

Southlake Historical Society Gazette

December
2019

It's Been a Very Good Year

The Southlake Historical Society has been promoting the preservation, understanding and appreciation of Southlake history since 1992.

This year was filled with exhibits, local events and a website created to be our virtual museum.

And as the year comes to a close, we would like to announce two events on the 2020 calendar.

Early next year, the City of Southlake and the Southlake Arts Council will install a piece of sculpture in the Blossom Prairie Wildflower Area, adjacent the Southlake Log House in Bicentennial Park. Local sculptor, Seth Vandable, has created a beautiful representation of a pioneer woman and her child looking out from the fields she is working. We are thrilled that this piece of art will complement the log house.

Next summer, our Town Hall exhibit will showcase Bob and Almeady Jones, early landowners in now-Southlake and namesakes of Bob Jones Park and the Bob Jones Nature Center. We are hard at work researching this story of endurance and success.

To stay up with our activities, please visit www.SouthlakeHistory.org, our Instagram page #southlaketxhistory and like us on Facebook.

Stop on By

When you are out and about with your family and friends over the holidays, please stop by the log house (located at the White Chapel Blvd. entrance to Bicentennial Park under the water tower) and learn more about life in the 1850s-1860s in North Texas. By the way, feel free to take some pictures since the house is all dressed up for Christmas. Southlake's Log House was built with logs from three structures that were built in the 1850s and 1860s. In the late 1990s, members of the Southlake Historical Society dismantled the three structures to save the logs and the heavy timbers were stored on



the property of SHS member and long-time local historian Jack Wiesman until 2008, when the society donated the logs to the city of Southlake.

City workers soon retrieved the logs from Mr. Wiesman's property and transported them to Stony, Texas where log structure reconstructionist Bill Marquis of Denton County crafted the log house structure that sits on the grounds of Bicentennial Park today.

To read more about the log house visit www.southlakehistory.org and click Buildings & Markers at the top of the homepage.

Nineteenth-Century Christmas in North Texas

Several years ago, SHS wrote an article about Christmas in the mid-1800s in Texas. We've included it here, and we hope you enjoy it.

Humble Beginnings: an Early Texas Christmas

By Anita Robeson and Connie Cooley

Christmas 1845 was one to remember. A few weeks before, just as 12 wagons of related families from Missouri arrived in the now-Southlake area, a great snowstorm swept across Texas. Unprepared, families huddled in their wagons or around fires built on the ground. When

the storm finally passed, they worked together with haste to chop wood, shelter their livestock, and build crude log cabins, one at a time. The first home, it's said, was built for a young couple with an infant.

Now that's a busy holiday season.

Christmas traditions for many Americans in the mid-1800s included customs we know today: decorated trees, gifts, St. Nicholas, greeting cards, stockings by the fire, church activities, and family-oriented days of feasting and fun.

In North Texas, far from civilization, the pioneer men and women, farmers, ranchers, soldiers, and cowboys of the 1840s, '50s and '60s often had a meager holiday. But Christmas would not be forgotten, be it ever so humble.

Those settlers who trekked to now-Southlake in 1845, all devout Baptists, celebrated by reading the Christmas story from the Bible and perhaps singing *The First Noel* (traditional) or *O Come All Ye Faithful* (17th century). Because they were in the Eastern Cross Timbers, they would have had plenty of Christmas trees to choose from -- but where would they find room for one in a 14-by-14-foot log cabin in which the entire family slept, stored their belongings, and prepared food?

Across Texas in remote frontier outposts, soldiers could be heard caroling, the smell of venison roasting over an open hearth drifting across the prairie. At parties from the Panhandle to Fort Worth, cowboys and local families danced and made merry.

In the late 1860s, Christmas at the Charles Goodnight ranch in the Palo Duro Canyon overflowed with good cheer. (Goodnight and his business partner, Oliver Loving, were the cattlemen whose lives Larry McMurtry drew upon for his protagonists Augustus McCrae and Woodrow Call in the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Lonesome Dove*.)

In *Texas and Christmas*, fifth-generation Texan folklorist, author and editor Joyce Gibson Roach of Keller included a description:

"The Old Colonel [Goodnight] always entertained the entire Panhandle at Christmas time. For weeks ahead of the appointed day women were busy planning and preparing for the big party at the Goodnight ranch, which was often attended by as many as 175 persons.

Long tables in the form of a cross were loaded with food – roast beef, wild turkey, antelope, cakes, pies, and other delicacies of the day. At the point where the long tables meet was a Star Navy tomato box decorated with pieces of colored glass and pretty pebbles and covered with a spotlessly clean white cloth. Upon this central table stood the Christmas tree, a spruce or other

evergreen from the Palo Duro Canyon ornamented with bunches of frosted raisins and strings of popcorn and cranberries. Each guest received at least one present.

Dances, a favorite diversion of the time, were attended by cowboys and others [who travelled] from great distances and continued until the small hours of the night. Girls, of whom there were never enough to go around, danced and rested alternately. Artists of the fiddle, banjo and guitar furnished music.”

Decorations in some log homes might have been evergreens, pinecones, holly, nuts, and berries. A family with a tree might have adorned it with bits of ribbon, yarn, berries, popcorn or paper strings, handmade figures, or dolls made of straw or yarn. Cookie-dough ornaments and gingerbread men were also popular decorations.

Almost every home, when possible, made the holiday a time of feasting, serving dried fruit, potatoes or turnips, cornbread, beans, pickles, fresh game, beef or ham, and desserts. Women began baking weeks ahead of time, leaving the plum pudding and fruitcake to age until Christmas dinner.

Homemade gifts included cornhusk dolls, sachets, carved wooden toys, pillows, footstools, embroidered hankies, and knitted scarves, hats, mittens, and socks. Children might find candies, small gifts, cookies, and an orange in their stockings.

On Christmas Eve, families sang carols around the Christmas tree or fireplace and perhaps attended a candlelight church service.

On Christmas Day, families went to church, savored a traditional meal, and spent the day visiting with friends and family.

Family traditions handed down and enjoyed more than a century later.

References: Missouri colonists’ first Christmas in Texas, *Trek to Texas: 1770-1870* by Pearl Foster O’Donnell; Charles Goodnight’s Christmas party, C. May Cohea, Oral History Collection, Panhandle Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

A Christmas Cookie Recipe from the Past

The origins of gingersnap cookies can be traced back to England and Germany. Early American colonists would have brought a traditional recipe such as this one with them when they began settling here.

GINGERSNAPS:

Ingredients:

1 cup brown sugar

¾ cup shortening

2 tablespoons molasses,

1 egg

2-1/2 cups flour

2 teaspoons baking soda

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground ginger

1/2 teaspoon ground cloves

Step 1: Preheat oven to 375°

Step 2: Mix brown sugar, shortening, molasses and egg together in a large bowl

Step 3: Stir in flour, baking soda, salt, and spices until dough forms

Step 4: Shape the dough into balls about the size of egg yolks

Step 5: Roll each ball in white, granulated sugar

Step 6: Place balls about 3 inches apart on a greased cookie sheet

Step 7: Bake for 10 minutes

Step 8: Cool for a few minutes before removing from the pan. Makes approximately 30 cookies, depending on how large you make the dough balls.

Year-End Giving

If you would like to donate to the society (a 501(c) 3 organization) in our continuing efforts to research and write about Southlake history, [please visit our website](#) and click the **DONATE** button on the right.

From our house to yours, we hope you have a wonderful holiday season.
And, we hope to see you in the new year!

Connie Cooley, President
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