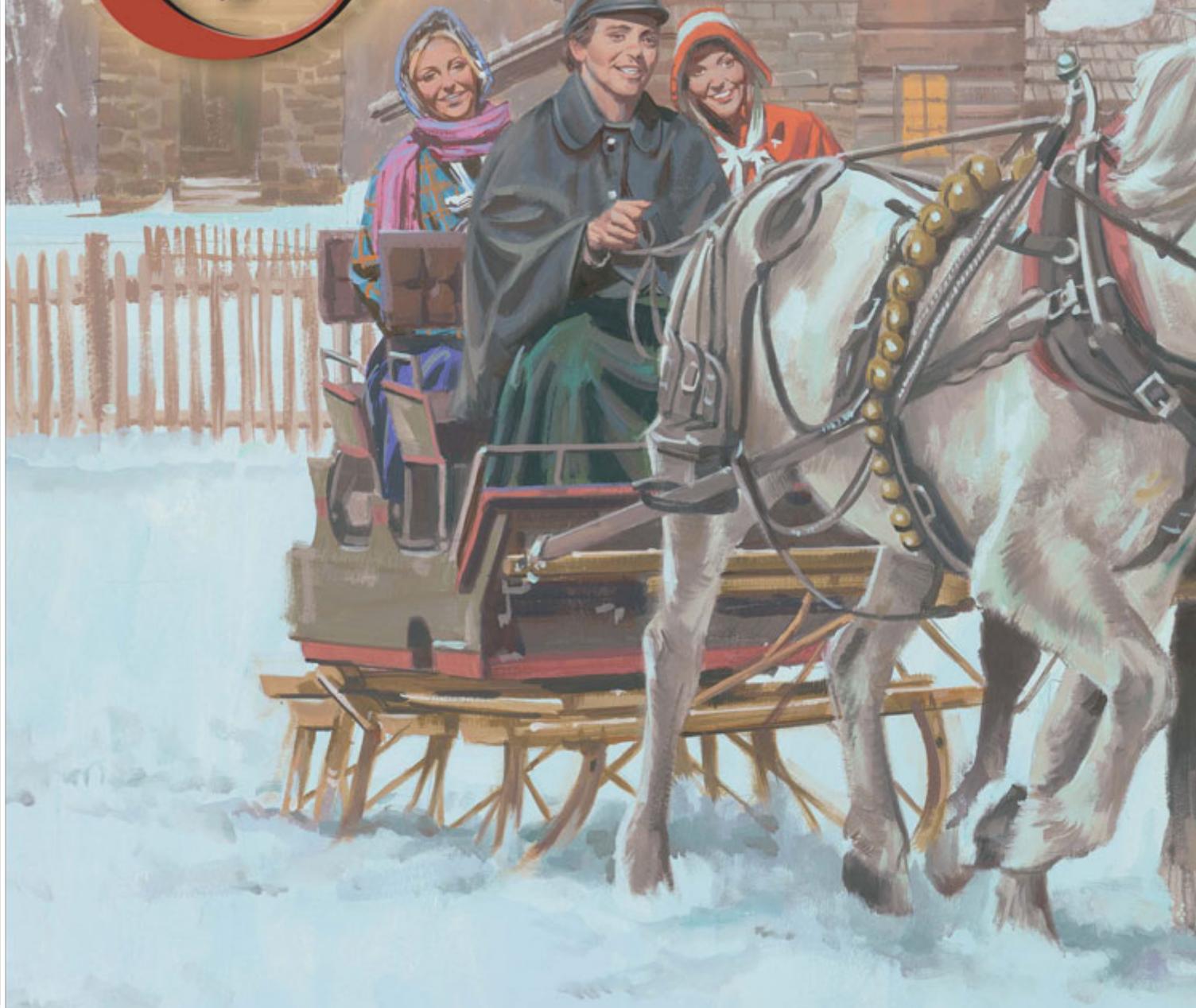


# CHRISTMAS with the



ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL MANN, LETTERING BY JOHN H. CLARK, PHOTOGRAPHS BY TAMMAY COLEMAN, AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN LUKE

# Pioneers

*Imagine what Christmas was like back with the early Saints.*

For pioneers, Christmas in the depths of harsh winters was unfortunately not often a time of plenty. Yet memories of those early Christmas holidays, some as simple as a dance, a word of gratitude, or a small gift of sweets, have been passed down through families to this day.

Here are just a few records written down of holidays held in pioneer times:

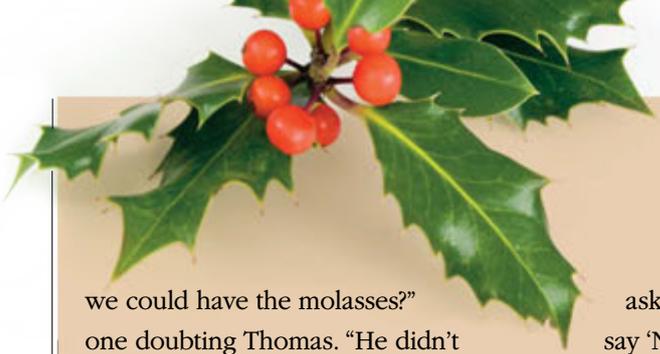
## **The Case of the Missing Molasses**

Orderville, Utah—One December evening some of the sisters of Orderville met to plan a Christmas treat for the children. The Order had no luxuries and the necessities were strictly rationed. About the only sweets the people had was molasses, so, the sisters decided to make molasses candy and cookies for the youngsters.

But on Christmas Eve, they came to “Grandmother Spencer,” wife of Howard Orson Spencer, bishop and leader in Orderville, with the news that the brother in charge of the molasses “won’t let us have any. He says our allowance for the month is already used.” Grandmother’s lips tightened. “The children are going to have something for Christmas. I’ll speak to my husband after dinner—he’ll give us permission.”

