

MIDWEST COMPUTER GENEALOGISTS

NEWSLETTER

www.mcgenealogists.org

Volume XXIV

December, 2020

Number 12

CHRISTMAS TREES IN SMALL-TOWN AND RURAL MISSOURI, 1876-1900

Glynda Elliott Morse and Julia Morse

Whatever trees early settlers used for Christmas depended on what was available, whether pine, spruce, fir, cedar, or some other type of green. Going back in history, evergreens were seen as renewal, and Christians see evergreen symbolizing everlasting life. The tree used by early settlers in most parts of Missouri would have been the Eastern red cedar, which grew in the timbered areas and along some of the creek banks.

Christmas trees in the United States began with the early German immigrants bringing their custom to the new country. Newspaper accounts demonstrate a general awareness of the German custom through the 1840's. However, the American populus began to quickly adopt Christmas trees after Godey's Lady's Book in 1850 showed illustrations of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert decorating a tree with candles.

President Franklin Pierce had what is believed to be the first Christmas tree in the White House, in either 1853 or 1856. The custom of Christmas trees spread from the more populated areas to the frontier and the Midwest. For example, Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote in her book, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, about seeing her first Christmas tree in the church as a child in the 1870s.

In 1867, the St. Louis editors of *The Missouri Republican* wrote, "A quarter of a century ago, not a single Christmas Tree was kindled on this continent except by immigrated Germans. . . . The greatness of the idea and the simplicity and universality of the form have made Christmas Eve a cosmopolitan festivity, and the Christmas Tree has taken root for

ever, it seems, in all the zones and civilized countries on earth" (23 Dec 1867). The good Germans of St. Louis had the Christkind (Christ-Child) ring a bell on Christmas Eve to announce that gifts had been left, but that same Christmas, the paper in Lancaster, Missouri confirmed a different custom already in place: "The Christmas tree at the Methodist Church on Christmas Eve was well attended and the children were delighted. The snow having melted on the road between here and Bloomfield, Santa Claus could not get here on his sleigh, but the distribution was effected by a committee. . ." (*Lancaster Excelsior*, 28 Dec 1867).

By following newspaper reports from the town of Windsor, Missouri through the 1800's, we can get a sense of how Christmas Trees were enveloped into the annual traditions in this part of the country.

Although the *Windsor Review* began publication in 1876, no mention of Christmas trees appeared until four years later (1880) when it announced, "The Methodist Church...will present the 'Star of Bethlehem' at their church on Christmas Eve night. This will be a beautiful modification of the old-fashioned Christmas Tree." The next year (1881), "the members of the Christian Church Sunday School want to meet early and get through with their Christmas tree in time for the Cantata..." Throughout the 1880s, many churches mentioned a Christmas tree as part of their Christmas events.

Schools also included a Christmas tree as part of the Christmas festivities. The *Windsor Review* reported, "There is to be a Christmas tree at the Stark & Brown school house Thursday night under the care of Miss Lottie Hatch, who teaches there." (Stark & Brown school was a rural school in Pettis County, later named Maple Grove School.) In the next decade, the newspaper frequently mentioned schools having a Christmas tree as in this example

in 1892: “Quite a nice Christmas tree was given at Sunny Side school house last Thursday night. Quite a number assembled to see what was going on.”

Likely Christmas trees were already part of home celebrations but simply not mentioned as part of the social news about family gatherings. One example of a home Christmas tree was in the January 14, 1897 edition which stated, “Bertha and Charlie Scott had a very pleasant trip to Vernon. Quite a number of memories of fine dinners, turkeys, candy pulling, concerts, Christmas Tree, etc. will linger a long time with them.” A January 8, 1898 news story described a party given by Mr. and Mrs. John Schweer, Dec. 29, to a number of their friends: “After refreshments were served the guests adjourned to another room where they were surprised to behold a large Christmas tree lighted and laden with gifts for each was present. A good oldfashioned old folks Christmas was then indulged in which each again went back to the days of their childhood.”

