



Sam Waitely.



BY FRANK H. SWEET  
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Harriet Hepner.

**Y**ES, my dear," said Aunt Susan reminiscently. "I remember my school days as though 'twas only yesterday. And the spelling matches we used to have! There was old Squire Hepner, who always took a great interest in our school. He was a peculiar kind of man. Folks would call him cranky in these days, I suppose. He was so gruff and sullen that you'd think he'd snap your head off.

"Education was the old man's hobby. He had no learning himself and used to tell us how he felt the need of it. He thought that people could not be educated unless they could spell clean from b-a, ba, to incommunicability in the speller.

"Well, Squire Hepner had heard that the Red Haw district folks were making their boasts that they could outspell ours, and it angered him. His daughter Harriet was the best speller in our school, and they said her father offered her any cow on his place if she'd spell the Red Haw school down.

"One Friday afternoon the old squire came stamping into the schoolhouse when our school was having a spelling match. He was the director of our district, and the boldest scholar would be wate and meek when he appeared. He had two little jet black eyes that seemed to see right through you. He could make almost any scholar wobble in his seat by fastening his eyes upon him.

"The squire was the richest man in Four Mile, but he never gave any money away, and that made it all the more surprising when, just before school let out that night, he got up and in his short, jerky, gruff way said: 'You've spelled pretty well this afternoon, scholars, and I'm glad of it, for, to my thinkin', spellin' is the most important thing a body can learn. In fact, it stands to reason you've got to be good spellers 'fore you can be good readers or real good in anything. It's all well enough to know how to figger correctly, an' I reckon grammar's well enough, though I never took much stock in it. Geography an' algebray an' history an' all that is good enough in its place, but 'cordin' to my notion spellin' beats 'em all.

"An' now, to encourage you in being good spellers an' to stop the braggin' of some districts not far from here, I'm goin' to make it an object for you to study your spellers like sixty for the next few weeks.

"In six weeks from tonight, an' that will be Christmas eve, we'll have a spellin' match in this house, an' I want it circulated round that airy school in this township is free to come an' spell for the prize I'll offer, which is \$25 in gold to the one that spells down everybody.

"Now, take your spellers home with you tonight an' do somethin' else with 'em besides a-chawin' the corners off. And with that the squire made one of his stiff bows to the teacher and walked out.

"I tell you, \$25 was a large sum of money in those days, and when it was known that the prize had been offered there was more studying of our old blue backed spellers than there had ever been before. We used to take them home every night, and our fathers and mothers would give us all the hard words, like 'daguerreotype' and 'phthisic' and 'recept' and those with silent letters in them, and we would spell them over and over again.

"The offering of that prize set the whole township in a commotion, and little else was thought of or talked about. The Red Haw and Jack Oak districts let it be known that they would try for the prize, and they had some good spellers in those schools, especially in the Red Haw.

"But none of them had a better record than Harriet Hepner, and they said that in those six weeks she studied her speller night and day. Folks who passed the Hepner house at midnight declared that through the windows from the road they had seen Harriet sitting on a stool up near the fireplace, leaning her head against the wall, and the squire sitting in his old hickory chair, spelling book in one hand and a tallow dip in the other, giving out words to her, and everybody else in bed. No wonder the girl became thin and peaked.

"You see, the squire fairly hated the Red Haw district and about everybody in it. The Red Haw and ours had formerly been one district, and he opposed their being divided, because he owned land in both, and he knew that if they were divided there would be an extra tax for a new schoolhouse and a new school fund.

"The squire had a sister living in the

Red Haw district, but he had not spoken to her for years, and would not allow his folks to look at or speak to her or her children.

"The poor woman had, in the first place, married against the squire's wishes. That angered him. Still, he spoke to her when they met, though they did not visit back and forth any.

"Mr. Waitely, the squire's brother-in-law, was the one that first suggested the dividing of the district and did more to bring it about than any other man, which was natural, for the district was so big and the schoolhouse so far off that the Waitely children could not go to school in the winter time.

"But that didn't make the least difference to Squire Hepner. He was furiously angry with Waitely, and on town meeting day he and Waitely had some dreadful words.

"Of course Mrs. Waitely sided with her husband, and from that day the squire turned from his own kin. He

the valleys ring. Yes, and the sled upset, too, and we were all thrown into a ditch. The edge of the wagon bow caught my beau's big feet under it, and I thought I should cry from mortification when he lay there and actually bawled and snuffed. I was so put out about it that I wouldn't sit by him after we got into the sled or speak to him afterward.

