

A View Through History
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Remembrances of Christmas Past and Present

Memories of growing up in a small Texas town are what many of us cling to as we age. Remembrances of Christmas past events and activities often highlight our thoughts of those elusive “good old days.” Many of us growing up in rural Central Texas during the twentieth century fondly remember our hometown’s Christmas Parades, holiday light displays, downtown decorations, and visits with Santa Claus. Today, is probably no different for the tikes and tots of modern-day Milam County.

Case in point, the annual Cameron Christmas Parade which has wound through the local streets surrounding the Milam County Courthouse for generations. This event has been sponsored by the Cameron Area Chamber of Commerce for many, many years and the 2023 version was no exception. No doubt, the youngsters attending this year’s spectacular parade will remember it for years to come. The parade featured a record-breaking eighty entries including floats, classic cars, fire engines, police vehicles, and much more, all illuminating the early evening procession. The sound of Jingle Bells could be heard as the award-winning C. H. Yoe High School Band marched around the square and of course Ho, Ho, Ho, could be heard coming from a sleigh driven by old St. Nick himself. All the sights and sounds of the December 7th Christmas Parade can easily be committed to every child’s memory.

For several years now the Christmas Parade has been coupled with a downtown market-place type festival. Over forty food and arts & crafts vendors were featured at this year’s event. To top off the exciting evening, the citizens of Milam County were treated to fireworks over Cameron’s downtown area. Many businesses and attractions kept their doors open later to accommodate the large crowds, including the Milam County Historical Museum, the new Milam County Railroad Museum and Old Town Cameron Display, the Historic 1895 Milam County Jailhouse Museum, and the Museum’s Transportation Exhibit.

Many small towns across the state have businesses, civic organizations, schools, and churches that pitch-in to make such an event possible. In Cameron it is no different. Many people spend countless volunteer hours working on floats, setting up booths, preparing food, and organizing this event. However, they have always made it a successful holiday event. Truly, Christmas has never been neglected in Cameron, Texas.

In back issues of the Cameron Herald, it’s possible to trace the long tradition of having a Christmas Parade and Christmas activities in Cameron’s downtown area. The 1892 Milam County Courthouse has towered over many holiday festivities in the past. For example, sixty years ago the Cameron Herald reported that on December 6th, 1963, “Bands and floats are to highlight the annual Cameron Christmas Parade at 4:30pm.” The story continues by saying that Santa will be leading the Christmas festivities on Friday afternoon and that hundreds are expected to line the streets along the parade route. Like today, people came from all parts of the county to enjoy the Christmas Parade. However, in 1963 the crowd numbered in the hundreds, while in 2023 the crowds numbered in the thousands. Like today, prizes were given for the best float and the Cameron Chamber of Commerce sponsored the judging and the entire event. Unlike today, the 1963 version of the parade had only 20 entries. A far cry from the 80 entries in this year’s parade. Like this year’s parade, the early sixties’ event allowed children to visit with Santa Claus, who received his eager young followers on the Milam County Courthouse Square.

During this Christmas Season, Santa visited downtown Cameron twice. First, he greeted children on the square after the Christmas Parade and then last Saturday at the S'mores Holiday Event he visited with children in the new Milam County Railroad Museum at 110 W. 1st Street in Cameron. Again, memories were made for many youngsters at the Christmas activities in downtown Cameron.

Whether currently, sixty years ago, or even eighty years ago, the people of Cameron and Milam County have always ushered in the Christmas Season with memory-making events and activities. Take the 1941 Christmas Season for example. Eighty-two years ago, it was a somber time to celebrate the holiday season with the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese coming only a few weeks before Christmas. In the Cameron Herald dated December 18, 1941, children's letters to Santa Claus shared the newspaper pages with advertisements for Defense Bonds and headlines of America entering the Second World War. The people of Cameron still strived to have Christmas activities for children and families. One headline in the December 18, 1941, Cameron Herald read, "War Influencing Xmas Celebration Here." According to the article, "Cameron was making preparation for the observance of Christmas despite the existence of war."

It goes on to say that Milam County's 1941 Christmas celebrations would not be as elaborate as citizens were accustomed to, but still would take place with churches planning programs and celebrations. No doubt a memory making Christmas for children across this country.

Decorations in our small towns always seem to make a huge impact on youngsters. Today the trees and buildings of the Milam County Seat are covered in beautiful Christmas lights. Many families with children have already been enjoying the nightly display of lights. It is truly a wonderful sight to see. Some natives can remember downtown Cameron having colorful Christmas lights hanging from almost every light pole in town. Strings of lights across Main and First Streets with shiny bells still hang in our memories from the 1960s. And who could forget the huge plastic animated snowmen on the downtown mall. They rotated at their waistline, and they actually appeared to be shoveling snow in the 1970's normally warm Central Texas weather. No matter what the decorations looked like, it always meant one thing... Santa Claus was coming to town! It's that memory of sitting on Kris Kringle's lap at a downtown Cameron Parade or event that is an unforgettable remembrance for generations of Milam County residents.

Offering a wide range of Christmas decorations for viewing or purchasing this season, the Milam County Historical Museum invites you to share Christmas memories or traditions with us. We have many trees on display in the museum located at 112 W. First Street in Cameron and our gift shop is also open for last minute gifts. Our Holiday Hours are 10am-3pm Thursday & Friday December 21, 22 and December 28, 29. We will be closed December 23, 30. Our regular hours resume on January 4. From all of us at your Milam County Historical Museum...Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!