

# Angels and Dollars: One Hundred Years of Christmas in Sioux Falls

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Christmas is a relatively new holiday in the United States, becoming part of our collective culture only in the mid-to-late 1800s. As the popularity of Christmas has risen, so has the perception that the religious meaning of the holiday has been subverted by its commercial appeal. In reality, Christmas in America has long been a commercially related event, with customs like gift buying and holiday decorating becoming popular as early as the 1830s. In a recent study, religious historian Leigh Eric Schmidt compared the holiday with other Christian festivals, noting that the tensions between "sacrifice and indulgence, simplicity and affluence, piety and spectacle, Christianity and consumerism" have a long association throughout the history of Western Civilization.<sup>1</sup> Westward-moving Americans brought the same tensions to the new states on the Northern Great Plains in the late 1800s, and through the years, the region's large commercial districts, like Sioux Falls, South Dakota, have offered a good barometer of the national trend of mixing the religious and commercial.

1. Leigh E. Schmidt, "Joy to [Some of] the World: Christianity in the Marketplace: Christmas and the Consumer Culture," *Cross Currents* 43 (Fall 1992): 355. One of the best accounts of the rise of Christmas as a holiday in the United States is Penne L. Restad, *Christmas in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). See also Restad's "Christmas in 19th-Century America," *History Today* 45 (Dec. 1995): 13-19.

An examination of the *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader* and other city newspapers from the 1870s to the 1980s provides a plethora of information about the growth of Christmas in the United States. The presence of enticing department store advertisements throughout the decades clearly demonstrates that the holiday had an enormous economic impact. At the same time, the newspapers suggest that the religious side of Christmas became more and more a part of the lives of Sioux Falls residents as churches and service groups organized programs and charitable activities. Discord over the "true meaning" of the holiday surfaced occasionally, but that was the story of Christmas everywhere, whether one marked it in Sioux Falls or New England, where residents had embraced the season of peace and good will as an antidote to the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution and the Civil War. Homes in Boston and New York displayed Christmas trees in the 1830s and 1840s, and they began to appear in Sioux Falls during the 1870s and 1880s. At Christmastime, the huge department stores of the eastern cities were decorated like cathedrals, with statues of angels and saints and decorations of lilies and greens. Sioux Falls stores replicated these scenes on a smaller scale in the last decade or two of the nineteenth century. On its streets, shoppers undoubtedly even heard the new "American" carols "It Came upon a Midnight Clear" and "Jingle Bells."<sup>2</sup>

During the days before Christmas, the citizens of late nineteenth century Sioux Falls prepared for the holiday in both public and private ways. The *Dakota Pantagraph* reported in November 1878 that the "opening ball" of the holiday season was to take place Thanksgiving eve. Masquerade balls, dances, and banquets hosted by club groups such as the Mystic Shriners occurred throughout December.<sup>3</sup> Women of the various churches readied gift

2. Restad, *Christmas in America*, pp. 59, 109; Schmidt, "Joy to [Some of] the World," pp. 346-52.

3. *Dakota Pantagraph*, 27 Nov. 1878; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 6 Dec. 1887, 3 Dec. 1890, 26 Nov. 1892.

items for purchase at bazaars. In 1890, the Congregational Ladies Aid held a festival at which they offered "bags of every shape, size, material, workmanship, cast, and description imaginable."<sup>4</sup> In 1895, the ladies of Saint Michael's congregation held their three-day-long "Catholic fair" at Germania Hall, netting between seven and eight hundred dollars.<sup>5</sup> Although children were not likely to be interested in the "fancy articles" sold at bazaars, school parties and the thought of Christmas vacation undoubtedly drew them into the holiday spirit. One kindergarten class in 1895 enjoyed a tree decorated with nut-filled stockings and candy-filled mittens. Each child received a present—dolls for the girls and toy horses for the boys. Depending on the year, schools closed for two to three weeks during the holiday.<sup>6</sup>

The custom of selecting and decorating a tree for one's home, a common Christmas tradition today, started slowly in early Sioux Falls. The mere reporting of a tree in the Dell Rapids residence of Albion Thorne by the *Sioux Falls Independent* in 1874 indicates that it was probably one of the few in the area. Four years later, the *Dakota Pantagraph* mentioned a "private tree" in a Sioux Falls residence.<sup>7</sup> By the late 1880s, the practice had caught on. Advertisements for Christmas trees began appearing in the newspapers, and the *Argus-Leader* reported that trees graced many homes. In the early 1890s, trees cost anywhere from thirty-five cents to two dollars. Store ads mentioning Christmas tree candles and decorative balls also began to appear.<sup>8</sup>

4. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 3 Dec. 1890.

5. *Ibid.*, 10, 14 Dec. 1895. According to Restad, handmade gifts, which symbolized the simpler, pre-industrial age, were more popular at the turn of the century than manufactured ones. Restad, *Christmas in America*, pp. 129-30.

6. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 22 Dec. 1887, 24 Dec. 1895.

7. *Sioux Falls Independent*, 31 Dec. 1874; *Dakota Pantagraph*, 25 Dec. 1878.

8. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 15 Dec. 1887, 26 Dec. 1888, 15, 22 Dec. 1892. Restad, *Christmas in America*, pp. 58-64, provides a good account of the adoption of the Christmas tree in the 1800s. For a history of tree decorations, see Phillip V. Snyder, *The Christmas Tree Book: The History of the Christmas Tree and Antique Christmas Tree Ornaments* (New York: Viking Press, 1976).

