

**General
Membership Notice**

Election of Officers
scheduled for
January 2017 at the
General MHS
Meeting at Senior
Citizen Center



Thursday Dec.15th

Christmas Party/
Dinner at Salvatore
Italian Restaurant at
6:30pm

\$25.00 per person
Menu includes
Salad and Garlic
Bread

Choose one Entrée:

Spaghetti with
Meatballs or
Sausage
Meat or Spinach
Lasagna
Chicken or Shrimp
Fettuccine Alfredo

Soda, coffee, Iced
Tea, Hot Tea

Coming Soon

170th Anniversary of
Battle of Rio San
Gabriel

January 7, 2017

12pm-4pm

Adobe Dust

JUAN MATIAS SANCHEZ
ADOBE MUSEUM



DECEMBER 2016

Message From the President—Chris Vargas

The Juan Matias Sanchez adobe was over flowing with happiness, holiday joy, Christmas music and children on November 18, 2016 when the Girl Scouts of America, Troop 6485 with their troop leader, Alejendra Helguera, and parents made Christmas ornaments and helped decorate the adobe Christmas trees and the adobe. The girl scouts started off with their Girl Scout Law:

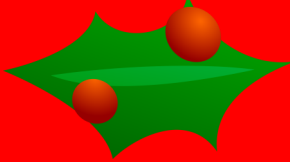
I will do my best to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong, and responsible for what I say and do, and to respect myself and others, respect authority, use resources wisely, make the world a better place, and be a sister to every Girl Scout.

They made Victorian era Christmas ornaments and other ornaments, sang songs, asked about Dona Maria Casilda Soto de Lobo, the first resident at the adobe in 1845, and were enamored with our mannequins depicting some of our historical figures at the adobe. One of our many goals this year at the MHS was to build bridges and relationships with our local community. We are proud and happy to have connected with the Girl Scouts of America, Troop 6485 at the adobe. We hope to continue our relationship for years to come with troop 6485 and other local groups in Montebello.

Let's remember to think about those who are less fortunate and, if you can, volunteer and/or donate during the holiday period. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

—Chris Vargas





Transformation of Santa

The origin of Santa Claus dates back to the year 280 when St. Nicholas was born in Greece. St. Nicholas became bishop of Myra, a Roman town in Turkey and was a staunch defender of the church. During the great persecution, when Bibles were burned and priests were executed for upholding their beliefs, St. Nicholas spent several years in prison finally to be released when Constantine brought Christianity to reign again in his empire. Many miracles had been attributed to St. Nicholas but he is hardly connected to what came to be Santa Claus. Having a reputation as a gift giver, St. Nicholas was seen as a loving figure but that changed after the Protestant Reformation.

The earliest records of Santa Claus can be traced to some scary Germanic figures. These figures frightened children into behaving. Some of these figures were called Ru-klaus (Rough Nicholas) and Aschenklas (Ashy Nicholas). Stories told of whippings and kidnappings of badly behaved children. But in America these legends changed. In New England Christmas was celebrated like a pagan festival. Historian Gerry Bowler states that Christmas "was celebrated as a kind of outdoor, alcohol-fueled, rowdy community blowout. That's what it had become in England as well. And there was no particular, magical gift bringer."

But in early 19th century America things changed. A group of writers and poets started writing stories making Christmas a family celebration and reviving the kindness of St. Nicholas. The book, Knickerbocker's History of New York, written by Washington Irving in 1809 introduced Santa as a pipe-smoking jolly man who soared over rooftops in a flying wagon, bringing gifts to good boys and girls. Also in 1821 there was an anonymous illustrated poem, "The Children's Friend" which again presented Santa as a loving character rather than a fearsome monster. Most famous to all of us is "The Night Before Christmas" written in 1822 by Clement Clarke Moore for his children. "Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house...." is an unforgettable line even today.

In 19th century America Santa was at times seen as a less religious figure particularly for the Mexican-Americans. A Catholic Hispanic tradition, Las Posadas marked the beginning of the Christmas season with an emphasis on the journey of Mary and Joseph to find a place for the birth of Jesus. A reenactment takes place where in song, characters representing Mary and Joseph go from house to house asking for shelter but are turned away. Eventually, a family invites them in and there is a celebration. In many households, Baby Jesus was the main gift giver. The Christmas season for many Mexican-Americans extended well past Christmas day to the feast of the Epiphany or the "feast of the three Kings." The introduction of Santa Claus was not a substitute for religious beliefs but was more of a concept created for children as reflected in the stories of the 19th century. Today there are many popular images of "the adoring Santa" which shows Santa kneeling before the infant Jesus. This representation is designed to impart the place that Santa has in the overall symbolism of Christmas and that culturally we can blend several of our traditions and share all aspects of the holiday season.

