

AGARITA GAZETTE



A Chronicle of the Plum Creek Shooting Society

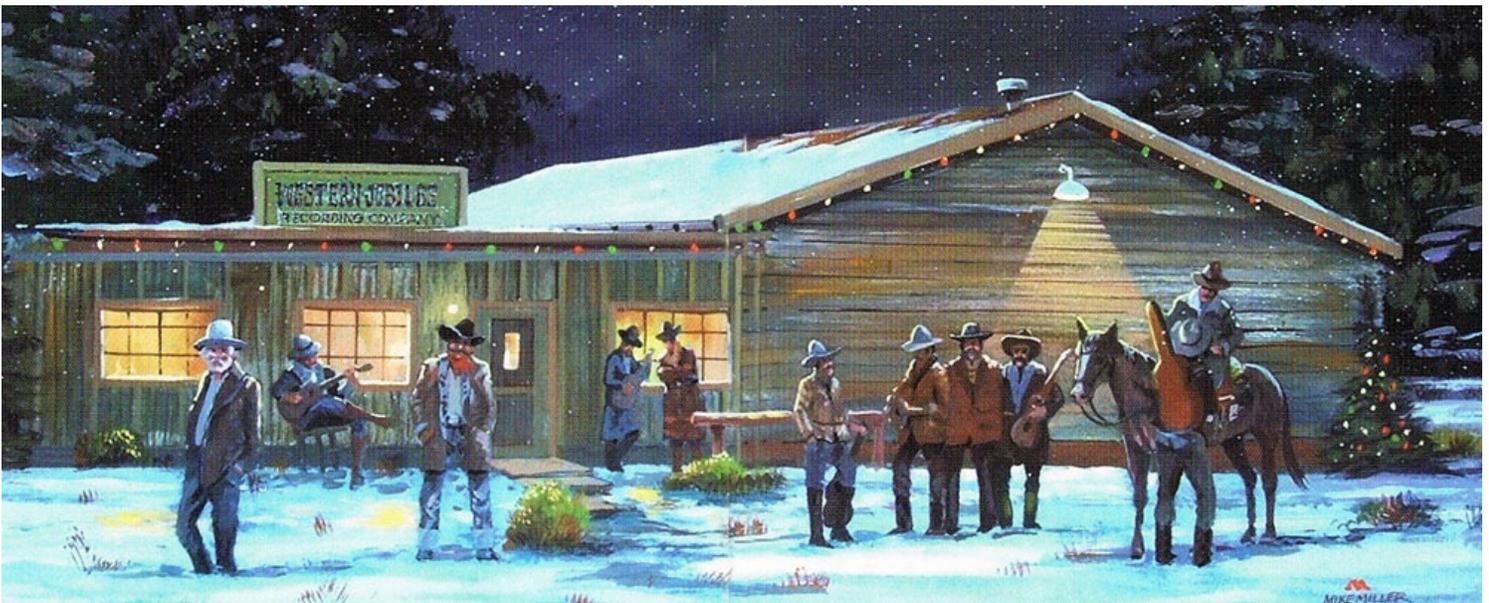


Agarita Ranch

December 2015

Lockhart, Texas

Christmas in the Old West



Life in the Old West, now considered romantic, was labor intensive with few celebratory breaks. It was, nevertheless, common to pause at Christmas and reflect on joys or hardships of the time, on memories of the past and on dreams of the future. It would have been difficult to find a Christmas in the Old West where the holiday was not acknowledged or celebrated in some fashion.

In the mid-19th Century, Christmas in American

included many of the same traditions, customs and festivities as is does today, including tree decorating, gift-giving, greeting cards, stockings by the fire, church activities and family-oriented days of feast and fun. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Santa Claus was a figure well known in the Old West, thanks primarily to English and German Christmas traditions carried west by settlers and soldiers alike. In her book "Tenting on the Plains,"

Elizabeth Custer, wife of General George Armstrong Custer, wrote the following:

We had a lovely Christmas ... We had a large Christmas-tree, and Autie was Santa Claus, and handed down the presents, making side-splitting remarks as each person walked up to receive his gift. The tree was well lighted. I don't know how so many tapers were gotten together.