"When we reached the schoolhouse we found it packed so full that we could not just crowd in. Most everybody had brought a candle to stick up on the logs and some sprigs of evergreen and berries to make the room look Christmasy. There were four different teachers and well known spellers from all over the township.

"Lecta Plumb and I 'chose up.' I got first choice and took Harriet Hepner. She was pale as death and looked nervous and frightened. Lecta took Abimelech Abers, the leading speller from the Red Haw school, and I took



HE STOOD WITHIN A FOOT OF HIS UNCLE HEPNER.

never spoke to them again, not even after Mr. Waitely died. The poor man got caught under a falling tree and was killed, leaving his widow with four children and nothing but a shabby roof over their heads and three or four acres of scrubby land.

"She had a fearfully hard time supporting herself and the children, but the squire never helped her. And, to make matters worse, her oldest child, little Sam, was a cripple, humpbacked and lame in one leg, so that he had to walk with a crutch. Of course he wasn't any help to his mother on the place, but she was trying to educate him, knowing that he never could do any physical work.

"Well, the spelling bee excitement became more and more intense as the time drew near, and when Christmas eve at last came the old Four Mile schoolhouse was a sight to see.

"The night was one of the coldest I ever remember. The stars shone like bright lamps in the sky. The sleighing was good and the air sharp enough to stir the blood and, if possible, still more to stimulate the boys and girls. A lot of the boys had borrowed a pair of sled runners and put a big wagon on them. Then plenty of straw was put in the box, and about twenty of us boys and girls piled in, with lots of quilts and buffalo robes and warm shawls.

"I had my first beau that night. His name was Azrael Whitehead, and of all awkward boys he was the awkwardest. I think I was the first girl he had ever asked to go with him. Anyhow, I know he fell flat on his back trying to help me out of the sled, and he let me go head first into a snow bank.

"I remember that his handkerchief was wet with cinnamon drops and that he gave me a handful of peppermint and cloves. I remember, too, how we all of us went up and down hill singing and laughing at the top of our voices. We made the old woods and

Cindy Patch, the best speller from Jack Oak.

"Then we chose everybody in the room who could spell at all. I think we had more than fifty on a side. We stood in long rows on both sides of the house against the wall, and, much to my disgust, I got my hair full of tallow from a dripping candle.

"We were about ready to commence spelling and everybody had become quiet when the people who sat near the door made way for some one who had come late, and in came little Sam Waitely on his crutch, with his mother behind him in a poor, thin, patched old faded calico dress and a thin cotton shawl, with a faded old red hood on her head. I could see a hole worn in her shoe as she put her foot up on the stove hearth.

"Sam was then about fifteen years old, but not as tall as some boys of nine. He was very thinly dressed for such a sharp night, and they had walked fully two miles.

"I felt sorry for them and spoke up at once and took Sam on my side. It happened to be my turn to choose, and I was bound the poor fellow should not be slighted, whether he could spell or not.

"He had half a mind not to try, but I saw his mother reach out her hand and gently push him, and then he hobbled down to the end of the line and stood within a foot of his Uncle Hepner.

"Then the spelling commenced. I blushed to tell it, but I actually missed the very first word given me, and that was 'mermaid.' I spelled it 'murmur.' I knew better, but I was so nervous I could not collect my thoughts. So I had to take my seat, and of course I had a little cry all to myself.

"But I nearly laughed so as to be heard all over the room when Azrael Whitehead missed 'goose.' He spelled it 'guse,' and he had told me in confidence that he half expected to get the

prize and had been studying his speller for weeks.

"Electa missed 'emanate.' She spelled it with an 'f' instead of an 'a.' 'Cindy Patch missed 'tranquillize.' I think she knew how to spell it, but she was excited because seven or eight had missed it before her. The Jack Oak scholars looked very sober when Cindy had to sit down.

"But you ought to have seen old Squire Hepner's eyes twinkle and his grim face look grimmer when Abimelech Abers, the best Red Haw scholar, missed 'phytochimy' and Harriet spelled it without hesitation. Bimelech got confused and thought the last letter was 'e' instead of 'y.'

"The Red Haw people did look mortified, and the Four Mile folks were highly pleased and showed it, too, for all the best spellers were out on both sides, and only Harriet Hepner and five or six others were left. Four of them missed 'micaceous,' and Harriet was just going to spell it when Mrs. Waitely, in a scared, timid voice that could just be heard, said:

"If you please, teacher, Sammy hasn't spelled yet."

"Sammy stood down at the end of the line, and they had overlooked him. But the teacher replied:

"Oh, indeed! I thought he was done long ago."

"I thought he said it sneeringly, and he gave Sammy the word in a tone that said plainly, 'You can't spell it anyway!'

