

Silver and Gold



Chapter Nine – by Kay Hively

A few days before the Christmas program, Molly asked her father if the Indian family could come. Captain Hankins said he would invite Black Feather and his family.

Everyone was excited to have some holiday entertainment. Because so many people wanted to attend, the colonel gave permission for it to be held in the mess hall which was bigger than the school room.

Christmas Eve finally came. Molly was eager to perform. She was also excited about the dinner and dance that were planned after the program. Mrs. Hankins had made new dresses for herself and Molly.

Except for the soldiers on guard duty, everyone at the fort attended. Molly thought everything and everyone were lovely. The ladies and children were dressed in their finest clothes. The officers and men were in their handsome uniforms.

After the children's program, the ladies choir sang Christmas carols. As Molly listened to her mother and the other ladies singing, she noticed Black Feather and his family standing in the back of the hall. When the program ended, Molly jumped from her chair and raced to the back of the room, but the Indian family was not there. Quickly, she rushed outside just as Black Feather and his family were leaving. Molly raced across the porch and out into the snow.

When she caught up with Black Feather and his family, Molly pressed her little silver bell into Sweet Flower's hand and wished her a merry Christmas.

Sweet Flower gently shook the bell and smiled at Molly. Upon hearing the sound of the bell, the little Indian boy laughed and clapped his hands together. Molly thought he made a great Christmas baby.

After Christmas, life at the fort returned to normal. Molly went to school every day. Her mother tended the house and formed a sewing circle with other women on the post.

Captain Hankins worked around the post or went on patrol with his soldiers. All the army patrols rode beside the railroad track, looking for any trouble or damage. One of their missions at Fort Russell was to protect the railroad and those who were building it.

For the rest of the winter, there was snow on the ground. Molly knew when the snow melted, the railroad builders would go back to work. Then, once again, trains would come and go nearly every day. Her father said the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific would soon be joined together. He said a big ceremony would be held when the last spike was driven and the entire United States was connected by rail.

But the best news Molly's father told was that the railroad companies had invited people from the fort to attend the ceremony. A special train would be taking people to the celebration.

Molly had been wanting to ride on the new train. Maybe, she hoped, this would be her chance.

Things to Think About and Do

- A. Molly gave Sweet Flower a silver bell for Christmas. Do you think that was a good present? If you could give Sweet Flower something you own, what would it be?
- B. Have you ever ridden on a train? Do trains come through your town? What have you seen being carried on freight trains?
- C. The Christmas program was a community gathering. In your newspaper, find reports of gatherings planned in your community. Add to the list events planned at your school. Create a Community Calendar listing happenings over the next month.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Goforth-Stewart both live in Neosho, Mo. Produced by the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2007.

