Christmas of a Pioneer Family

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Ludwick D. and Eliza Turner had experienced but few seasons in Northwest Iowa since their arrival in the prairie schooner. They had traveled from New York state; first by rail, later by stage and ferry, and last by ox team.

Another miraculous prairie summer had passed. The once gently rolling Iowa uplands on which grew the many colored beautiful prairie flowers, were bleak and cold looking. The long grasses and canes, high as a man on horseback, were brown, bent and broken. Ludwick had watched the muskrat houses fast appearing in the sloughs, and was planning a busy winter, hoping thereby to make a few dollars. Eliza was in need of a new calico dress to wear on certain occasions. She had been very busy picking and preparing wild strawberries, plums, grapes and wild crab apples from nearby hillsides and timber spots, looking ahead to Christmas time. Also, she had learned the art of making delicious foods from the meager supplies of pioneer times, and had become quite proficient in making dainty scraps of lace, silk and woolen into little garments, cushions and toy dolls. She had salvaged the material from garments she had worn while a teacher in the public schools of New York state.

Ludwick had returned from trapping very tired. He had skinned the muskrats and stretched the furs to dry. He had retired early on the homemade bedstead, with the stuffed hay bed tick resting on cords of rope drawn through the bedstead. Eliza had not completed her tasks; she lighted two candles, placing one in the window, as a guide to any traveler, and as an invitation, “Here you are welcome.” By the other candle on a table in the “soddie” she finished off

1Matie L. Turner Baily is the only living descendant of Ludwig D. and Eliza Turner.
a pair of wristlets for Ludwick from ravelings of a blue wool
hood of her girlhood days.

As she knitted on, she thought of the beauties of the prai-
rie she had learned to admire and truly love. That very
evening she had witnessed one of those many sunsets that
never were described—a prairie sunset. There were sun-
dogs above and below the sun. Beautiful golden rays and
streamers adorned the western sky. There was a distance
of a score of miles across the flat prairie before the eye met
the horizon, and the snow glistened like millions of dia-
monds all the way to the west.

Then suddenly her thoughts were turned to those other
Christmas times in New York state when father and mother
lived in a commodious, well-built house where timber was
plentiful. She visioned them in their armchairs close to
the huge fireplace, in which the great logs crackled and
burned while the young folks roasted apples and chestnuts
and planned sleighing parties. And, oh! the pretty Christ-
mas trees—then like the true pioneer mother, she mused—
“Ludwick and I came to the West to build a home.”

She said a prayer for all and went to her bed to dream of
the time when the “soddie” would be replaced by a frame
house. Many herds of cattle and horses would feed upon
these grassy plains. Neighbors would be close, churches
and schools built and this beautiful Iowa prairie land would
“blossom as a rose.” And because there was so everlastingly
much of it, it might help feed some of the East, if railroads
ever came.

And she lived to see the change of sixty odd years. Our
beloved Iowa is where it is today because of sacrifices and
courage of pioneers. And last, but not least, they lived by
Bible faith and honest toil, not counting hours but rather
service.