"But what did Sammy do but spell it correctly without the slightest hesitation.

"Then the others who were standing missed 'dromedary,' and that left Harriet and Sammy alone. I tell you, you might have heard a pin drop then. Everybody was half crazy with excitement.

"Old Squire Hepner did not move a muscle. He had the money, five gold five dollar pieces, and a fancy purse and was to give them himself to the winner.

"It seemed to me that that poor crippled boy got help from on high that night. I never saw anything like it. At first he was so shy that his voice almost trembled, but when he and the cousin he had never spoken to stood up there alone and his fierce old uncle glared so contemptuously at him the little fellow raised himself to his full height and from that moment never flinched.

"His large eyes glistened, and he threw back his head and looked boldly at his uncle and spelled the words in a loud, clear tone that fairly took people's breath away.

"His mother had quietly slipped through the crowd and taken her seat behind him, and those that sat near said she got one of his hands in hers and held it, while the tears streamed down her face.

"The two spelled against each other for a full half hour, and all the time poor Harriet was as white as a sheet, and I could see that she was trembling from head to foot.

"At last the teacher gave the word 'tyrannously.' Harriet spelled the first syllable, then stopped and stammered, looked imploringly at her father and then tremblingly went on and spelled it with one 'n.'

"How did you spell it, Harriet? Did you have only—"

"Squire Hepner had been looking on a spelling book too. Now he turned sharply round to the master and in his hardest, coldest voice said:

"She missed it, sir. Pass it to the next."

"Sam spelled it without hesitating an instant.

"You could have heard a pin drop in that room. It was still as death. Harriet dropped into her seat and buried her face in her hands. Squire Hepner's face never changed. Without a word he rose, reached out his long arm, beckoned to Sam to come to him and then dropped into the lad's outstretched hand the purse. Turning and facing the breathless people, he said:

"I want you all to know that I think this has been a fair and square match, and my nephew deserves the prize."

"Without further words he took his hat and marched out of the house.

"Well, the Red Haw people actually carried Sam home on their shoulders, with Mrs. Waitely close behind, crying as if her heart would break with joy and nervousness. But she had on a long, warm, plaid shawl that I saw Mrs. Squire Hepner throw over her as she stepped out of the door.

"One of my sisters went home with the Hepners that night, and she said Harriet cried all the way home and was in mortal terror at the thought of meeting her father. She stopped on the doorstep a long while, and when she did finally step into the room, trembling and fairly mourning, her father, who was sitting with his head between his hands before the fire, got up and walked over to her and actually kissed her there before them all. Then he went off to bed without a word.

"But what followed was better still. Christmas day the squire took his big sled, put in lots of hay and blankets and drove off like Nimshi himself to his sister's. No one ever knew what happened there, but it ended in Mrs. Waitely and all the children going home with the squire. And a big Christmas day they had, folks said.

"The squire declared it was an honor to know a boy who could spell like Sam. They say he had that boy spell the dictionary half through that winter and nearly hugged him when he spelled correctly the longest word in it.

"The squire was the strangest man on the subject of spelling that I ever heard of. Nothing but Sam's knowing how to spell so well ever softened his heart toward his sister and her children. And nothing pleased him more than to have Sam and Harriet spell against each other for hours at a stretch."

## Christmas at the White House

**S**UNSHINE and shadows, happiness and misery, have mingled together in the celebration of Christmas at the White House since the days of President Adams to the present.

Mrs. John Adams, the first mistress of the White House, had an unpleasant experience. Her husband had taken the oath of office in Independence hall, Philadelphia, on the 4th of March, 1797, and on the 10th of November, 1800, came to Washington, the White House being announced as ready for occupancy. But the good lady found the building anything but ready, and in a letter to a friend she said that not a single apartment was finished; no fence, no yard, no convenience whatever without, "and the great unfinished audience room I make a drying room of to hang up the clothes in. . . . Two articles we are much distressed for. One is bells, but the more important one is wood. Yet you cannot see for trees. We have used about nine cord trying to dry the walls of the house. Congress poured in, but



PRESIDENT JACKSON CELEBRATED IN TENNESSEE STYLE.

shiver, shiver! I have no looking glasses but dwarfs for this house nor a twentieth part of lamps enough to light it."

With the families of the president's cabinet and a few invited guests from Georgetown Mrs. Adams celebrated the first Christmas at the White House, but her letters clearly show that she was not entirely happy in the unfinished "great house in the wilderness," and after four months she returned to the family estate at Quincy, Mass., and during her husband's administration did not return save on visits.