Most of the first Christmas trees in the area were decorated with items available at home such as stringing up popcorn or berries for garland and making ornaments out of paper. As railroads made manufactured products more widely available, glass ornaments began to become available in the latter part of the 1800s and began to appear on trees, those items being safely stored away to be used for the next year.

Few of the newspaper articles provided much information about how the Christmas trees were decorated, but the 1892 description of the Congregational Church stated: “The tree presented a beautiful sight, standing at the pulpit fifteen feet high, trimmed with strings of pop-corn, glistening glass balls, and wax candles, and heavily loaded with presents.”

The December 16, 1898 *Windsor Review* had a fiction story of a little boy who awakes to see a Christmas tree, “a Christmas tree two feet tall stuck into the middle of a bundle of wood. The light was reflected from a hundred pieces of red paper tied to the scrawny boughs, a dozen red and white popcorn balls hung like apples on the limbs. Little candles

twinkled through the scant foliage, while barber-pole candy, a tin soldier and a jumping jack were prominently displayed.”

In 1900, the *Windsor Review* editor described one of the business windows in town:

“Haden & Jennings have a very pretty window, in which may be seen the much idolized Christmas tree laden with all kinds of fruit and various other things necessary in making a Merry Christmas.”

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Al Morse

When I first saw the name O. H. P. Miller, I immediately wondered what the initials stood for. I later found that they came from the name of a famous hero from the War of 1812, Oliver Hazard Perry. So, yes, my second great grandfather was Oliver Hazard Perry Miller. Most records show either O. H. P. or Oliver. He was born May 21, 1820 in Franklin County, Missouri. At the age of 17 or 18, he left home and went west to Bates County, Missouri. He married Charlotte Brians on September 30, 1841.

They started in Charlotte Township but they moved to New Home Township in 1845 and built and settled there. He was well educated, skilled in languages, and familiar with the classics. They had nine children. The oldest was Henry Clay Miller, born in 1842, and the second oldest was William Barton Miller, born in 1844. William became my great grandfather. Oliver started a school and was the teacher as well as being a farmer.

As the border conflicts between the Kansas Territory and the state of Missouri began, problems could always be possible. New Home Township was close to the Missouri-Kansas border. As the Civil War began, problems increased. They had cattle stolen in 1861. He wanted to remain neutral, but that put two sides against him. For fear of his life, he and his family moved to Henry County, Missouri. It was reported that their house was burned on Christmas Eve, 1861 by Jayhawkers or the Union Army.

In the spring of 1862, Oliver and his oldest son, Henry, joined the Confederate Army. He became a quartermaster under Capt. John McCombs. They fought in the battle at Lone Jack on August 8, 1862. Henry was killed as was John McCombs. In the book, *Battle of Lone Jack*, by Joanne Chiles Eaken, Oliver and Henry are listed as being in “Units Not Known”. However, it mentioned that Oliver was later in Company B, 10th Missouri Cav.

I am sure that, as Oliver traveled south with his company, he had a heavy heart. He was in the battle of Newtonia on September 30, 1862. He was captured and taken prisoner to Springfield, Missouri. He was put in Federal Prison and died there on April 30, 1863. The family returned to Bates County in the spring of 1866. They rebuilt their house and started their lives over again. Charlotte would have children of ages 5 through 22. William married Mary Elizabeth Woodfin on December 5, 1869. William was a farmer and also a minister. He served as minister of the Sprague, Missouri Christian Church. William and Mary had ten children. Child number eight was Alma Dona Miller, born October 28, 1885. She married Clark Frank Morse on January 17, 1906. They had four children. Their second child was Albert Frank Morse, born July 11, 1909. He married Mildred Catherine Janssens on November 6, 1940. Their first child was born January 3, 1942 named Albert Frank Morse, Jr. He is the one writing this article.

Some of the facts mentioned in this article were found in *History of Cass and Bates Counties*, Missouri, published in 1883 or in *History of Bates County*” by W. O. Atkeson in 1918.

