

MEDINA BUGLE

A Publication of the Medina Historical Society

Winter 2012

President's Message

As the holiday season is upon us I find myself reflecting on the past year and all of your help that continued to shape our museum. I thank you for all your support in 2012.

Holiday meeting agenda:

2013 Elections
1865 Christmas decorations
View new exhibits
Waldo book update and orders
Holiday Fun

“And the Grinch, with his Grinch feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons, it came without tags, it came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before, what if Christmas he thought doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas perhaps, means a little bit more?” Dr. Seuss

Next Monthly Meeting

Monday Nov 26th 7:00pm
Open house at the Medina Historical Society Museum

406 West Ave.

Officers 2012

President Reinhard Rogowski
Vice President: Craig Lacy
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The Board of Directors of Medina Historical Society and Museum decided to have the museum decorated circa 1865 at the end of the Civil War. 2012 is one of the years of the sesquicentennial of that war. A few comments of Christmas in Civil War time...

During the Civil War Christmas was often heart wrenching what with families apart and death all around. The south suffered more, with mothers telling their children that even Santa could not run the blockade. A soldier of the Jew Jersey 5th Alfred Bellard told about the arrival of the newly popular Christmas tree in his camp and how the men "decorated" it withhardtack and salt pork in lieu of fruit and candy.

One bit of Christmas warmth happened after Sherman's capture of Savannah, Georgia. On December 21, 1864 about 90 Michigan soldiers and their captain loaded several wagons with food and other supplies and handed them out to the local residents. The Southerners thanked the Union Santa Clauses as their wagons were pulled away by mules, which had branches strapped to their heads as make-believe reindeer. Thomas Nast an illustrator with Harper's Weekly drew Santa Claus throughout the 1860's and it is his illustrations that gave us the look of Santa that continues with us to this day. Abraham Lincoln called Nast's use of Santa "the best recruiting sergeant the North ever had." On the Southern side The Richmond Examiner told its young citizens that Santa was a "Dutch toy monger" a New York/New England "scrub" and Hottentot that had nothing to do with the traditional Virginia

celebration of Christmas. After the Civil War was over Nast made Santa's home the North Pole so no one would be able to use Santa for propaganda as Nast himself did. "I heard the bells on Christmas Day" ... Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned these words after visiting his severely wounded son, Charles who was in the Army of the Potomac and struggling to recover during Christmas 1864. Later the poem was put to music. One of the stanzas that shows Longfellow's despair:

"Then from each black, accursed
mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound the carols
drowned
Of peace on earth, good will to men."

Whenever there is war - holidays for the soldiers and their families are bittersweet, true back then and true now. They prayed for peace then as we do now.

At our museum today, we attempt to make our Christmas of 1865 a joyous celebration of family so.....

When you arrive at our museum you may be a bit "underwhelmed" for lack of lavish decoration. And, that is as it should be; lavish Christmas decorations didn't come until much later, closer to the 20th century, or late Victorian era. Table top trees were the norm, and even they were for the more affluent. Greens - holly and evergreen were popular for decorating the mantels and naturally mistletoe was always popular, especially with the young and old alike. Homemade decorations were the norm and stringing popcorn and cranberries in the north was a traditional touch. Cookies, candy

and fruit – like apples and nuts were hung on the tree. Gifts were placed on the tree rather than under it.

Most people did not have Christmas trees, often not even a wreath on the door. But, they did celebrate and Christmas dinner was the highlight. In the north oysters were a special treat. The trains made it possible to have fresh sea food shipped far inland for all to enjoy. When you visit our museum either on November 24th or the 26th check out the oyster plate, whole oysters were served on it. Tradition in my family (Ramming) oyster stew was a Christmas Eve dinner must. It seems food was the best delight then as it is now! Turkey was a favorite, but also goose and duck. Pies of apple and pumpkin, mashed potatoes and gravy. The bounty of what grew around was presented at its best.

By Georgia Thomas

Merry Christmas to all from Medina Historical Society and Museum!

Article from Los Angeles Times Dec 1995

Civil War Christmas" seeks to relive those moments in history, by re-creating the sights and sounds typical of Christmas in 1865, this Saturday at the George Key Ranch in Placentia.

The facility's 1898 ranch house and the surrounding two acres of groves and outbuildings will be transformed into a rural homestead where Confederate and Union soldiers on their way home from the war will gather with locals to celebrate. The event will include performances and audience participation dances by the Yesteryear Dancers, mid-Victorian music

by the Cottonwood String Band, old-fashioned Christmas decorations and food.

The ranch, purchased by the county in 1980 and one of six historical sites operated by the county's department of harbors, beaches and parks, is a portion of the original property of Canadian immigrant George Benn Key, one of the area's early civic leaders. The 2.2-acre site is open to the public only through arranged tours and for special events such as the annual "Christmas at the Ranch" celebrations.

Mike Miniaci, the park ranger who organized "A Civil War Christmas," says he has tried to re-create "that twilight period in history when the war was over, but the turmoil brought on by the Reconstruction had not begun."

"It was a happy time of soldiers coming home, families being reunited and people just making the best of what they had. We want to capture that sense of celebration and hopefulness."

Miniaci invited several reenactment groups from Southern California. The groups, each inspired by a particular Confederate or Union army battalion, are made up of Civil War enthusiasts who outfit themselves (at considerable personal expense) in replica uniforms, gear and artillery.

If you've seen the film "Gettysburg," you've seen reenactment enthusiasts in action, said Miniaci, a member of the Iron Brigade group. Nearly 5,000 enthusiasts from across the United States helped stage the battle scenes in the 1993 movie. You can often catch reenactments at places such as Irvine Regional Park and Oak Glen near Beaumont.

On Saturday the Key house will be decorated with fresh greenery, pine cones, paper chains and cornhusk dolls to fit the period. In keeping with traditions of the day, the dining room will be set for a

"formal hospitality," in which visitors can enjoy a treat or some cider while mingling with Confederate and Union officers and festively dressed ladies. Outside, soldiers will greet the revelers from their encampments, and settlers (traveling vendors who followed the troops) will sell hand-carved toys and other period items.

Irene Ujda, director of the Yesteryear Dancers--which will perform and involve viewers in such dances as the Virginia reel and the Lancers quadrille--maintains that, although celebrations may have been lean in 1865, the dances and formal clothing were among the most elegant in American history.

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