Thomas Jefferson's White House Christmases were truly after the "Jeffersonian simplicity" style. Mr. Jefferson was a widower, and when he came to Washington in 1801 to be inaugurated as chief executive he rode horseback from his estate at Monticello unaccompanied by even a servant. He was the first president to take the oath of office in Washington, and the reception at the White House that evening was the greatest affair during his administration. He had four daughters, the eldest, Martha, presiding at the White House during her father's second administration. While Christmas had not been celebrated to any extent during the first administration, Miss Martha made it exceedingly interesting after she became the first lady. Christmas trees and entertainments of every kind were arranged for the children, and in these the president would take part.

While James Madison served two full terms—1809-1817—as president, he and his beautiful wife, Dolly, did not spend all of these in the White House, but it was a joyous Christmas each year for them. Mrs. Madison would not have it any other way. In fact, the eight years of Madison's administration were the most brilliant as well as most exciting in the history of American society. Before the British sacked and burned the White House in August, 1814, Mrs. Madison had for five years shown Washington folk how to celebrate Christmas. It was the brilliant woman's pleasure to entertain rather to please her friends than to gain glory for herself, and each Christmas was indeed a joyous season for every inmate of the White House, from the humblest servant to the president. Mrs. Madison always invited many of her friends to these Christmas celebrations, and during the holiday week there was always one evening set apart for the entertainment of her little friends, the children. After the British soldiers interrupted the morning breakfast at the White House and made a bonfire of the building the president took up his residence in the noted Octagon house, where they resided for about two years and then moved to a residence at the corner of Nineteenth street and Pennsylvania avenue. In these two houses Mrs. Madison continued to dispense Christmas cheer, but on a smaller scale.

French methods of cooking and serving dinners at the White House were inaugurated by Mrs. James Monroe in

1817, when her husband became chief executive, and along with the Christmas turkey, baked in the "Ole Virginia" style, outlandish dishes came into vogue.

Although it is a matter of history that in 1826, about a year after John Quincy Adams took the oath of office as president, congress protested against a bill for billiard tables for the White House, declaring billiard playing a species of gambling and "alarmed to the religious, moral and the redempting portion of the community." President Adams was not a spendthrift, and it was a difficult matter to get him to agree to Christmas celebrations. He believed in great simplicity, and economy controlled every action of his life, even to wearing one hat for ten years. He was notably the shabbily dressed man that ever occupied the White House. To celebrate Christmas after the New England style was sufficient for him, and Santa Claus did not cut much of a figure during the four years of Mr. Adams' administration.

President Andrew Jackson during his two terms saw that Christmas was celebrated after the good old style of Tennessee. Mrs. Emily Donelson, whose husband was the president's secretary, assumed the duties of first lady, and she was Jackson's niece, but he called her "daughter," and she was very fond of the sad hearted man and was of great assistance to him in the turbulent administration. During the eight years the president left in the hands of "daughter" all arrangements for Christmas.

President Lincoln took a leading hand in all the holiday festivities. When he entered the White House he had three sons, but the second one, William, died in 1862. Tad, another son, died shortly after the assassination of his father. Like her husband, Mrs. Lincoln believed in giving the children all the pleasure possible, and each Christmas found a splendid Christmas tree laden with presents not only for the boys, but for the employees of the White House, regardless of color.—Washington Star.

**The Only Exception.**  
The Suburbanite—I suppose the folks next door don't know we have a Christmas tree.  
The Wife—What makes you think so?  
The Suburbanite—Well, they haven't sent in to borrow it.—Brooklyn Life.

## Santa and The Merkid.

The pole where Santa has his shop is now a wireless station, and messages which reach its top arrive from all creation. The other day one landed there that set the saint to guessing: "The merkid wants a Teddy bear!" Good gracious, how distressing!

For this was what made Santa blue and roused such sad emotion—The merkid lived a mile or two beneath the bounding ocean. (A mermaid fair, a merman strong, whose habitat was water, had been merman and wife for long; The merkid was their daughter.)



Old Santa gave a dismal groan and muttered: "Jumpin' jim'neyn! I don't believe the mermans own A cubic foot of chimney.

And yet I simply must not fail The merkid without striving, For just to see it wag its tail 'Would pay for miles of diving!'

The reindeer would not leave their shed And balked at ocean cruising. "It gives us mal de mer," they said. "Our meals we'll all be losing." So Santa took a submarine. He'd borrowed from the Germans And soon appeared upon the scene, Among the waggish mermans.

But when they saw the Teddy bear No fishlike tail was wagging The merkid and the merman pair Gave Santa Claus a ragging. Their rage, alas, knew no restraint Toward Teddy and his maker. They set the dogfish on the saint And called him nature fakir. —Earle Hooker Eaton in Harper's Weekly.