Continued next page

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For those living in the Old West, far away from more civilized life in the East, Christmas could be a very difficult time. On the prairies, they were often barraged with terrible blizzards and savage December winds. Blinding storms and freezing cold forced



mountain men to curtail their activities long before Christmas. Although Christmas for pioneers, sod busters, cowboys, explorers and mountain men was often meager, it was not forgotten, it was just a more modest celebration.

Determined to bring the spirit of Christmas alive on the American frontier, soldiers could be heard caroling at their remote outposts and the smell of venison roasting over an open hearth floated on the winds of the open prairie. Settlers in the Old West looked forward to the chance to forget their hard



everyday lives and to focus instead on the Christmas season. They decorated their homes for the holidays with whatever natural materials looked attractive at

Continued next page

the bleakest time of year, such as evergreens,



pinecones, holly, nuts and berries. For some, there was a Christmas tree, gaily decorated with bits of ribbon, yarn, berries, popcorn or paper strings and homemade decorations. Homemade decorations included figures or dolls made of straw or yarn. Cookie-dough ornaments and gingerbread men were also popular. In other places, wood was too scarce to "waste" on a tree, if one could be found at all, and

many pioneer homes were simply too small to make room for a tree.

Virtually every home made the holiday a time of feast, bringing out preserved fruits and vegetables, fresh game when possible and maybe even beef or a ham. Many women began to bake for the holiday weeks ahead of time, leaving the plum pudding to age in the pot until Christmas dinner. You might empathize with the passengers who spent the Christmas of 1870 on the Kansas-Pacific train stuck in snow. Fortunately, soldiers from a nearby fort provided fresh buffalo meat, which is a whole lot more than you get today if stuck at the airport.

Homemade Christmas gifts included corn husk dolls, sachets (small scented bag), carved wooden toys, pillows, footstools, embroidered hankies and

knitted scarves, hats, mitts and socks. If the family had had a good year, the children might find candies, small gifts, cookies and fruit in their stockings.

Christmas Eve usually found most families singing carols around the Christmas tree or fireplace. On Christmas Day, most would attend church, return home for the traditional Christmas meal and spend the day visiting with friends and neighbors. Then, as it is today, however, Christmas would also find many a mountain man, explorer or lone cowboy spending a solitary evening without the benefit of festivities.

To all of you, whether celebrating alone or with friends and family, **Merry Christmas and best wishes for the New Year!**





Long Juan Here:

Thanks to **Fuzzy One**, **General Burleson** and **Lefty Leo** for handling registration and scoring at the December match. Anyone who has not done it has no idea how much work is involved. We all need to tell them thanks as often as we can. The only piece of news this month is that **Dragon Hill Dave** and **Long Juan** have been re-elected to two-year terms as President and Secretary respectively.

FIND DELTA RAIDER:

Last month, **Delta Raider** was “hidden” in the photo of **Six Goin’ South’s** posse. He did not shoot with that posse and did not pose with the posse for the photo. He was added later using PhotoShop. That counts as “hidden when finding **Delta Raider** each month. Hereby mentioned in the dispatches for finding **Delta Raider** in the November issues are: **El Sabre**, **Six Goin’ South**, **Hairtrigger Hayes**, **Sheriff Robert Love**, **Big John Mesquite**, **Six Wire**, **Hoss Roonwright**, **Artiman** and **Mad Dog McCoy**. See if you can find where he is hidden this month for a mention in the dispatches next month. For those of you who are really good at finding him, he is hidden twice. Find both for an extra mention in the Dispatches.





Stories from Jake (Paladin that is):

The Tradition of Mistletoe at Christmas

Most people have heard of Mistletoe, particularly at Christmas time. It is a plant which often grows on other trees and shrubs. The white berries are full of a sticky juice.

