

## **Legends of Freeborn County Celebration introduces other Christmas traditions**

by Bev Jackson

Thirty-third in a monthly series of Freeborn County Articles - December 2002□  
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"If you are who you say you are , then why are you here in this humble place? Why are you not with kings?"

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These words have stayed with me ever since Christmas in the village - Feliz Navidad, when I heard them expressed during the reenactment on the Posada, a Mexican celebration which takes place for nine consecutive days prior to Christmas. By taking part in "Versos Para Pedir Posada" meaning "We Come to Ask Shelter," its participants can truly feel the denial when Joseph asks the innkeeper for a place for Mary to rest.

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You feel, too, the joy as a shelter is offered that is warm and dry and away from the noise and bustle of the inn.

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Earlier, it was fun to watch as children who were blindfolded struck out at the pinata that was bouncing in front of them. The others who yelled, "Hit it!" or "Higher" or "Lower," were so excited and when it finally broke and the candy scattered on the floor, everybody scrambled for their share of the treats.

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The food was great. Homemade, corn husk wrapped tamales, jacima and lime, sugar and cinnamon coated churros, coconut flavored candies, fresh fruit, crispy bunuelos, Mexican coffee and hot chocolate - a delightful introduction to authentic Mexican food for many museum visitors.

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When I closed my eyes, the wonderful music of keyboard and guitars and mellow voices brought back memories of my last trip to Mexico.

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The Mexican community was very generous with their donations to the temporary exhibit in Heritage Hall and with their time during all of the planning and preparations that went into this shared experience. It was a fun afternoon, but more important, a meaningful one.

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Speaking of tradition, I have had a good time this year reading about some of our holiday traditions and how they have changed throughout the years. Maybe you'll find yourself in one of these pictures:

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Imagine your home decorated only with pine boughs and cranberries, before Martin Luther's idea of the Christmas tree came to America.

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Or playing Parlor Games like Charades and Blindman's Bluff or telling stories on Christmas Eve, especially ghost stories. Did you know that Charles Dickens wrote a special Christmas story every year that was printed both in England and in American newspapers? His most famous story "A Christmas Carol" is still one of my favorites.

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Or going sleigh riding on Christmas afternoon or ice-sailing or ice-fishing (Maybe this one is not such a distant happening).

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Or did you know that taffy pulling was held in honor of Saint Catherine, the patron saint of single women? Because there was always so much work to do during the other seasons of the year, the Christmas season was a time for relaxing and getting together, a time for romance. The French settlers started this romance season with taffy pulling on Nov. 25,

allowing young men and women to meet each other and to begin thinking of love and marriage.

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Or maybe this was your favorite Christmas dinner menu: Oyster Soup, Boiled Turbot, Roast Turkey, Cranberry Sauce, Roast Beef, Boiled Pork, mashed and browned potatoes, onions in cream sauce, tomatoes, chicken pie, rice croquettes, plum pudding, foaming sauce, mince pies, raspberry trifle, walnuts, celery, crackers, cheese, fruit and coffee. Imagine preparing that meal in an 1842 kitchen.

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Or did your family fast during advent and eat such foods as frumenty? This porridge later developed into plum pudding when hakin (sausage) was added. The first plum puddings contained meat, eggs, porridge, currants or raisins and other fruit. Often coins were put inside the pudding along with a button. It was said that the person who got the "bachelor button" would remain unmarried. If you had helped to stir up this pudding on Stir Up Sunday in November maybe the wish you made would come true.

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If you lived more than 150 years ago, your Santa Claus would have appeared very different from today. Each country in Europe had its own beliefs about this person who delivered gifts to children on Dec. 6. Sometimes he came by horse, or reindeer, or moose, on snowshoes, and even by bicycle. Some people even thought that giant turkeys took him from house to house. Saint Nicolas had a helper named Black Peter, sometimes called Bellsnickle. Or maybe, if you are of German heritage, it was Christkindl, who brought presents from the Baby Jesus on Christmas Eve. This young female angel was the origin of the name Kris Kringle.

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No matter what your traditions, be they from your country of origin or from new family patterns that continue from year to year, I hope that your holiday season is filled with love and peace. Merry Christmas, everyone.