

A View Through History
With Kyle Schiller Barrett

December Seventh: A Day of Remembrance and Celebration

This December 7th will be one of celebration in Milam County, as the Cameron Area Chamber of Commerce presents its annual Christmas Parade and Festival. For decades our small town has hosted a Christmas Parade for families from all over Central Texas to enjoy. This year is no different, except the size and spectacle of the parade has increased in recent years. This local tradition is scheduled to begin at 5:00pm with vendors selling their holiday wears and lots of food for all to enjoy. Many downtown businesses will remain open, and the lighted Christmas Parade will begin at 6:30pm. With over 70 entries this year's parade will have something for everyone. There is no doubt parade goers will see the state award winning C. H. Yoe High School Marching Band, numerous firetrucks, classic cars, floats presented by local banks, organizations, and churches, along with old Santa Claus himself. Just as last December, a fireworks show will fill the sky over Cameron at the conclusion of the evening's festivities. All the credit for the many hours of preparation that go into making the Christmas Parade and Festival a success can be attributed to the Cameron Area Chamber of Commerce Board Members and their Executive Director Melanie Reed. She and her assistant Kathy Barrett work for months planning the official start to our community's Christmas Season. You won't want your family and friends to miss this December 7th celebration.

Cameron's downtown square is already bustling with a happy holiday feeling, as the trees and businesses are brightly lit for the season. It's not uncommon to see families enjoying themselves in downtown Cameron, with small children running and playing under the canopy of lights every evening. The Cameron Economic Development Corporation headed by director Ginger Watkins receives the credit for the beautiful and festive light display. As well as the many businesses and sponsors who have funded the beautiful lighting in our city center. County buildings such as the historic Milam County Courthouse and the 1895 Milam County Jail Museum are also decked in lights. Most other downtown Cameron attractions and businesses also have lighted rooflines that all come to life at dusk each evening throughout the holidays. No doubt it's a happy festive time in Cameron, Milam County, Texas.

However, one December 7th, which was eighty-two years ago, is not remembered as happy and festive. The holiday season must have felt very different on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor, Hawaii was attacked. Many of us were not yet born, but we have heard our parents or grandparents recount where they were when they first heard news that slalom seventh day of December. An early morning attack by the Empire of Japan on the U.S. Naval and Air Bases at Pearl Harbor shocked the world. This Japanese surprise attack against the United States propelled our nation into World War II. The attack killed 2,403 service members and wounded 1,178 more; plus sank or destroyed six U.S. ships. It also destroyed 169 U.S. Navy and Army Air Corps planes. It affected Americans from the big cities to the rural small towns like ours. President Franklin D. Roosevelt called December 7, 1941, "A date which will live in infamy!" And thus, it has become exactly that and is remembered by Americans of all ages.

It is understandable that 1941's December 7th would not be a cause for celebration among families and communities who had lost loved ones at Pearl Harbor. It should be remembered as a day to honor those who have paid the ultimate price for the freedoms that we all enjoy in the USA. And yet, in a way, those freedoms are clearly what we celebrate in small town Texas with events like Christmas Parades, Fireworks, and holiday traditions. We can celebrate with family and friends from Thanksgiving to Christmas to Hanukkah to New Year's Day, and anything else we want, because of the freedoms granted to us by men and women of our US Military and our Military Veterans. Let's not forget that.

Of course, December 7th also has an impact on Texas History, or at least it should have an impact for those of us living in Milam County Texas. During the Texas Revolution, which began in the Fall of 1835, several small battles were fought by early Texans in their attempt to gain their freedom from Mexico. One of these skirmishes took place at Gonzales, Texas, which is sometimes known as the "Come and Take It" Battle. On October 2, 1835, armed Texas citizens defied Santa Anna's soldiers and kept them from retrieving a small brass canon in Gonzales. There the early Texans raised a flag with the words "Come and Take It" on it and dared the Mexican troops to take the canon. A short time later the Texan forces became a bit more organized and marched to capture the town of Goliad, which had been in Mexican military control. One of the leading patriots in these early revolutionary battles was Colonel Benjamin Rush Milam. The same Ben Milam that is our county's namesake, whose statue graces the courthouse lawn, and who has an elementary school in Cameron named for him.

Ben Milam, a native of Kentucky, encouraged the rebellious Texan troops to follow him into San Antonio and take the city away from Santa Anna's army. Three months before the more famous Battle of the Alamo, Ben Milam bravely stood up and yelled, "Who will go with old Ben Milam into San Antonio." The Texas army followed him into the Battle of Bexar and that act eventually captured the village of San Antonio de Bexar and The Alamo. This battle and siege at San Antonio took four days, December 5-8.

On December 7, 1835, during the third day of hard fighting, Ben Milam was killed by a sniper's rifle. Shot in the head he died instantly at age 47 and he is remembered as a Texas Revolutionary Hero. So, again December the 7th can be remembered in reverence for the brave Ben Milam. Or, it can also be celebrated for the freedoms those early Texas patriots gave the people of our beloved state. Let us not forget Ben Milam, and his life ending sacrifice one hundred and eighty-eight years ago on another significant December 7th.

So, when you visit downtown Cameron during the Christmas Season, celebrate and enjoy the parade and festival, the lights and fireworks. Have great time, create lots of memories, and just for a moment, among all the fun... notice the American and Texas flags flying proudly on the Milam County Courthouse Square. Don't allow December 7th to go by without remembering how we've gained our freedom to celebrate together at Christmastime.