THE SETTLERS’ CHRISTMAS EVE (Poem from the mid 1800s)

Alice Cary

Alice Cary’s childhood in the 1820’s and 1830’s on a farm about 10 miles north of Cincinnati provided her with firsthand knowledge of family life in remote settlements. She was one of nine children. Miss Cary later described the conditions in their family: “My father worked early and late; my mother’s work was never done. There was little

time to study and had there been more, there was no chance to learn but in the district school house down the road. I never went to any other—not very often at that.” (*The Hocking Sentinel*, Logan, OH, 23 Apr 1885).

This poem “The Settlers’ Christmas Eve” appeared in a book of poetry Miss Cary co-authored with her sister, Phoebe, in 1849. In December 1866, it gained broad attention on the cover of *Harper’s Weekly*. We present it here, slightly abridged:

In a patch of clearing, scarcely more
Than his brawny double hands,
With woods behind and woods before,
The settler's cabin stands;
A little, low, and lonesome shed,
With a roof of clapboards overhead.

. . . And do you ask beneath such thatch
What heart or hope may be?
Just pull the string of the wooden latch,
And see what you shall see:
A hearth-stone broad and warm and wide,
With master and mistress either side.

And 'twixt them, in the radiant glow,
Prattling of Christmas joys,
With faces in a shining row.
Six children, girls and boys ;
And in the cradle a head half-hid
By the shaggy wolf-skin coverlid.

For the baby sleeps in the shaded light
As gently as a lamb,
And two little stockings, scarlet bright,
Are hanging 'gainst the jamb ;
And the yellow cat lies all of a curl
In the lap of a two-years’ blue-eyed girl.

On the dresser, saved for weeks and weeks,
A hamper of apples stands,
And some are red as the children's cheeks,
And some are brown as their hands;
For cakes and apples must stead, you see,
The rich man's costlier Christmas-tree.

. . . The settler's rifle, bright and brown,
Hangs high on the rafter-hooks.

And, swinging a hand's-breath lower down.
Is a modest shelf of books :
Bible and Hymn-book, thumbed all through,
"Baxter's Call,"* and a novel or two.

A branch of sumach, shining bright,
And a stag- horn, deck the wall,
With a string of birds'-eggs, blue and white,
Beneath. But after all,
You will say the six little heads in a row
By the hearth-stone make the prettiest show.

The boldest urchin dares not stir;
But each heart, be sure, rebels
As the father taps on the newspaper
With his brass-bowed spectacles;
And knitting-needle with needle clicks.
As the mother waits for the politics.

He has rubbed the glass and rubbed the bow.
And now is a fearful pause;
"Come, Molly!" he says, "come, Sue, come, Joe,
And I'll tell you of Santa Claus!"
How the faces shine with glad surprise,
As if the souls looked out of the eyes.

. . . "And what will Santa Claus bring?" they tease,
"And, say, is he tall and fair?"
While the younger climb the good man's knees,
And the elder scale his chair;
And the mother jogs the cradle, and tries
The charm of the dear old lullabies.

So happily the hours fly past,
'Tis a pity to have them o'er;
But the rusty weights of the clock, at last
Are dragging near the floor;
And the knitting-needles, one and all,
Are stuck in the round, red knitting-ball.

Now, all on a sudden the father twirls
The empty apple-plate ;
"Old Santa Claus don't like his girls
And boys to be up so late! "
He says, "And I'll warrant our star-faced cow,
He's waiting astride o'the chimney now."

Down the back of his chair they slide,
They slide down arm and knee ;

"If Santa Claus is indeed outside,
He shan't be kept for me!"
Cry one and all; and away they go,
Hurrying, flurrying, six in a row.

In the mother's eyes are happy tears
As she sees them flutter away;
"My man," she says, "it is sixteen years
Since our blessed wedding-day ;
And I would n't think it but just a year,
If it was n't for all these children here."

And then they talk of what they will do
As the years shall come and go ;
Of schooling for little Molly and Sue,
And of land for John and Joe;
And Dick is so wise, and Dolly so fair,
"They," says the mother, "will have luck to spare! "

"Ay, ay, good wife, that 's clear, that 's clear!"
Then, with eyes on the cradle bent,
"And what if he in the wolf-skin here
Turned out to be President?
Just think! Oh, would n't it be fine, —
Such fortune for your boy and mine!"

