

Iowa Anecdote

THE PLIGHT OF FIDDLIN' JIM

The early spring of 1856 saw the completion of a much-needed schoolhouse near the pioneer village of Redman. It was an important and significant event in the little neighborhood. As such, it deserved proper recognition, by a general celebration and dance. Redman and vicinity determined to "do it up right".

Every one in the community, men, women, and children, gathered for the "raising". The men worked furiously, laughing and joking, with a bit of occasional "nipping" at the little brown jug nearby. The women watched, gossiped, and prepared the supper. By late afternoon the work was finished. The little brown jug, loads of good substantial food, and the presence of almost everybody in the neighborhood foretold a night of fun and frolic.

The spring evening was still, the sky clear and filled with stars. Surfeited with food, and warmed by work and "wine", the crowd repaired to a nearby barn. There the floor, a little rough to be sure, had been swept clean. Benches had been

constructed, and lanterns hung about. Everything was ready for the dance.

The men, dressed in tight-fitting suits and "boiled" shirts, or perhaps in clean corduroys, stamped their fresh-greased boots as they "limbered-up" in action and talk. Already a few, with huge colored handkerchiefs, were wiping the perspiration from their foreheads. The women, in alpacas and calicoes, with here and there a figured lawn, stood or sat in little chatting groups. The children were everywhere, running, yelling, and whistling. But there was no music.

"Where's Fiddlin' Jim?" some one asked, impatiently.

The cry was immediately taken up. "Jim. We want Jim. Music. Let's start."

But Fiddlin' Jim was not there. Nor had anybody seen him. Questions flew thick and fast. Finally, some one volunteered that "Jim couldn't come till evenin'. Said he'd cut over through Salt Creek. Should be here by now, though."

"Come on; let's git him", proposed a voice.

Four of the men left the barn and crossed the fields toward the creek. One carried a lantern, although the rising moon cast a generous light. Soon they entered the woods near the creek. As they progressed, they heard sounds that seemed incongruous.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say that was a fiddle", remarked one of the searchers.

"Maybe Jim got all liquored-up, and is playing himself a tune", suggested another.

The quartet moved on. As they advanced, the sound, unmistakably that of a violin, grew in volume. At last they paused, near the edge of a small opening. There, seated on the low swaying roof of a long-deserted "shanty", sat Fiddlin' Jim, with his violin tucked under his chin and his fingers flying. His audience consisted of a half-dozen lean and hungry wolves, squatted in a circle around the shack.

With a great deal of shouting, the four ran forward, each brandishing a hurriedly-snatched club. The wolves slunk away; and Jim climbed down.

"Howdy, boys", said he. "You came in right handy. Them wolves sure meant business, and every time I quit playin', they started movin' up. But", he added, "I sure got tuned up good."

And so the dance in celebration of the new schoolhouse was a great success.

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