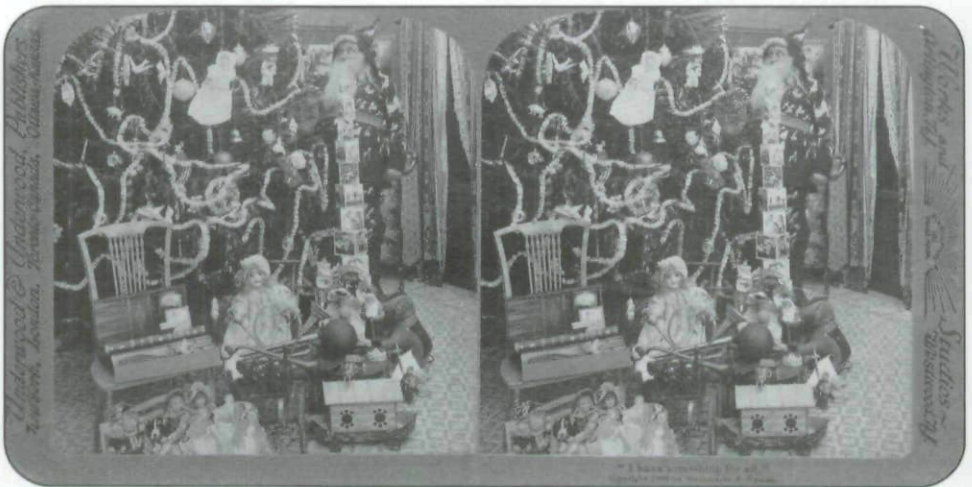


More common, especially in the 1870s, were "Sunday School trees" at churches. Programs centered around these symbols of everlasting life often took place on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day and involved singing, recitations, and scripture readings. By the late seventies, newspapers noted that there were presents on the trees, and at the Congregational church in 1878 Santa Claus handed out the gifts.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the eighties and nineties, church Christmas programs became more elaborate. In 1886, the Congregationalists had a "Santa Clausville," the Presbyterians hosted a "Gathering of the Nations to Meet Santa Claus," the Baptist church held a literary musical entertainment and supper, and the Methodist-Episcopal church had a "Christmas house" with Santa.<sup>10</sup> Christmas

9. *Dakota Pantagraph*, 11, 18, 25 Dec. 1878; *Sioux Falls Independent*, 18 Dec. 1873. Nationally, Sunday School trees appeared in the 1840s and 1850s. Restad, *Christmas in America*, p. 62.

10. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 24 Dec. 1886.

"Something for all," announced the Santa Claus in this 1890s stereoscopic view. Christmas trees and visits from Santa, popular traditions in other parts of the country, also caught on in Sioux Falls during this period.



trees and Santa Claus remained important features of these programs into the 1890s, although at times they appeared with strange twists. At the Baptist church in 1887, Santa distributed presents from a chariot; at the Congregational church a few years later, he arrived on a motorcycle.<sup>11</sup>

The spirit of giving to the needy also gained a more prominent place in the churches' Christmas commemorations during the 1870s-to-1890s era. Children were urged to bring vegetables to their Christmas programs for distribution to the poor, and organized collections of food, clothing, and money for the less fortunate continued throughout the period.<sup>12</sup> The desire to make Christmas more pleasant for those in need extended beyond the churches, however. In 1892, the *Argus-Leader* carried an editorial calling for Sioux Falls residents to aid the "deserving poor"—those impoverished because of circumstances beyond their control, such as the illness or death of the family's breadwinner.

During this era, people believed that human progress occurred when "the fittest survive." Late nineteenth century society tended to view individuals who did not fare well financially as responsible for their own condition through "indolence or prodigality or sins committed."<sup>13</sup> At the same time, society was beginning to recognize, as the *Argus-Leader* editorial indicated, that some people were not in control of their financial fates, and the citizens of the nation and Sioux Falls engaged more and more often in various acts of kindness at Christmastime. In 1890, the couple who ran the local poorhouse provided a Christmas tree for their "inmates." For several years, one wholesaler donated fruit, candy, and nuts to scores of poor chil-

11. Ibid., 23, 24 Dec. 1887, 26 Dec. 1895.

12. Ibid., 24 Dec. 1887, 24 Dec. 1888, 24 Dec. 1890.

13. Ibid., 24 Dec. 1892.

dren. Residents of the Children's Home in the mid-1890s benefited from the generosity of students at Lincoln School, who collected ten bushels of potatoes, a barrel of apples, an assortment of vegetables, and \$3.20 in coin. At least one year, the owners of The Fair department store donated a tree and presents to the orphanage. By the mid-nineties, workers for the Salvation Army, organized in the United States in 1880, were providing Christmas dinner for the poor in Sioux Falls.<sup>14</sup>

Along with the rise in charitable holiday giving came a growing focus on Christmas within the business community. In the 1870s, newspapers reported little on the commercial aspect of the holiday. For instance, the *Sioux Falls Independent* on Christmas Eve in 1874 merely noted that business had been exceptionally good for town merchants the previous few days.<sup>15</sup> Over the next several years, merchants began to place one- and two-line advertisements beginning in the first or second week of December and reminding readers that "Christmas is coming" or that a "fine assortment of Candy, Toys, etc." would be available soon.<sup>16</sup> By the mid-eighties, store owners were creating detailed ads to announce the arrival of Christmas goods in November.<sup>17</sup> In 1886, one merchant encouraged "holiday gents" to come in and inspect his line of London and Paris mufflers and Japanese and Chinese silk handkerchiefs.<sup>18</sup> In 1887, the Bee Hive, one of the city's first major dry goods stores, purchased almost the entire front page of the *Argus-Leader* to announce "Useful and Beautiful Presents for Everybody this Week." The advertisement listed gifts for every price range—from a "ladies hem-stitched handkerchief" or a "nice china doll" for five cents to an "elegant plush photo album" or "gents all wool shirt or drawers" for ninety-eight cents. The variety of presents

14. *Ibid.*, 27 Dec. 1890, 24 Dec. 1892, 23, 24, 26 Dec. 1895.