When her husband came in tired and hungry, Sister Spencer hovered over her husband and after dinner urged him to rest by the fire. As he sat looking drowsily into the flames, she said in a low voice, “You do think the children should have some candy and cookies for Christmas, don’t you Howard?” “Ummhmmm,” was the sleepy response, and grandmother went away smiling. She reported to the ladies that everything was all right, “My husband has given us permission.” “Did he say





we could have the molasses?" asked one doubting Thomas. "He didn't say 'No,'" replied Sister Spencer truthfully. "Now we won't wake up the brother in charge of the molasses. We'll just slip out and take what we need."

The man in charge of the molasses barrel was very conscious of his responsibility. On the lid of the barrel he had placed a section of heavy logging chain and a large boulder. Only a thin wooden partition at the head of the bed separated him from the barrel outside, and he was a light sleeper. Shivering from the cold the women crunched through the snow toward the barrel. It was beginning to snow again and the night was very dark.

With infinite caution they removed the heavy chain without so much as one betraying clank. It took the combined efforts of all the women to lower the boulder noiselessly to the ground. There was a breathless pause as Sister Spencer raised the lid and dipped into the barrel with a saucepan. She emptied its contents into a bucket and dipped again, and again. "We have enough now," whispered one of the women. "Let's go back." With the same caution the chain and boulder were replaced and the women filed back to the warm kitchen to make the Christmas goodies. But, there was a dismayed gasp when they looked into the pail. "Oh dear, we haven't enough molasses. We'll have to get some more." "Oh no, Sister Spencer. It's cold and dark. It's too risky." "Well, just the same, we must unless we want the children to be disappointed."

There could only be one answer to such a statement and the little band of mothers went again to the molasses barrel. They returned safely and set to work. When morning came, every child in Orderville had two molasses cookies and one big slightly sticky lump of candy in his stocking. Santa Claus had not forgotten them. Grandfather insisted all his life that he could not remember ever having given the women permission to get the molasses.

*Our Pioneer Heritage*, 18 (1975): 160-61

### **A Clothespin Doll for Clara**

Willow Creek, Idaho—James A. Smith and his wife,

Annie Sellars Smith, left their home in Utah and settled in Willow Creek, about twelve miles northeast of Idaho Falls, in 1886. Their eight-year-old daughter, Mamie, took a special interest in her younger sister, Clara, and the two played together endlessly. Mamie was heartbroken this Christmas to think that little Clara would not get a doll. The little family was snowbound and their Christmas celebration would consist of homemade candy, apples, a cheerful fire and music.

Christmas morning found a little doll, neatly and beautifully dressed, in her little sister's stocking. Mamie had taken a long clothespin from her mother's peg sack and had spent hours in hemming, folding, dyeing, tying, painting and padding a doll for Clara so her Christmas cry in the morning would be one of gladness, not of disappointment. Clara Smith DeMott always cherished the memory of her first doll and of the happiness it brought and the never-to-be-forgotten loving sister who made her first doll from a clothespin.

Deon Smith Seedall, *Treasures of Pioneer History*, 4:201-2

### **Sleigh Bells, Skating, and a Big Bonfire**

Centerville, Utah—The severe winter resulted in the finest open air sport in the world—sleighriding, in big groups, in bob sleighs piled with soft straw, hot bricks and plenty of covers. At Christmas, it is a thrilling new world to participate in, or the sounds at night as you relax in a warm home listening to tinkling bells placed on the harness of the horses drawing merry groups. Then there was Christmas skating, in the perfectly flat, smooth lake bottoms west of Centerville, with a big bonfire of cast-off railway ties. And the ice, frozen to a thickness of 18 inches, was soon stored in the co-op store ice house and covered with a thick layer of sawdust and kept for summer use.

John Q. Adams, *Our Pioneer Heritage*, 18 (1975): 158

### **Dancing Parties and a Santa Claus Tree**

Salt Lake City, Utah—When the Social Hall was completed, in 1852, Christmas was celebrated there with dancing parties, both for the adults and the children. Our girls and boys will never forget the first Christmas tree there

where there was a present for every child of several large families, and all numbered and arranged in perfect order of name and age. President Young—Brother Brigham—was foremost in making the affair a grand success. Hon. John W. Young, then only a boy, handed the presents down from the tree, and I recollect Brother Brigham standing and pointing with his cane, and telling John just which to take down, and so on; the children were wild with delight and some of the mothers quite as much elated, though not as demonstrative. After the Santa Claus tree was

### **My, How Time Flies**

La Verkin, Utah—One night when I was sixteen years old, Father gave a Christmas party for his own children and their families and the nearest neighbors. We danced. My brothers were the musicians. We knew it was Father's aim to end the party at ten o'clock, which he did right in the middle of a square-dance by ordering the musicians to stop. But Father didn't know that my brothers had lifted me up to the clock many times that night. Each time I turned it back thirty minutes. It must have been past midnight

***Christmas was a time of joy and giving. In pioneer times, even when there wasn't much to give, it was still a time to make memories.***



stripped of its gifts, the floor was cleared and the dancing commenced, and there was good music too, and President Young led the dance, and “cut a pigeon wing,” to the great delight of the little folks. In fact, I think the evening was almost entirely given up to the children's festivities, and the older ones, the fathers and mothers and more especially President Young, made them supremely happy for that one Christmas eve.

Adapted from Emmeline B. Wells, *Young Women's Journal*, 12 (1901): 539–42

when the party broke up.

“Julia's Christmas,” from the Christian Olsen family record, *Our Pioneer Heritage* 14 (1971): 199

