

Christmas is normally the largest annual economic stimulus for many countries. Sales increase dramatically in almost all retail aspects as folks purchase gifts, decorations, and supplies. As a general rule, the Christmas shopping season begins on Black Friday – or the day after Thanksgiving.

Xmas Note



How Riel's Prisoners Spent Christmas

When the morning of the 25th of December, 1869, came round in Red River, it found 63 prisoners in the hands of the Provisional Government of Assiniboia, of which Louis Riel was president.

They came to be there because when they were asked by a representative of Governor Macdougall to take up arms for their country they complied, but they soon found themselves deserted, and Riel finding them with arms in their hands, lodged them in jail.

He fed them with pemmican. It so happened that the Canadian Government owned some dozen or two quarters of beef. The writer, on applying for the use of this supply of meat, was allowed to use it as food for the prisoners. It could not be served raw and the only hotel in the place refused to cook it.

Fortunately, the representative referred to left behind him in the village a cooking stove, a man servant, a horse, and a leased house. The services of all were put in requisition and the wife of Brian Devlin, the only baker in the place, undertook for a consideration of five shillings, to bake a sack of flour, the flour being bought in the place.

In this way, it came about that every morning there was sent up to the prisoners two boilers full of hot tea and

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In most areas, Christmas Day is the slowest day of the year for business and commerce after the busy time between Black Friday and Christmas Eve. Almost all businesses close on the Christmas holiday.

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several loaves of bread, and every afternoon at about one o'clock, a mess of boiled beef and bread.

On the day before Christmas, the writer spoke to a few friends as to whether anything extra could be added to the very plain bill of fare on Christmas day.

All that could be done in the leased house would be the boiling of an extra quantity of meat and tea. Outside aid must be sought for the rest. George Emmerling, the owner of the hotel, professed himself willing to do what he could, but on referring to his better half was told that the dinner for their own guests would tax all their capacity.

At last, a promise of aid was cordially given by some ladies. In one house it was resolved a plum pudding should be made; a young lady, later the wife of a North-West magistrate, undertook the mysterious operation. Mrs. James Stewart lent a willing hand in the

manufacture of pastry, and two o'clock the following day was fixed upon as the time at which all should be ready for dispatch to the fort, nearly three-quarters of a mile distant.

The latter part of the repast came near being spoiled by the absence of dried fruit, which at last was obtained at eight o'clock in the evening at the store of Henry McKenney.

On account of the pressure of work at the leased house, it was found necessary to dispense with the usual breakfast. As no communication had been had with the prisoners as to the intentions of those outside, they unfortunately knew no reason for the absence of breakfast, and as the whole dinner was not ready until four in the afternoon, they had all come to the conclusion that for some unknown reason they were going to go without any outside food that day. Indeed, I believe many of them stayed their appetites with pemmican before our dinner reached them.

At four o'clock, however, Joseph Crowson, with his faithful black nag, was on his way with the beef, tea, pudding and pastry and, just as the darkness was settling down, he delivered his supplies to

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the starving prisoners.

It looked strange to see the sled on which the tea boiler was carried to the fort. The cover was not a good fit and the jolting of the sled caused the tea to run over the edge of the boiler, and in a few days a small mound of ice tea formed on the sled and daily received additions to its height.

The thanks of the prisoners were duly returned through Mr.

Crowson to the ladies who had so kindly assisted to give relief to their otherwise monotonous fare.

This was the way, then, that they got their Christmas dinner.