15. *Sioux Falls Independent*, 24 Dec. 1874.

16. *Ibid.*, 2 Dec. 1875; *Dakota Pantagraph*, 12 Dec. 1877.

17. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 13 Nov. 1886, 19 Nov., 17 Dec. 1887, 24 Nov., 15 Dec. 1888.

18. *Ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1886.





## HOLIDAY :: ATTRACTIONS

Our establishment is now in its full Holiday attire. Goods for home use and specially adapted for gifts are here, there and everywhere. They are in an infinite variety of forms, and the range of prices is equally wide—just what gift buyers require and appreciate. Some of the attractions are presented below. A visit will reveal thousands of others.

# THE PALACE DRY GOODS CO.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rubber Toys,</li> <li>Banks, Safes,</li> <li>Blocks, Trunks,</li> <li>Tool Chests,</li> <li>Animal Games,</li> <li>Books, Balls, Tops, Drums.</li> <li>Ten Pins,</li> <li>Scrap Books,</li> <li>Writing Desks, Ink Stands,</li> <li>Box Papereries, Pen Wipers,</li> <li>Calendars, Shopping Bags,</li> <li>Fancy Feather Dusters,</li> <li>Celluloid Novelties,</li> <li>In Endless Variety, Purses,</li> <li>Cups and Saucers, Toy Tea Sets,</li> <li>After Dinner Sets, Nut Sets,</li> <li>Paper Cutters, Paper Weights,</li> <li>Match Safes, Button Hooks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Photograph Albums,</li> <li>Toilet Cases, Work Boxes,</li> <li>Manicure Sets, Shaving Sets,</li> <li>Collar and Cuff Boxes,</li> <li>Smoking Sets, Jewel Cases,</li> <li>Leather Traveling Bags,</li> <li>Whisk Broom Holders,</li> <li>Crumb Trays, Odor Cases,</li> <li>Metal Card Trays, Bisque Dolls,</li> <li>Autograph Albums,</li> <li>Kid Body Dolls, Rubber Dolls,</li> <li>Washable Dolls,</li> <li>Worsted Dolls,</li> <li>Jointed Dolls,</li> <li>Dressed Dolls,</li> <li>Wooden Toys,</li> <li>Esquimaux Dolls,</li> <li>Iron Toys, Tin Toys,</li> </ul>
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*As the commercial importance of Christmas grew, merchants created larger and more elaborate advertisements to attract holiday shoppers.*

was virtually endless. Popular for children were sleds, velocipedes, doll carriages, trains and other cast-iron vehicles, stuffed animals, wheeled animals (some life-sized), mechanical toys, board games, magic lanterns, and so on.<sup>19</sup>

Merchants used various techniques to draw customers to their stores, and nothing worked better than Santa Claus. One of the first businesses to use the image to help stimulate interest in shopping was the Phillips and Brown hardware store in 1877, which also advertised “goods and toys of every description.”<sup>20</sup> In 1888, the Bee Hive declared that Santa would make his Christmas headquarters there; two years later, T. H. Pruner claimed the same for his “notions” store. In addition, there were wondrous

19. Ibid., 17 Dec. 1887.

20. *Dakota Pantagraph*, 12 Dec. 1877.

scenes displayed in department store windows, reflecting a rapidly growing trend nationwide. The *Argus-Leader* in 1888 reported many beautiful store windows in the Sioux Falls shopping district, at least one of which used electric lights to show off the wares. In 1890, the window of Bowen and Cameron, primarily a grocery establishment, was trimmed with Christmas greens. Supplementing these tactics, merchants also attracted customers with "give-away" gimmicks such as presenting them with numbered tickets for every dollar spent to be used in a prize drawing held after the holiday. In 1886, the Bee Hive gave away an imported musical instrument and two years later offered chances on a number of prizes, including a roomful of furniture, a parlor stove, and a farm wagon. On one mid-December day in 1892, the Bazaar gave customers a doll for every dollar's worth of goods they purchased.<sup>21</sup>

Sioux Falls stores also began the practice of offering late shopping hours as Christmas neared. In 1890, the Palace Dry Goods Company remained open until ten o'clock on the night of 23 December and midnight on Christmas Eve. More typical was the practice of remaining open in the evenings the week before Christmas.<sup>22</sup> Another marketing technique that became a tradition was the Christmas sale, held either before or after the holiday. The Bee Hive in early January 1887 announced "smashed" prices and "unmerciful reductions" on all fall and winter goods. As early as 1893, the store was touting its "Great January Clearance Sale," a concept modern shoppers will easily recognize.<sup>23</sup> Pre-Christmas sales were also common in the difficult financial times of the late eighties and early nineties. To help stimulate the Christmas trade in 1890,

21. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 6 Dec. 1886, 15, 18, 20 Dec. 1888, 13, 18 Dec. 1890, 13 Dec. 1892.

