a dinner to a few of the brethren and sisters, and Brigham Young with some of his family, and Willard Richards and others of the Apostles were present. It is quite impossible, at this late date, to tell what was served at table on that happy occasion, but this I do recall, that the conversation was cheerful, and as Sister Vilate Kimball was the hostess (and was a prime favorite with all the guests), it must have been a very pleasant affair; as for myself, I was too much occupied with my baby to take much notice of the amusements, except that I know Hans Hansen played the violin, and Brother Smithies the big bass, and Horace K. Whitney the flute, and of course there was singing, though I would not like to be obliged to recall the "Old Songs;" however, let me add, there were very good singers in those days, if the instrumental music was not of the finest order. I know Horace and some of the rest of us used to sing, "Shades of evening close not o'er us," and "Bonnie Doon," and "Maid of Athens," and I might go on repeating numerous titles of the songs we used to sing in the days now gone forever. But I don't believe we had presents for the children; I don't know what we could have given them, they were not the days of plenty, and we have scarcely become accustomed to our new surroundings. . . . No doubt Heber C. Kimball told some of his funny anec-

dots, for he never failed to make merry in that way on all festive occasions. . . .

Christmas later on was a jolly time though all the fare was simple and the stockings hung in the chimney corner were filled with home-made gifts; nevertheless the love was as genuine, and the morning kisses as sweet, as those of these days of lavish expenditure. The stockings filled with beet molasses candy made in all kinds of fanciful shapes, and pulled until quite light and brittle, and gingerbread cut into fantastic figures, as well as doughnuts cut and fried beautifully brown; and for the girls rag dolls which they enjoyed singing to sleep with the old-fashioned lullabies, and great care was taken to dress them nicely from the odd bits of various materials, these when tastefully put together were as welcome to the dear little girls as the expensive dolls are to our children nowadays. . . .

When the Social Hall was built, Christmas was sometimes celebrated there with dancing parties, and the enjoyment was such that those who had the opportunity of attending them remember to this day those good old times. Children's parties, too, were given there occasionally, and our girls and boys will perhaps never forget while they live, the first Christmas tree in the Social Hall, where there was a present for every child of several large families, and all numbered and arranged in perfect order of name and age. . . . President Young, Daniel H. Wells and others of their fellow citizens were there, but Brigham was foremost in making the affair a grand

success. It was an event in the lives of our children they ought never to forget, and I doubt if they ever will. . . .

Hon. John W. Young, then only a boy, handed the presents down from the tree, and I recollect Brother Brigham standing and pointing with his cane, and telling John just which to take down, and so on; the children were wild with delight and some of the mothers were quite as much elated, though not as demonstrative. After the Santa Claus tree was stripped of its gifts, the floor was cleared and the dancing commenced, and there was good music, too, and President Young led the dance, and cut a pigeon wing, to the great delight of the little folks. In fact, I think the evening was almost entirely given up to the children's festivities, and the older ones, the fathers and mothers and more especially President Young, made them supremely happy for that one Christmas eve. . . .

Then we had to tell them stories to make up for the things we lacked; now there is so much to occupy the time, that mothers have no moment to spare, evidently to tell them stories at all; they depend on the Primary and the Kindergarten teachers to do all this for them, while they, the dear blessed mothers, lose all the sweetest hours life can bring. . . .

Children do not have too much love not even on Christmas, . . . but they very often have too many toys and sweetmeats; how many children there are in the world who long more earnestly for real love than they do for aught else; there is no comfort or luxury that will supply its place even in the heart of a little child. There is more happiness because of love than from any other gift. The Savior taught many lessons of love and enjoined upon the Saints to love one another. It is natural to seek the happiness of those we love, to spare no pains, to grudge no self-denial on our part; and this we should teach to the children.

Above all else mothers tell the little ones a story on Christmas, and let it be a true one, that will always be remembered. . . .

**December 25, 1851.** A delightful day ushered in not by the ringing of bells for our city does not possess any, but by the firing of cannon. At daybreak the Nauvoo Brass Band had assembled and serenaded the city for 2 hours. At 10 A M the carpenter's shop was thrown open for an entertainment for the men employed on the public works, who with their families numbered 600 to 700. The building was comfortably fitted up with seats, tables, and conveniences for making tea. The Governor with several members of the Legislature were present with their ladies. When the floor was cleared for dancing (a good band having been engaged) the employers took for their partners the wives and daughters of the workmen and the workmen in turn took the wives and daughters of their employers. The company separated at 10 p.m.

#### Diary of Jean Rio Baker

**December 25, 1873.** At Ten o'clock on Christmas morning the children and teachers of the 15th Ward Sunday School, numbering about 300, assembled in the school house, to receive presents which had been placed upon a large Christmas tree in the center of the hall. The tree, besides being filled with a variety of things, was also illuminated with numerous wax candles, the room having been darkened to give better effect to the scene, which presented a very imposing appearance.

In addition to the presents from the tree, a number of prizes were distributed. A plain gold ring was awarded to Effie W. Morris, daughter of Elias Morris, for the best essay on "the birth and mission of Jesus Christ." Prizes were also awarded to the best singers, Miss Annie Jones and Arthur Davis being the successful competitors. At intervals the Sunday School Choir discoursed sweet music under the direction of their leader, D.A. Swan, to whom great praise is due for the pains he has taken to render the choir so efficient.

Before the presents were distributed James Moyle, on behalf of the committee and the school, presented an ivory handled walking cane to the superintendent, who received the same with grateful acknowledgments.