She stopped, — her heart with hope elate, —
And kissed the golden head;
Then, with the brawny hand of her mate
Folded in hers, she said:
"Walls as narrow, and a roof as low,
Have sheltered a President, you know."

And then they said they would work and wait,
The good, sweet-hearted pair.
You must have pulled the latch-string straight,
Had you in truth been there,
Feeling that you were not by leave
At the settler's hearth that Christmas eve.

*"Baxter's Call" refers to the book *A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live* by English Puritan pastor Richard Baxter (1615-1691).

SHARING WITH SIBLINGS

Marjorie Slavens

My parents, Ralph Westmeier Slavens 1907-1983), and Mildred Marie Welty Slavens (1910-2008), were married on Columbus Day in 1930. My father was working in the mines in Waco, Missouri, and my mother had completed two years toward her teaching degree in Kansas City Kansas. They were married in Kansas City and moved to Asbury, Jasper County, Missouri, where their grandparents lived and where they met. 10 days after their wedding, my father lost his job. He was young and recently hired, and it was "last in, first out" during the Depression because there were not many jobs. They moved to Oklahoma, where they lived for four months with his parents and then returned to Kansas City, where they lived with her parents and he attended school to learn to be a barber. My brother, Everett, was born in October, 1931, and my sister, Beverly, in 1932. My younger sister, Carol, is eight years younger than I, so she did not share some of the early experiences with us.

Everett, Beverly, and I all had retinitis pigmentosa, although it was not diagnosed until later. In the early '40s, a doctor in Kansas City told my parents to feed them more carrots and milk. We had some vision at first, but all three of us lost our sight when we were very young. Since I was younger and had the strongest vision at any given age, I learned very early to read for them. We had to have very strong light and magnifying glasses to read anything. We lived in Oklahoma at first. My brother failed the first grade because his teacher would not help him nor would she give my mother the material to help him at home. He and my sister were in the same grade after that year, and both were excellent students. When my brother received his Ph.D. in History from the University of Missouri in 1969, I wanted to look up that first grade teacher and invite her to the graduation. (By the way, barbering was not a very good profession during the Depression because a haircut cost 25 cents and a shave 15 cents.)

Our mother said a social worker in Pittsburg, Kansas came to visit her and told her she should

send her two second graders, Everett and Beverly, to the School for the Blind in Kansas City. She did not want to send them away and talked to their teacher, who said, "Why would you do that? They are two of my best students". They did not go to Kansas City. Beverly attended the School for the Blind in St. Louis for her senior year in high school and met many of her lifetime friends, including her husband, Don, there.

I was in the first grade when they first had to deal with fractions. I could not understand ordinal numbers, so I read $\frac{3}{4}$ as 3 over 4. When they had decimals later, I read the numbers with periods.

Everett and Beverly thought I should learn everything they learned. They taught me all of the capitals of the 48 states from a puzzle of the United States they had. Of course, we could learn the size, shape, and location in the country of these states from the puzzle, except for the tiny New England States that were on the same piece.

The summer after they finished the fifth grade and I the first grade, they had to learn the names of the books of the Bible at Vacation Bible School and recite them with the other children in their class at the final program. They had taught me all of the names of the books, and my brother volunteered me to recite them at the program. They were good teachers. (I cannot recite that list now.)

My brother and I were at the University of Missouri together for several years. He received his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in History from the University of Missouri and taught for 38 years in two colleges, Junior College of the School of the Ozarks, now College of the Ozarks, and Ouachita Baptist University, before his retirement. I got my first two degrees in Spanish from Missouri and the third in Spanish and Latin American Studies from St. Louis University and taught in two colleges, Western College for Women and Rockford University, for 36 years before I retired.

Beverly went to a Business School. She worked for 9 years as a dictaphone operator before she had her

first child; she was an excellent mother of two wonderful children. She was also an excellent typist, and her boss thought he had the best typist because she rarely made a mistake. (I did not share that talent with her!)