22. *Ibid.*, 23 Dec. 1890, 17 Dec. 1892.

23. *Ibid.*, 4 Jan. 1887, 3 Jan. 1893.



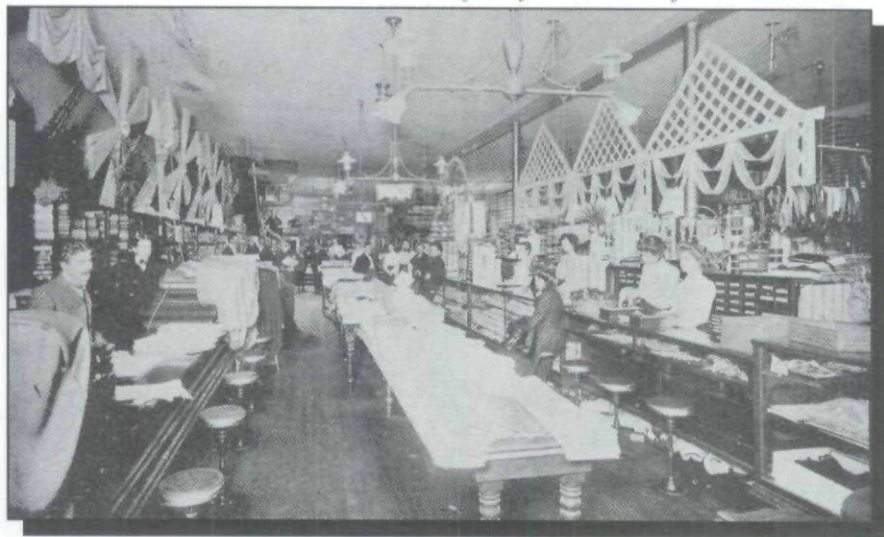
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*The Bee Hive, one of the largest dry goods stores in early Sioux Falls, dominates this turn-of-the-century view of Phillips Avenue.*

*Shoppers enjoyed a wide array of goods at the Fantle Brothers store, established in 1896 just a few doors down from the Bee Hive.*



the Palace Dry Goods Company cut prices by twenty-five percent because money was so scarce.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of early Christmas celebrations was the observation of Christmas Day itself, which was a social, activity-filled occasion. On Christmas Day in 1874, for example, a number of Sioux Falls residents gathered for "exercises of an interesting and instructive character, appropriate to the day . . . at the school-house, both afternoon and evening."<sup>25</sup> In 1887, the high school offered a similar program of music, orations, and essay readings. Naturally, church services and Sunday School programs were common, but people also ventured outdoors for recreational activities like sleighing. For several years, "turkey shoots" were held on Christmas Day, and in 1895 a football game was scheduled between a Sioux Falls club and American Indians from Flandreau. On that same day, the Sioux Falls Commercial Club hosted a whist tournament at its meeting rooms. Dinner parties were also part of the day's festivities, at least for the upper class, and dances were common. In 1878, the Eight-to-Twelve Club hosted a "hop" on Christmas night, and in 1890, the Germania Verein met for a dance, festivities, and a tree for the children. In the late seventies, some Sioux Falls residents opted for entertainment, spending Christmas evening at the Van Eps Opera House watching the Chambers Brothers theatrical troupe perform "Lady Andley's Secret."<sup>26</sup> Clearly, Christmas in the late nineteenth century was not just the sacred, family-oriented holiday many believe it to have been.

24. *Ibid.*, 13 Dec. 1890, 13, 27 Dec. 1892. For information about the economic conditions in South Dakota during this period, see Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 3d ed., rev. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), pp. 223, 233, and Gary D. Olson and Erik L. Olson, *Sioux Falls, South Dakota: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, Va.: Donning Co., 1985), pp. 30-31.

25. *Sioux Falls Independent*, 31 Dec. 1874.

26. *Sioux Falls Independent*, 24, 31 Dec. 1874, 23 Dec. 1875; *Dakota Pantagraph*, 18, 25 Dec. 1878; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 27 Dec. 1886, 22 Dec. 1887, 24, 27 Dec. 1890, 24 Dec. 1892, 23, 26 Dec. 1895.

Many Christmas customs established in the nineteenth century became traditions as Sioux Falls moved into the twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1945, the church bazaar became a regular feature from mid-November to mid-December. The First Lutheran Church bazaar in 1925 was an immense success, attracting an estimated five thousand people and grossing thirty-six hundred dollars. Dances, parties, and club gatherings also remained part of the season's festivities. The Knights of Columbus, Pan-Hellenic Society, Business and Professional Women, and Kiwanis, Elks, and Lions clubs were just some of the organizations that met in November or December to celebrate the Christmas holiday. A new tradition also appeared as national chains such as J. C. Penney began to host annual parties and dances for their personnel. In 1940, another chain, Kresge's, rewarded Sioux Falls workers by handing out Christmas bonuses.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, children continued to celebrate Christmas in the schools with trees in classrooms and programs that combined the religious and secular. In 1900, the Reverend W. H. Jordan of the First Methodist Episcopal Church spoke to high school students on the "deeper" meaning of Christmas. All the Sioux Falls public schools that year held programs of recitations, singing, and dialogues. During World War I, students from the fifth grade and above at Whittier School decided to forego Christmas trees in their classrooms, donating the money saved to soldiers from the east side of Sioux Falls who were stationed at Camp Cody, Texas. By the late thirties, Washington High School was holding an annual holiday dance, and students met at an assembly to sing carols. Both grade-school pupils and high school stu-

27. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 14, 18 Dec. 1920, 29 Nov. 1922, 10, 14 Dec. 1925, 20, 24 Dec. 1927, 18 Dec. 1935, 21 Dec. 1937.



dents held parties and exchanged gifts on the last day of classes before Christmas vacation.<sup>28</sup>

During the years before 1945, the home Christmas tree gradually eclipsed the Sunday School tree, which played only a minor role in church programs after World War I. By the early 1900s, at least five thousand Christmas trees were available for home use in Sioux Falls annually, with a price of around thirty cents apiece. Twenty years later, around fifty thousand trees were shipped in for the season. Store advertisements only occasionally mentioned tree ornaments, although in 1900 the Bee Hive sold glass balls and fancy horns for between nineteen and fifty cents per dozen and bells for a nickel each. Tree candles at the turn of the century sold for twelve cents for a box of thirty-six, but by 1912, many people were switching to the newer electric lights for safety reasons. The state fire marshal endorsed the change while warning people not to use cotton or paper ornaments that might be set ablaze by the flimsy wiring of some light sets. The *Argus-Leader* noted that there were no tree fires in 1921 and 1922, partly due to the switch from candles to lights. Some hard-pressed families probably used candles into the 1930s, however, to avoid the expense of the electric lamps, which generally sold for between forty and sixty cents for a set of eight.<sup>29</sup>

Two new Christmas customs made their debut in Sioux Falls in the 1920s-1930s era—municipal decorations and home-lighting contests. Store owners had begun the trend by placing Christmas trees along the street in front of their stores in the mid-twenties. In 1927, the city placed a twenty-foot tree at the intersection of Thirteenth Street and Phillips Avenue, adding evergreens, poinsettias, bells, and

28. Ibid., 23 Dec. 1900, 20 Dec. 1917, 20 Dec. 1933, 12, 15 Dec. 1937.

29. Ibid., 14, 22 Dec. 1900, 15, 22 Dec. 1903, 21, 24 Dec. 1912, 16 Nov., 13, 26 Dec. 1922, 24 Dec. 1925, 11, 21 Dec. 1930, 14, 20 Dec. 1933, 12, 23 Dec. 1935, 22 Dec. 1937, 22 Dec. 1940.

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*During the 1910s, Sioux Falls-area residents began to replace the dangerous candles on their Christmas trees with convenient new electric lights.*

colored lights on Phillips and Main avenues over the next several years.<sup>30</sup> The Great Depression cast some doubt over whether the city should expend funds for Christmas decorations, but the retailers argued it was best for business to create a more cheerful scene. Either the *Argus-Leader* or local merchants paid for a municipal tree, which was located at Ninth Street and Phillips Avenue. Generally, decorations were in place between mid-November and the first week of December. The municipal tree lights were switched on ceremoniously in early December, although during World War II, all lights remained off. Home-decoration contests had started by the 1930s, with the Associated Retailers, a local trade group, first sponsoring the event. Eventually, the Junior Chamber of Commerce took responsibility for dividing the city into districts and awarding prizes for the best-lighted and best-decorated homes.<sup>31</sup>

Along with the glitter came organized charitable work, making holiday giving a solid tradition in twentieth-century Sioux Falls. The Salvation Army, which had begun work in the city in the late 1800s, provided an annual dinner for the poor and a tree with presents for children. By 1910, the organization had placed donation boxes in stores, although its now-famous kettle appeared at times on street corners. During the Christmas season of 1903, the Volunteers of America, an auxiliary of evangelical churches, established a mission in the city. Throughout the first two decades of the century, however, the local chapter of the Elks Club provided holiday charity on a larger scale than did any other group. Occasionally, this lodge distributed Christmas dinners—four drays loaded with three hundred food baskets in 1903—but it concentrated more on spon-

30. Ibid., 11 Dec. 1925, 20 Dec. 1927, 17, 30 Nov. 1930. According to Restad, the adoption of the community Christmas tree signified that the holiday was becoming a civic festival. *Christmas in America*, p. 156.

31. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 1 Dec. 1930, 23 Nov., 3 Dec. 1933, 4, 9 Dec. 1935, 19 Nov., 7 Dec. 1937, 5 Dec. 1940, 13 Nov. 1943.



soring a Christmas tree loaded with gifts for needy children. Initiated in 1902, the project was providing presents for twelve hundred fifty children by 1908. In 1915 and 1920, the group prepared two thousand gifts for Santa to hand out. During World War I, the Elks discontinued their tree to concentrate on other relief activities.<sup>32</sup>

The *Argus-Leader* company joined the community efforts, forming the "Big Brother Christmas Club" in 1912. The newspaper office served as a collection point for donated toys and a clearing house for the names of needy children. In its first year, the club helped provide a brighter holiday for approximately one thousand young people. By the early 1920s, Sioux Falls donors employed the "Good Fellow Fund," a strategy for centralizing Christmas fund-raising utilized in other cities. The *Argus-Leader* again stepped forward to head this charitable work, collecting donations and distributing the money among the various groups providing Christmas dinners and gifts for the less fortunate.<sup>33</sup>

In 1921, the Kiwanis Kristmas Kids Klub joined the older organizations, and Sioux Falls citizens continued to drop their coins into Salvation Army kettles or Volunteers of America red chimneys. Together, charitable societies aided at least four to five thousand children each year. In 1925, for example, the Volunteers of America provided presents for one hundred fifty children and food and clothing for fifty families; the Kiwanis helped fifteen hundred children and three hundred families; the Salvation Army aided twelve hundred people; and the Elks hosted four thousand children at their tree on Christmas Day.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1930s, individual organizations continued to collect funds, but the Community Chest began to act as a

32. Ibid., 8, 15, 24 Dec. 1903, 8, 23, 25 Dec. 1905, 23 Dec. 1908, 12, 13, 21, 26 Dec. 1910, 22 Dec. 1915, 24, 27 Dec. 1920.