Barbara Garcia-Guzman

Christmas during the American Civil War

Christmas was celebrated in both the United States and the Confederate States of America. The war continued to rage on Christmas and skirmishes occurred throughout the countryside. Celebrations for both troops and civilians saw significant alteration. In 1870, Christmas became an official Federal holiday under President Ulysses S. Grant, the former Union Army commander.

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln and his family visited wounded soldiers at the union hospitals. Many Union soldiers in 1863 received gifts "From Tad Lincoln" mostly books and clothing. Tad had been deeply moved by the ordeal of wounded soldiers. The most famous Christmas gift Lincoln ever received came on December 22 when General William Tecumseh Sherman capture of Savannah Georgia.

Soldiers not actively campaigning celebrated Christmas in several ways. Union soldiers would use salt pork and hard tack to decorate Christmas trees. Others were treated to special meals; a captain from Massachusetts treated his soldiers to foods such as turkey, oysters, pies and apples. Many soldiers received no special treats or privileges.

Carols, hymns, and songs were sung during the war, with some, such as "Deck the Halls," "Oh Come All Ye Faithful," "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, 1840," "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear 1850," "Jingle Bells, 1857," and "Up on the Housetop, 1860," all still sung today.

For children, Christmas was changed during the war. Presents were sparse, especially in the South. Some fathers on both sides were allowed furlough and children were said to react to their fathers as if seeing "near strangers". Excuses in the South for "Where's Santa?" The Yankees shot him.

Christmas served as an escape. Soldiers looked forward to a day of rest and relaxation. Families did their best to celebrate the holiday, but wondered when Johnny would be marching home.

Jon Reed



Christmas at the Ranchos

A few first-hand accounts share with us how the Californios celebrated Christmas. Remember, these Hispanic people were very, very Catholic. So all festivities revolved around the Nochebuena, or the Christmas Eve midnight mass. Two plays were popular with performances given at the Placita church in Los Angeles. The first, *Los Pastores*, which told the story of the shepherds looking for the Christ child in Bethlehem, with a trickster Devil character trying to mislead the shepherds. A more formal play called the *Pasterela* followed. Many notable people played the “Devil” including Pio Pico.

One account tells us how John Sutter celebrated Christmas eve at Sutter’s Fort in 1847. John Sutter, a native of Switzerland and Germany, served the best foods and local wines. He served fish, meats, peppers, and *frijoles*. Men and women were in full dress for the dance. The dancing lasted all night, where we would have seen the *jota*, the *jarabe* and the fandango. There was much music and dancing in an era when everyone danced!

Pio Pico’s nephew described the scene at the Ranchos as the guests “All came on horseback, as there were neither carriages nor roads.” “Riding out of the patio gate it was like a scene from the time of the Moors in Spain. As our horses snorted in the cold air. . . .”

Pico describes the various foods served: *Bunuelos*, fried crispy tortillas rolled in sugar and tamales. These Christmas foods are still served today.

Kathleen Rabago

Sources: *A Christmas Eve Before the Americans Came* by Jose Ramon Pico excerpt from *Pio Pico Miscellany* (1978) by Martin Cole.

Account of Sutter’s Fort 1847 excerpt from John Bonner, *Christmas in California*, published by the California Historical Society. Reprinted in *The Whole Christmas Catalogue*.

Excerpts from *Christmas on the American Frontier 1800-1900*. (1961). By John E. Baur.

A Short History of the Christmas Fruit Cake

The Christmas fruit cake has been much maligned in the last 40 or so years. Fruit cake is made across the globe. It has a long history and its genesis dates back to ancient Rome where it lists “pomegranate seeds, pine nuts, and raisins that were mixed into barley mash. In the middle ages, honey, spices, and preserved fruits were added. Fruit cakes soon proliferated all over Europe.”

“Prized for its portability and shelf life, Roman soldiers often brought fruitcake with them to the battlefields. Later, in the Middle Ages, preserved fruit, spices and honey were added to the mix and fruitcakes gained popularity with crusaders.”

I recall as a child growing up in Huntington Park, CA where homemade fruit cakes were made by my grandmother during the holidays. Many people would turn their nose up at fruitcake, but I thought my grandmother’s fruitcake was moist, but with some texture, semi-sweet and quite delicious. Admittedly, I have not had any fruitcake since I was a child because it is not really made at homes any longer or sold at stores or bakeries. You can order fruitcakes on-line.

Not sure if fruit cakes will ever have a revival in our country giving the particular tastes of the younger generations, but they will live on in our memories. Please note that fruitcake can be bought online. Just Google, *buy Christmas fruit cakes*. Merry Christmas and try some fruit cake!

Chris Vargas



Adobe Dust