For many years, Beverly and Don have been active members of the Missouri Council of the Blind. She served for 20 years as Chair of their Summer Camp Committee, scheduling vacations for three times a summer for MCB members. She also used to prepare Braille menus for restaurants.

I do not remember this story, but she told me recently that once, when we lived in Columbus, Kansas, and she was in the fourth grade, she made the highest score on her spelling test—a perfect score. The teacher let her go home early because she got the highest grade. When she arrived home, our mother asked her why she did not wait for me, a kindergartner, to walk home with me. She had to go back and retrieve me.

My sister, Carol, attended the University of Missouri, also had two wonderful children, and worked for 22 years in his local office for her Congressman. He wanted her to come to the Washington office to work but her husband worked here, and her two daughters were in school here. She is the only child my parents had who could see. She was the only one of us who could drive, and she was always there for all of mother's major surgeries. Mother lived with me for 10 years, but, when she was sick and needed special care, she wanted Carol, a super caregiver.

RP is a hereditary condition. It is a recessive characteristic which both of my parents had to transmit in order for us to receive the two recessive genes. The condition was not evident in at least 5 generations before us and two generations after us. We were diagnosed with RP in 1947, when our doctor told my parents they should spend their money on education and not on doctors because there was no cure. I was told by a doctor at the University of Wisconsin Hospital in 1990 that our diagnosis by Dr. T. E. Sanders in St. Louis was a very early diagnosis. He knew Dr. Sanders and had done his Residency with Sanders.

We lost Everett in May 2016. After he retired, he moved to Houston, Texas. While he lived there, he made three trips to Zambia with members of his church. He went alone on one of those trips. In Zambia, he taught courses on African American and African History at a seminary that had a relationship with his Woodlands Presbyterian Church. While he was teaching, he went to South Africa for a summer NEH Seminar for college teachers from small colleges. There, he also met Nelson Mandela and had a picture taken with him. He later moved to Las Cruces New Mexico, where he lived near his son, Doug, and his family.

RECHECK YOUR FAMILY ORGANIZATION

Julia Morse

Last month, I was redoing a search on a family branch which I hadn't revisited in a long time. This time, I found the treasure chest of the long-lost family story, unearthed and published online courtesy of the Christlieb-Chrislip-Crislip Family Association (christliebfamilyassociation.com) I must say, the story they published is AMAZING.

My grandmother Martha Sykes Morse had passed on to our family some photos identifying her grandmother Eliza Christlieb and a hand-written paper listing birth and death dates of Eliza's family, including Eliza's father John Christlieb, born in 1811. Through census records we learned that he was a carpenter born in Pennsylvania, but had not been able to link him with the many Christliebs we found in Pennsylvania. Obviously, it was a German Christian name. I knew there were a lot of Germans in Pennsylvania. That's all we knew.

One of the first compelling things I read from the CCC Family Association site was the statement that almost all Christlieb, Chrislips, and Crislips are found to be descendants of the two sons that migrated with their parents to Maryland in 1765. I had no idea. This meant that it was highly likely that my family was a part of theirs. I kept on reading.

The Christlieb-Chrislip-Crislip Family Association

site quickly took my breath away with the amazing and unexpected details they had compiled on the story of this family, starting with ancestor “Simon from Frankenstein,” a small village in a hilly forest region of the Rheinland on a trade-route to France in the first half of the 18th century. As a young Jewish man, he had made his way to the nearby salt-refining city of Bad Dürkheim. A 1742 letter from the Bad Dürkheim church to Count Christian Carl Reinhard of Leiningen details his petition to be instructed in the Christian faith and ultimately baptized. His baptism was attended by a great gathering of all the regional and local dignitaries: the Prince-Elector and three regional Counts and some of their family, the Mayor, other city officials, and the director of the city salt refinery. He was baptized with the new name Friedrich Carl Christlieb. (“Christlieb” literally translates as “Christ-love,” or possibly “dear to Christ.”) German scholars tell us that the attention of so many dignitaries was uncommon at that time, suggesting that Friedrich Carl for some reason was esteemed. It is thought that he may have contributed a position of value related to the salt works.