33. Ibid., 6, 9, 10, 13, 24, 26 Dec. 1912, 2 Dec. 1922.

34. Ibid., 20 Dec. 1922, 9, 21, 22, 26, 29 Dec. 1925, 14 Dec. 1927.



*The Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader promoted its "Big Brother Christmas Club," a charity drive for needy children, in a December 1912 issue of the newspaper.*

central office for determining which families in the city deserved help. The main purpose of the clearing house was to avoid duplicating services, a special concern during the Great Depression when the needy grew to unprecedented numbers. New groups joined the effort to provide Christmas cheer. The American Legion and the Knights of Columbus provided toys for the South Dakota Children's Home and the Presentation Children's Home, the city's two orphanages. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts joined other charitable groups in repairing donated toys

for distribution to poor children. In 1940, they presented 975 children with remade toys.<sup>35</sup>

While the citizens of Sioux Falls honored the true spirit of Christmas by helping others, the idea that "the business of Christmas is business" also gained strength in the first half of the century. Even though the Christmas shopping season did not open officially until the day after Thanksgiving, advertising began in mid-November or earlier. Until the 1930s, the Bee Hive was typically the first department store to advertise the arrival of Christmas toys. In 1900, it announced on 10 November that half of its toy stock was in the store. The city's major twentieth-century department stores, such as Shriver-Johnson and Fantle Brothers, generally opened their toylands the day after Thanksgiving, although they sometimes did so earlier. The trend toward pre-Thanksgiving openings gained momentum in the 1930s after the arrival of national chain stores like J. C. Penney, Montgomery Ward, and J. J. Newberry. In 1940, Penney's had opened its toyland by 7 November. The local jewelry stores were among the first to follow the lead of the chains, with Horwitz Jewelry beginning its 1940 Christmas lay-away campaign by 30 October.<sup>36</sup>

Hand in hand with the longer shopping season came a continuation of the late-1800s custom of decorating store windows and hosting visits by Santa Claus. A full-page advertisement for Fantle's in 1925 urged shoppers to come downtown to see the electric train and the cartoon characters Spark Plug and Barney Google displayed in their storefront. Inside, one found the aisles bedecked with

35. *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1927, 29 Nov. 1930, 29 Nov., 3, 9 Dec. 1933, 13 Dec. 1935, 18 Nov., 8 Dec. 1937.

36. *Ibid.*, 10 Nov., 7 Dec. 1900, 30 Nov. 1908, 24 Nov. 1920, 10, 30 Nov. 1922, 26 Nov. 1925, 18 Nov. 1927, 17 Nov. 1935, 19 Nov. 1937, 30 Oct., 7, 21 Nov. 1940, 18 Nov. 1943. The earlier start of the holiday shopping campaign may have been connected to economic hard times. South Dakota's agricultural economy suffered tremendously in the 1920s and 1930s, with seventy percent of all state banks collapsing by 1934. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 277-78, 283-84; Olson, *Sioux Falls*, p. 114.



holly, poinsettias, and other Christmas baubles. If the promise of beautiful decorations failed to attract shoppers, a chance to visit with Santa Claus certainly did. From brief appearances like a two-hour afternoon residence at Fattle's at the beginning of the century, Santa's hours and visibility expanded over the years. One hardware store had him spend his afternoons in its front window, and eventually nearly every store selling toys had a resident Santa located in its toyland. By 1940, Sioux Falls merchants were working together to sponsor a parade featuring Santa Claus to launch the traditional Christmas shopping season.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, store owners used extended hours and free gifts to draw shoppers, just as they had in the late 1800s. In the years before 1945, most stores remained open late for three to four days before Christmas. Occasionally, a merchant announced evening hours for mid-December, but by the 1920s most businesses abided by the holiday schedule set by the Associated Retailers. Free gifts handed out by Santa drew shoppers to the Bee Hive in the 1920s, and Shriver-Johnson sponsored different days for boys and girls to visit the store and receive presents. In 1927, Shriver's expanded on this concept, chartering all city streetcars and buses to transport shoppers to the store on the day after Thanksgiving, when each child in attendance would receive a gift.<sup>38</sup>

Stores catering to an adult clientele offered other types of incentives. Diamond Watch and Jewelry in the twenties gave away a clock with every twenty-five-dollar purchase, while another store gave chances on a five-hundred-dollar cash giveaway. However, no one could top the Frank Hyde Jewelry Company, which began an annual car give-

37. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 19 Dec. 1900, 22 Dec. 1903, 10 Dec. 1915, 6 Dec. 1917, 26 Nov. 1920, 26 Nov., 1, 4, 10 Dec. 1925, 22 Nov. 1935.

38. *Ibid.*, 18 Dec. 1900, 14 Dec. 1903, 18 Dec. 1905, 4 Dec. 1908, 13, 18 Dec. 1915, 17 Dec. 1920, 23 Nov., 4, 18 Dec. 1925, 22 Nov. 1927.