A common custom at Christmas-time is to place a sprig of Mistletoe above a door frame or to hang it from the ceiling. During frequent holiday get-togethers, any female who lingers under the Mistletoe is fair game for a harmless kiss from nearby males. The original custom was to pick a berry off for every kiss. When all the berries were gone, no more kissing. In any event, don't eat the berries; some species of Mistletoe are poisonous.

The tradition of hanging Mistletoe in the house goes back to the times of the ancient Druids (members of the educated, professional class among the Celtic peoples of Gaul, Britain and Ireland). Mistletoe was supposed to possess mystical powers which brought good luck to the household and warded off evil spirits. In Norse mythology, Mistletoe was also used as a sign of love and friendship and that's where the custom of kissing under Mistletoe comes from.



Ditties from Jake (Jones that is):

What Jake (Paladin that is) did not tell you: The name Mistletoe comes from two Anglo Saxon words "Mistel" (which means dung) and "tan" (which means twig or stick)! So you could translate Mistletoe as "poo on a stick"!!! Not as romantic as you thought, is it?

Pike, Fremont, Mules & More

Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike, for whom Pike's Peak is named, and 24 soldiers left Belle Fontaine near St. Louis, Missouri, on July 15, 1806. Their primary objective was to "ascertain the direction, extent and navigation of the Arkansas and Red Rivers." Lieutenant Pike and his men reached the site of what is now Salida, Colorado, on December 24th. Despite deep snow and the scarcity of game, the reality of impending starvation pushed a desperate hunting party out of camp Christmas Eve. The hunters were able to locate and kill 8 buffalo. Jubilation filled the entire party and Pike commented in his journal:



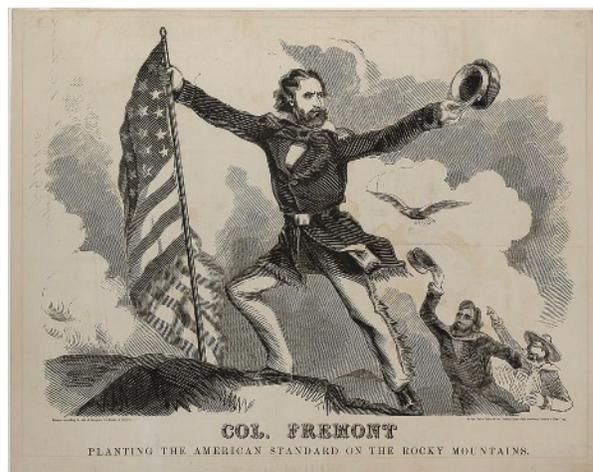
We now again found ourselves all assembled together on Christmas Eve, and appeared generally to be content, although all the refreshment we had to celebrate the holiday with was buffalo meat, without salt, or any other thing whatever.

Forty-two years later, Colonel John C. Fremont made his fourth expedition to the far West. Christmas 1848 found Colonel Fremont and his men camped high in the La Garita Range of southern Colorado. Conditions were so bad that they named the pathetic log outpost they built, Camp Desolation. Game had already migrated to lower elevations. Plentiful snow and freezing temperatures limited foraging. In spite of these hardships, perhaps because of them, the men nevertheless insisted on celebrating Christmas. Thomas Breckenridge, a member of Fremont's party, recorded the menu of the limited Christmas banquet:



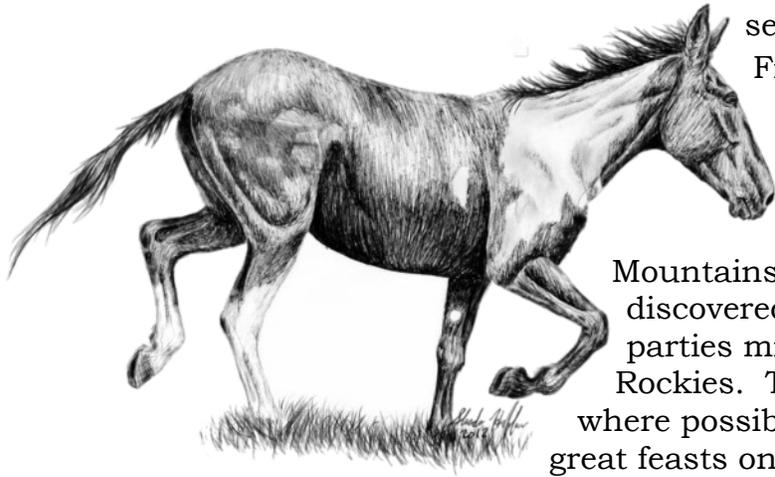
Soup
Mule Tail
Meats
Mule Steaks, Fried Mule, Mule Chops
Boiled Mule, Stewed Mule, Scrambled Mule
Shirred Mule, French-Fried Mule, Minced Mule,
Damned Mule, Mule on Toast (without toast)
Short Ribs of Mule with Apple Sauce (without Apple Sauce)
Beverages
Snow, Snow, Water, Water

Mule meat apparently isn't much for eating. I find mention of slicing it thin and roasting, but then it is much like eating leather. Mostly, mule was made edible as stew, mush or soup. Some sources mention



making soup from mule tail. Not sure how that works. Others sources mention eating mule rump, mule head, mule ears and mule liver, but I think those references are in jest. At least I hope they are in jest. During the siege at Vicksburg, one restaurant is reported to have advertised

Continued next page



serving rabbit-and-mule stew. In any event, Freeman's men apparently had lots of mule for Christmas dinner in 1848 and were happy to have it.

Government-funded explorations were not the only white men in the Rocky Mountains during the 1840's. Mountain men discovered passes and fertile valleys the government parties missed. The fur trade spread throughout the Rockies. Trappers mixed with Indians. When and where possible, the white men introduced their joy of great feasts on Christmas Day. The Indians dubbed the Christmas feast, "The Big Eating." For one such feast, James

Kipp, a grizzled mountain man, planned to treat his fur traders and Indian allies to a big surprise at Fort Union, Montana. Weeks before Christmas, Kipp fattened a large heifer, a rare commodity then, for his gift of an "Eastern" delicacy. He, however, received the day's biggest surprise. A few bites of beef convinced all the other diners that "tame" meat was "too fat and downright sickening." They returned to the lean buffalo and other wild meats, which I am guessing did not include mule.





Merry Christmas to All!!



@ The Agarita Ranch

December Match Photos

Dutch Van Horn and **Lefty Leo** contributed our photos this month. More are posted on the website.



Dutch ("Santa" Van Horn



Lucky Nickel & Texas Reb



Mr. Clean - Alamo Andy shot clean both morning and afternoon in December



Flaco Jimenez showing good “lever” form



Joe Darter



Looks like the man in the derby - Circuit Judge - did something to surprise Six Goin' South. We won't ask!



Showing a little BLING!



New Scoring Marshal, General Burleson, sure got a baptism under fire at his first solo match. With a little help from Lefty Leo, all turned out well. Thanks



Bunkhouse Bob shooting his 1911 at the morning Wild Bunch match with Wildcat Bob on the timer



I Reckon



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Shinbone Bob



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	105	FP	33	66
	125	RNFP	35	70
	125	FP	35	70
	130	RNFP	36	72
	158	RNFP	39	77
	158	FP	39	77
	158	SWC	39	77
.380	100	RNFP	33	65
.38-55	245	RNFP	59	117
.41	215	SWC	49	98
.44	180	RNFP	41	81
	240	SWC	52	104
.44-40	200	RNFP	45	90
.45 COLT	160	RNFP	46	92
	180	RNFP	41	81
	200	RNFP	45	90
	250	RNFP	53	106
9MM	124	RN	35	70
	125	CN	35	70
40 S&W	180	FP	41	81
.45ACP	200	SWC	45	90
	200	RN	45	90
	230	RN	51	101
45-70	405	FPT	111	222

*Price increase because of higher cost of lead. Sorry for any inconvenience.