A couple of months later, Friedrich Carl married the widow of an official “salt weigher” in the refinery. He became stepfather to her existing son, and they had two more sons.

In 1765, the family arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, only to find they had become the victims of swindlers, being asked to pay their fare a second time. Not being able to do so; the two sons, aged 16 and 14, were sold into indentured servitude, (thankfully together) for 8 years each, in order to pay for the passage for themselves and their parents.

By the time the indenture was ended, it wasn’t long before all the sons were involved in fighting for the cause of the American Revolution.

The CCC Family Association site has additional deep research into Friederich Carl’s wife’s family, and then each of the sons and their children. It was searching through these descendants that I finally found the correct parents for my John Christlieb

born 1811.

This was a flood of information, and I still haven’t absorbed it all. There have been many lessons in the process, which I share with you here:

(1) Information is always being updated. The key information that I needed from the Christlieb Association’s research has been posted online since I last searched on this family. That’s why we computer genealogists have to keep checking.

(2) Your family name may not be as common as you think. My early assumption that “Christlieb” was a common German Reform Protestant name was all wrong. Most Christliebs in the United States are found to be descended from the same family that arrived in Baltimore in 1765. Similarly, most Morses in the United States are descended from the same family that migrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635. Maybe there are other rare-ish family names that I am overlooking.

In such cases, even if you don’t have the exact linkage to the root family worked out, if you have a connection to their geographic area, you may be able to narrow down good odds that you have the correct ancestral family, and can keep working with that hypothesis, while enjoying all the kinship with the association’s research on your family origins.

(3) A family association is likely to have performed deep research into records not accessible online -- will and estate records, birth records, land records, church records, etc. Once I connected to the Christlieb Association root family and started digging through their family data, I found that they had researched and published data on Eliza Christlieb’s father John, including his county marriage certificates, (which I had not been able to find online) and census listings with his children. They had provided this research, even though the Association did not have further connection or contribution from John’s descendants. They had put out the information for us to make the connection.

(4) A family association is likely your most robust resource for information on the Old World history

of your family. There is usually someone in the organization who has travelled to the old home town, ferreted out the old church records, and sometimes made connections with descendants who remained in the area. Sometimes the family associations have raised funds for professional research, as was the case with the Christlieb Association. They linked up with key archivists for town records, as well as with experts in translation, as well as with handwriting transcription (very difficult with old German script, even for Germans).

(5) Your family association usually can help link you to a family research expert who can provide direction or advice on your family research mysteries. For example, there are two editions of the Morse genealogies published in 1850 and 1903. They are currently not well-indexed and it takes some studying just to learn how to navigate the arrangement between families. Similar to a reference librarian, research volunteers within the association can assist you in navigating key family resources.

(6) Family associations tend to have very professional research and presentation on what is known on the ancestral family—when they do publish it. The Christlieb site does an outstanding job of providing primary documentation, while still wrapping around details of the local customs and environment to help us understand the likely situations behind the known facts. I am looking to these presentations as examples on how I can better document and narrate my own family stories, (even the stories from other family branches).

(7) Your family association needs you! The Morse Society is dangerously short on volunteers—so much so that they stopped their newsletters and website updates. The Christlieb Association is also concerned with declining membership. The current website editor notes that “most family organizations last only 5 to 7 years.”

Although many people benefit from the research and publications of the family association, only a few people end up helping maintain the organization, its website, and publications. I originally was intimidated by the depth of knowledge of Morse Society researchers, but later realized that you don't have to be a family expert to get involved. In fact, volunteering will get you better connected with the experts and available resources. It's a great way to learn

Note: We were sad to learn of the death of Mary Ray, our MCG member and Foxwood resident, who was very active in the state organization before she moved to Foxwood Springs.

OFFICERS

Al Morse, President
Byron Gilbreath, Treasurer
Marjorie Slavens , Newsletter Editor
Julia Morse, Website Administrator, Digital Librarian