# Fantle Bros. Danzon Co.

EVERYBODY'S STORE

Sioux Falls Greatest Attraction

## Santa Himself Is Here

In this, his Sioux Falls home, down in Candy-Pole Village, Santa's here every afternoon to greet all his little friends. Every boy and girl should come down to see him, and have Santa write down your name and wishes in his great big book.

DOWNSTAIRS

*During the 1920 holiday season, Santa Claus spent afternoons greeting children at his "Candy-Pole Village" in the Fantle's basement.*

away in 1925. Customers received a ticket for every dollar in merchandise purchased, and a drawing was held later to determine the winner of the new automobile—a Nash in 1927, a Marmon in 1930, and a Plymouth in 1933. The tactic was so successful that other jewelers banded together to offer a similar contest. When this scheme fizzled, they went to court to stop the Hyde giveaway, claiming it had injured their business.<sup>39</sup>

When everyone finally opened their presents on Christmas Day in the years immediately following 1900, they did see some changes. Added to the toy steam engines, wheeled animals, and iron toys of the last century were the newly popular teddy bears. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 produced a tremendous demand for soldier figures, battleships, and other war toys. During World War I, war games, toy soldiers, and cannons again became popular gifts for boys. By the 1920s, horse-drawn toy vehicles such as wagons and fire engines were being replaced by airships and motorized vehicles, although the state fire marshal did warn parents not to buy toys that required gasoline, kerosene, or alcohol. While ads and store displays promoted new mechanical toys, especially the A. G. Gilbert Erector Sets, for boys, they continued to stress traditional toys for girls—dolls, doll carriages, baking sets, ironing boards, and so on.<sup>40</sup> In 1937, a female reporter for the *Argus-Leader* visited several toy departments and was so frustrated by the gender division that she concluded, "Little girls are either domestic or left out in a snowstorm."<sup>41</sup> Cowboys and G-men prevailed in the neutral 1930s, but with the start of World War II, war toys again became popular. About one-quarter of the toys featured in a 1943 Newberry's ad were war-related.<sup>42</sup>

39. Ibid., 22 Nov. 1927, 16 Nov. 1930, 26 Nov. 1933, 4 Dec. 1940.

40. Ibid., 11 Dec. 1900, 4, 10 Dec. 1903, 18 Dec. 1905, 21 Dec. 1908, 3, 6 Dec. 1917, 18 Nov., 13 Dec. 1922, 22 Dec. 1925, 20 Dec. 1927, 23 Nov. 1933.

41. Ibid., 5 Dec. 1937.

42. Ibid., 28 Nov. 1937, 2 Dec. 1943.



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New trends and inventions also produced new gifts for adults. Those with horseless carriages needed automobile coats. "Talking machines," or phonographs, also became popular for families in the opening years of the century. By 1908, one could buy a new Edison record that played for four minutes, twice the length of other records. The



*You've Owed  
Her This for  
Years!*

A GIFT FOR  
THE FAMILY  
KEEPS ON  
GIVING!

**ELECTROLUX**  
The GAS Refrigerator

10 year unconditional guarantee.  
No moving parts—this silent refrigerator lasts longer!

Small Down Payment  
Convenient Terms

The Winner of Our Saturday  
Turkey Contest is Leonard  
Rud, 919 N. DuSable Ave

**SIOUX FALLS GAS**

*Advertisements like this one for a 1940-model gas refrigerator targeted men, who were urged to give their wives the latest in labor-saving appliances.*

"Kodak" also made its appearance, with "Brownie" models ranging from one dollar on up. In the 1920s, radios became one of the most-advertised gifts for adults. Electrical, labor-saving appliances also gained a prominent place in the ads just before 1945. Their message was often aimed at men, who were told that a Frigidaire, a Maytag, or an electric vacuum cleaner would make their wives happy.<sup>43</sup> One 1940 example assured males, "She'll Be Tickled Pink With A Sears Deluxe Cleaner," which came complete with a set of sixteen attachments.<sup>44</sup>

Once their presents had been opened, Sioux Falls citizens of the 1900-1945 era found a multitude of activities to entertain them on Christmas Day. After-church sleigh rides soon were replaced by automobile rides. Stage productions, such as *The Royal Chef*, a musical offered at the New Theater in 1905, were gradually replaced by the movies. In 1927, for example, one could visit the Egyptian Theater to see *Night Life*, or the Royal to see Ken Maynard in *The Devil's Saddle*. Ten years later, the choice included *True Confession*, *Ebb Tide*, and *I'll Take Romance*—real holiday fare. Occasionally, a basketball game or target shoot took place on Christmas Day. In 1922, the weather was so mild that fifteen to twenty golfers played at the country club. Finally, at least for the first two decades of the century, some business was conducted on Christmas Day. Barber shops, pool halls, and saloons were often open. As in earlier eras, there were other ways to celebrate Christmas, it seems, than spending the day at church or with one's family.<sup>45</sup>

After World War II, Sioux Falls residents returned to celebrating Christmas much as they had in previous decades.

43. Ibid., 1 Dec. 1905, 18, 21 Dec. 1908, 10 Dec. 1912, 1 Dec. 1915, 9 Dec. 1922, 16 Dec. 1927, 23 Nov., 10 Dec. 1933.

44. Ibid., 17 Dec. 1940.

45. Ibid., 24, 26 Dec. 1900, 21, 24 Dec. 1903, 21, 23 Dec. 1905, 24 Dec. 1908, 26 Dec. 1910, 27 Dec. 1920, 26 Dec. 1922, 24 Dec. 1925, 24, 27 Dec. 1927, 24 Dec. 1937.



