

The interest of Christmas in America was revisited in the 1820s when several short stories and poems by Washington Irving appeared in his book "The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon" and "Old Christmas". Clement Clarke Moore's 1822 Poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" became popularly known as "Twas the Night Before Christmas".

1872 Xmas



triumphantly then as he does today.

Christmas in 1872 was not the day of days for us where comforts were concerned. There were neither glittering electric lights nor colored tinsels to sparkle and glisten on the Christmas trees. No, but we had lots of towering Christmas trees sparkling with myriad diamonds, placed there by Jack Frost, who reigned as gloriously and

Instead of the wonderful choirs singing beautiful Christmas carols, we would lie still at night and hear the howl of the wolves or the shrill cry of the coyote as he answered the call of his mate. And over all was the "Peace of the Plain." We seemed perhaps to understand better in those early days the true meaning of the words "Peace on Earth."

Perhaps the howl of the wolves would not seem like music to the ears of many today, nor take the place of the Christmas carols, but to me it had more of a thrill. Ever since my early days spent in the hills of Scotland I had longed for the time when I could roam over the plains and perhaps shoot a buffalo, of which I had read so much. So leaving Fort Edmonton early in December 1872, with my rifle and horse, dragging a long flat sled with some provisions and ammunition and tent material, I set out traveling south. Two companions joined me, one a Virginian [Addison McPherson], the other a Norwegian, known as "Dutch Charlie," [Charles Smith]. We traveled

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Most of Irvings stories were harmonious and warm holiday traditions he claimed to have observed in England. Some disagree saying that Irving invented the traditions he describes so that they would be widely followed by the American readers. Christmas was declared a Federal holiday in the United States in 1870.

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by easy stages, visiting with Indian tribes and pitching our tent when and where we felt like it.

After days of traveling, we reached some hills, I think now known as the Hand Hills. From the top of one of the hills we could see the prairie stretching for miles with hundreds of buffaloes feeding. What a thrill! Before we even had our lodge erected, I grabbed my rifle and started on the run. When I reached the place where I had seen the buffalo, there were plenty of tracks, but - no buffalo to be seen.

Next day, I said to my companions: "Is it true that tomorrow is Christmas day?"

"Sure thing, it's the 25th of December. What you think of doing?"

Hanging up your socks? Don't bother. There isn't no Santa Claus around here - no, nor turkey for dinner, neither."

"Well," I said, "I'm not looking for Santa Claus, but if I could only shoot a buffalo wouldn't a roast of that make a grand Christmas dinner?" "Sure would," said he, "but a greenhorn like you could never reach one. It takes the real Indians to do that."

There and then I made up my mind to get a buffalo or perish in the attempt. So taking my rifle, I set out. I could see from the top of a hill hundreds of buffalo feeding. There was timber on the north side of this hill, and suddenly I heard a crashing sound and turned just in time to see a huge buffalo coming on the run toward the hill where I was. I dropped out of sight until it disappeared in the hollow between the hills. I then ran until I reached a pile of brush. As I crouched there with my rifle cocked, it was only a minute or two till he passed me on the run just a few steps away - he looked as big as an elephant.

I shot him just behind the shoulder. He ran to the brow of the hill, then pitched forward on his breast, and slid right down the hill to the bottom. Was I proud? That was hardly the name for it. I was fairly dancing to think that I had really shot a buffalo. I did shoot many after that but none that ever gave me the thrill that I got from shooting this one.

After bleeding him and walking round and round before I could make up my mind to leave him, I hurried to our camp to tell the others. They came back with me, and after skinning it, we cut off the hind quarter and the tongue. Into the remainder I placed half a bottle of strychnine for the benefit of the wolves, which always followed a buffalo herd.

Next morning I was up bright and early, and visited what was left of the buffalo. There I found two dead wolves which we skinned, and Charlie cut out the back fat, a wide strip of which extended the full length of the back. As the strychnine never leaves the stomach, this fat is considered a great delicacy and was eaten with great relish.

And we did have such a merry Christmas dinner! We cooked the buffalo roast and ate it with bannocks made of flour and water and baked over hot stones - a feast fit for a king. After our dinner, we gathered around the camp fire, and Dutch Charlie told us stories of Christmas days and customs in Norway when he was a boy. The Virginian told us how they celebrated Christmas in Virginia, while I told of Christmas in Auld Scotland.

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Since then I have spent many Christmas days in Alberta and watched the buffalo trails give way to ribbons of steel and highways filled with automobiles, and have seen the buffalo slowly but surely disappear from the prairie, but never have I spent a Christmas day so full of happiness and the joy of achievement as that first Christmas day so long ago, for had I not at last realized the joy of accomplishment and the fulfillment of one of my childhood dreams.