Supt. J.K. Hall took from the tree a box of emblematic figures representing the birth of Christ, and, on behalf of the teachers and scholars of the school, presented it to Sister Sarah M. Kimball as a token of the esteem in which that lady is held by them. After receiving the present

and making a few remarks, Sister Kimball proceeded to arrange the figures, at the same time explaining them in a pleasing manner to the children.

Presiding Bishop Edward Hunter was present and addressed the children and teachers, expressing himself highly delighted with the morning's proceedings.

#### Journal History

**Kirtland, Ohio, Christmas, 1836.** Sunday went up to the house of God to worship and heard a discours from Brother Samuel Smith. Brother Hiram Smith brook bread which closed the meeting. Elder Smoot was quite sick and healed by the laying on of hands.

#### Wilford Woodruff, Diary

**Great Salt Lake City, 1848. Christmas.** I staid at home and read newspapers which Prest. Y[oung] sent me, he having call'd last eve[ning].

#### Eliza R. Snow, Diary

**Great Salt Lake City, 1849. Christmas** Eve was all alive by the people in all directions firing guns, pistols, revolvers and the cannon fired several times. A dance at Martin H. Pecks, and the band playing at Aaron Farr's house.

#### Thomas Bullock, Diary

**Iron County, Utah, 1850.** Very severe frost. Thermometer at 1/2 past 6 a.m., 12° below zero. Commenced working the banks of the river, water about 2 feet deep. The ford was a good one, the comeing-out bank was over a very steep bluff which was difficult to ascend, being very slippery. It was very injurious to our cattle not being shod. Our Train all crossed over with the exception of 2 waggons. Capt. Bringham with eleven waggons came up, who had been in the rear since we left Peteeetneet, and camped on the other side of the river.

#### George A. Smith, Journal

**Vejle, Denmark, 1857.** It is the first day of Christmas. I stayed here and observed a fast day. There was a meeting here in Brother C.P. Stiep's house, but few came because there was a heavy rain and storm.

#### Peter Nielsen, Reminiscences and Journal

**London, England, 1840.** Christmas Day in London. The Church Bells throughout the city commenced chanting for meeting at half past ten. We met with the Saints . . . at 11 o'clock and we taught the Saints some plain principles, which had a good effect. We took our Christmas dinner with Br. Morgan. He had his family



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at home with him. The Dinner consisted of Baked Mutton, Goose, Rabbit Pies, Minced Pies, and Plum Pudding, and bread and cheese, Porter and water. We spent the evening at Mr. Albums in conversing about the things of God . . . May the Lord preserve my life, my wife and child in peace I pray, and enable all the Saints to be established in righteousness.

**Wilford Woodruff, Diary**

**Wednesday, 25 December 1850.** Christmas day lovely. The band, twenty-six in number, have promenaded the city and played before the houses of the Presidency. Twelve, and others, while riding on horseback. President Young went up to his mill, where there was a dance in the upper room.

**Church Historian's office, Diary**

**Thursday, 25 December 1856.** Accompanied by Bishop Edwin D. Woolley and Frederick Kesler, Brigham Young rode in a sleigh to the ice dam. After the president returned to the office he gave counsel and instruction to various persons.

**Church Historian's office, Diary**

**Buenos Aires, Friday, 25 December 1925.** Christmas morning. Went early this morning to Parque 3 de Febrero, and in a beautiful secluded spot Elder Melvin J. Ballard dedicated South America to preaching the gospel. Wonderful spirit present. Visited German Saints in the afternoon.

**Diary of Rey L. Pratt**

**Laupahoeho, Hawaii, Sunday, 25 December 1853.** In the afternoon we got the privilege to preach in a Calvinist Meeting House to quite a large congregation of natives. I don't find it any different with the natives than any other class of people. They manifest the same spirits: . . . some believe, and some fight and oppose it, and others obey it, the same as it is among all people. We baptized three this afternoon.

**Thomas Karren, Journal**

**East Germany, 1945.** Wolfsgruen. A Mormon refugee home. The prospects for Christmas 1945 seemed very gloomy. We succeeded in baking rye-buns. . . . My wife made her usual trip to Meerane to purchase provisions. Her sister who was a clerk in a grocery store, and who has helped us previously, had saved 60 pounds of chopped wheat. The wheat was no longer considered edible and was to be sold for cattle-food. With this wheat my wife baked a good Christmas cake. The baking eliminated the smell of moldiness and this added



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materially to our Christmas dinner.

**Arnold Schmidt, Reminiscence**

**25 December 1835.** At home all this day and enjoyed myself with my family, it being Christmas day—the only time I have had this privilege so satisfactorily for a long time.

**Joseph Smith, Diary**

One day just before Christmas, I left the old home with feelings I cannot describe. . . . I wanted something to please my chicks and to mark the Christmas day from all days—but not a cent to do it with! I walked up and down Main Street, looking into the shop windows—into Amussen's jewelry store, into every store—everywhere—and then slunk out of sight of humanity and sat down and wept like a child, until my poured-out

grief relieved my aching heart; and after a while returned home, as empty as when I left, and played with the children, grateful and happy only for them. . . .

**Joseph F. Smith to his son, 29 December 1914, Improvement Era 22:266.**

**25 December 1940.** It was a real treat to see how happy the children were with their gifts. . . . I played with them, helped them enjoy their toys, read to them some faith-promoting stories and we shed tears together as we had brought to our attention the sacrifices that were made by some of our loved ones when they settled this country. . . .

**George Albert Smith, Diary**

Diary excerpts from Christmas cards designed by the LDS Historical Department, History Division, 1972-1977.