

Have you ever wondered what holiday traditions were observed in the early days of Alpine? Well, some of the earliest European settlers began to arrive in the mid 1800's. Many were from a Catholic or Anglican background and may have celebrated in the Christian tradition but we don't have records of holiday activities dating back that far. These early pioneers were mostly single men, but within a few years, some families began to move to this promising land.

In 1875 Edward & Caroline Foss purchased property in the Alpine Heights area and set up their ranch called Tule Springs. They arrived with two sons but by 1888 they had six children – five boys and one girl. The ranching life in Alpine during those years was very hard and it took a toll on Carrie's health. Her physical decline made it all the more difficult to care for her family, keep up the farm chores, and plan for holiday festivities. Nonetheless, she found time to write letters to her family back east, even though it sometimes took her several days to complete a letter.

In Carrie Foss's letter to her sister Annie, dated December 22, 1888, we find one of the earliest accounts of Christmas traditions for an Alpine family. In this letter she said:

My dear sister:

It is another very heavy rain and it's most dark too but I'll try and improve the few remaining moments. I've been helping the children to make ready their Christmas presents. Nothing very expensive but some quite pretty. There is to be a tree Monday evening and the children wanted to do a little especially as I could not... I swept the house yesterday for the first time I believe since Thanksgiving and today I am lame and sore all over. Thanksgiving we had mush as also on Percy's birthday. We meant to have turkey the 29th but didn't and I was going to have him for Christmas but alas I sent for some pork and it is not good, so it must be it was not meant to have it just now. If Eliphalets Notts parents and brother could live on corn bread, milk and bean porridge why can't we and yet my stomach is too faint to think almost...

There is a break in the letter here, but she continues on Christmas eve with this:

Edward came home Saturday night and we've had such very heavy rain, five inches some say. Everything is so wet even the dishes, knives, forks and kettles... I do not think it over yet. It's very black out. It is too dark for the tree. I guess nothing has been done about it.

Dear readers, as we go about our busy days hanging holiday lights, wrapping gifts, planning and preparing for our holiday meals and watching expectantly for the reindeer on the roof, remember that life was not as easy for the early pioneers in Alpine. But, despite the hardships that are so evident in Carrie's letter, there is a ray of sunshine. It comes from her note that the children wanted to help prepare for Christmas by making gifts for the family to give for the holidays. But with such limited resources, what kind of gifts could they make? That is our mystery question for December: What gifts did the Foss children make for Christmas in 1888?

You can find excerpts from Carrie's letter in the Beatrice La Force book, [History of a Mountain Settlement](#), or by visiting the Alpine History Museum at our next Open House on December 28 and 29 from 2 to 4 pm. The Alpine History Museum is located at 2116 Tavern Road in Alpine.