

CHRISTMAS IN DECATUR COUNTY IN 1864

an article appearing in the GREENSBURG, INDIANA DAILY NEWS written by S. J. Richardson and published in late December 1943

" As a background to this story I give the following: In 1830 Wren Grayson lived as a very young man near Memphis, Tenn. where he was born. The Grayson family were opposed to slavery in every form, and foresaw that there would be a war between the States to settle the matter of "states rights". So the family came overland to Indiana, settling in southern Decatur county, near the line of Jennings county. The father, the elder Grayson was also named Wren, and the parents came along-the elder Grayson had been a member of the Third Tennessee Cavalry (on foot) and was with Andy Jackson at New Orleans. Naturally they were Jacksonian Democrats. They took a claim of 160 acres from the government at \$1.25 an acre and built their first cabin on the 80 lying east of the Range line road, with Sandcreek bordering on the south side, at a point just opposite where Rock Creek from the east empties into Sandcreek. Wren Grayson Jr. had married Lucinda Williamson, of that famous Breathitt county, Kentucky family and their first baby was born in the log cabin on the night "the stars fell" Nov. 14, 1834.

It was Christmas week, 1864, and four of the Grayson boys, John, Hyrum, Will and Beryl were in the Union Army. Grandfather Grayson had built two new houses since the cabin first mentioned. The first a large commodious log house at the corner near the present iron bridge. Then a more modern frame house where a Mr. Maddux lives on the top of the hill west of the bridge. This has always been known as the Grayson home and it was here the family lived in 1864 and for many years afterward.

There is a small branch-dry most of the year-that empties into Sandcreek just

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east of this Range line road. Like in the recent war, help was scarce so Grandfather Grayson built his hog pen near this little stream - "Wild Cat creek" to be near his big corn crop in the "Bend Field" to the east. A rainstorm came in the night, and Wild Cat creek went on a rampage carrying the four fattening hogs to a place "down the river". This was a very serious matter as the family would be short on meat until another bunch could be bought and fattened. The day before Christmas Uncle Billy Boicourt who lived on an adjoining farm to the northwest, came over to hear the war news, and incidentally asked Grandfather Grayson if he and Uncle Sam (the only son too young to go into the army), would come over and help butcher. Also asking him to bring their scalding barrel along on the sled-and of course bring the womenfolk to help with the work-and cook a good dinner.

When evening came Uncle William said: "Uncle Wren, you had bad luck losing your fattening hogs, so load in a couple of these and take home with you".

Next morning was Christmas-an eventful day in the Grayson home. The women folk had made the sausage and had a big dinner in the oven and boiling in the pots in the fireplace. Besides Uncle Sam, the girls at home were Katherine, Mary, Lucinda, Eliza (my mother in 1867) and Anabel, the baby (Annabel is 86 years old, lives with her daughter, Mrs. W.H. Davis of Pittsburg, Kas., is the only one of the family now living.) An older sister, Rebecca, had married James W. Myers and lived southeast of Westport in the brick house which is standing today on the hill south of Sandcreek.

Uncle John Grayson had been captured by the Confederate soldiers and was in Andersonville prison. He had written a year before that he had been captured and was on his way to some prison and no word had been received from him during the year.

Late in the evening the daughter, Eliza, was standing on the back porch looking towards the road at the foot of the hill. She noted three people coming up the hill—two women supporting a man and helping him make the grade up the hill—to the house. Running into the house she told the folks that her sisters, Aunt Beck Myers and Aunt Kate, later Mrs. Melvin Higgins, and Brother John were coming up the hill. It was pandemonium as they all rushed to the door and down the hill to meet them. I will not attempt to describe that joyful meeting. John had been discharged on account of disability and had come to Greensburg.

One of the first men he saw as he unloaded from the train was Uncle Levi Giddings, who brought him to Westport. Uncle Jim Myers and Aunt Beck and Aunt Kate were there in the big family sled buying some groceries from Dr. William M. McCullough's general store. They took Uncle John in the sled to the road east from the present site of Freedonia church, and he and his two sisters walked the balance of the way while Uncle Jim Myers went east past the old Dixon homestead to his own home to take care of the livestock for the night, then going on to the Grayson home to join the festivities. Johnny Boicourt and Uncle Will Grayson arrived home on furloughs, and Aunt Jane (McCammon) Grayson, Beryl's wife and her two byby girls, Annie and Minnie, had come over from her father's, Uncle Jimmy McCammon's to tell the good news—that Beryl, who was in a hospital in Nashville, recovering from a

bullet wound which nearly cost his life at Missionary Ridge, was well enough to come home if some one would come after him.

Other neighbors had dropped in to see the returned soldiers, and discuss the war, nearing its end as all verily believed. The table was set and while getting ready to seat them all at the enlarged table, someone suggested to Grandpa Grayson that he should read a chapter from the Bible and lead in the singing. He read the Bible, but excused himself from leading the singing, as he knew only one song, "A Charge to Keep Have I", so Uncle Jim Myers led with "The Lily of the Valley".

Then Grandfather Grayson offered thanks for the meal and happy occasion. Uncle John sat there almost dumbfounded with tears running down his cheeks-told them that he was thinking of his starving comrades still left in Andersonville-told them it was impossible for him to eat as his doctor gave strict orders to be careful on this line for a long time-so Grandma Grayson cried as she gave him a large bowl of mush and milk. A bright moonlight night and Uncle Jim took his brood and all the neighbors that lived along the way, and saw that they were safely landed at their own home. Grandpa Grayson read the chapter about Moses and the children of Israel hunting the promised land, offered a prayer for the boys still at the front.

So ended the happy Christmas at the Grayson home south of Westport, 81 years ago.

FEATURE STORY BY RICHARDSON

Linked with the history of Decatur county during the closing period of the Civil War is the feature story on page 3 in this issue by S.J. Richardson. Captioned "Christmas in Decatur County in 1864", the story by Mr. Richardson will be read with especial interest by citizens of the southern section of the county. Mr. R., veteran Indiana newspaperman is a former publisher