*Recreation, entertainment, and socializing outside the family circle remained important Christmas Day activities into the twentieth century.*

The wartime shortage of tree ornaments and lights continued for a short period, but by 1948 such luxuries were readily available again. One store, the Farmer's Market, reported as early as the fall of 1945 that it would offer a wide array of merchandise for holiday shoppers, some-



thing it had been unable to do during the war years.<sup>46</sup> An advertisement for Horwitz Jewelers in early November 1945 also urged people to "Prepare Now for the Most Wonderful Christmas Since Pearl Harbor."<sup>47</sup> As usual, churches announced their bazaars, and various groups planned their annual Christmas parties, dinners, and dances.<sup>48</sup>

Advertising for the Christmas shopping season started in late October and early November in the postwar years, although everyone still publicly proclaimed the Friday following Thanksgiving as the first "official" shopping day. In 1945, Sears opened its toyland on 10 November, the same day Santa Claus arrived at the J. C. Penney store. In 1955, Horwitz Jewelers began advertising gifts in late October, and Newberry's opened its toyland on Halloween. Thirty years later, the story remained much the same. Most merchants decorated their establishments gradually throughout November to build a sense of excitement by the Thanksgiving holiday. During the early 1980s, however, the new Target store began selling trees and decorations in early October. By the middle of the decade, the Empire Mall was decorating on 4 November in an attempt to launch Christmas buying on Veterans Day. By the late eighties, some merchants decorated in September, maintaining that customers wanted Christmas items early.<sup>49</sup>

In the era before suburban malls, the emphasis on street decorations—bells, evergreen roping, foil scrolls, and elf faces—remained strong. In 1945, Christmas lights extinguished by World War II returned to Main and Phillips avenues. For at least two decades after the war, however, the store window decorations probably drew just as much attention. Christmas window-dressing became a competitive

46. *Ibid.*, 1, 6 Nov., 5 Dec. 1945, 6 Dec. 1948.

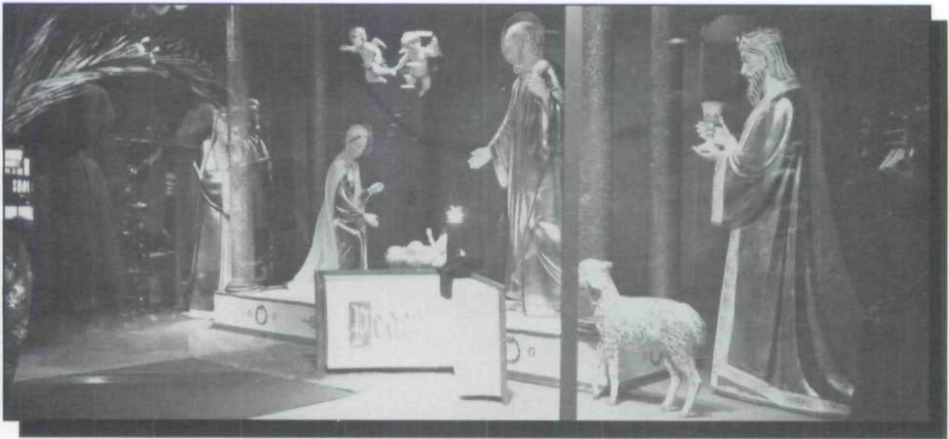
47. *Ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1945.

48. *Ibid.*, 1, 5, 11 Dec. 1945, 28 Nov., 7 Dec. 1948, 22 Dec. 1950, 16 Dec. 1952.

49. *Ibid.*, 9, 25 Nov. 1945, 27, 30 Oct. 1955, 8 Nov. 1982, 10 Nov. 1985, 30 Sept. 1988.

event during the 1950s as store owners vied for prize money. In 1952, forty-five stores placed Christmas scenes, most of them animated, in their windows. Generally, there was a formal unveiling of the windows on the Friday after Thanksgiving.<sup>50</sup>

The Christmas parade returned to postwar Sioux Falls in 1948 as a part of a holiday carnival dubbed the "Mistletoe Rodeo." In that year, there were to be seventy floats



*Store windows adorned with Christmas scenes, many of them animated, drew shoppers to downtown Sioux Falls in the 1950s and 1960s. This scene appeared in the Shriver's window in 1959.*

and three bands participating, but snow and cold temperatures cut the number of floats by half and eliminated the bands entirely. Following the parade, two thousand people attended a ball at the Coliseum, where "Miss Mistletoe" was named. The winner of this beauty contest received a \$250 wardrobe and a free trip to the Aberdeen Snow Carnival. During the early fifties, parade organizers adopted the theme "Put Christ Back into Christmas," prob-

50. Ibid., 16 Nov. 1945, 16 Nov. 1948, 16, 30 Nov. 1952, 22 Nov. 1955, 26, 30 Nov. 1958, 23, 28 Nov. 1960, 9 Dec. 1962, 24, 25 Nov., 12 Dec. 1965, 11, 27 Nov. 1973, 23 Dec. 1980, 20 Nov. 1985, 22 Nov. 1994.

ably due to the strong anti-Communist feelings in the country. Downtown Sioux Falls was the site in 1962 of a Macy's-style parade of giant balloons featuring characters from fairy tales and Christmas stories. After an absence of some years, the parade was revived briefly in the 1980s to boost retail shopping. Following another period of inactivity, the "Parade of Lights," held after dark and featuring lighted floats, made its initial appearance in 1992.<sup>51</sup>

Santa Claus also retained his role in the retail world. In addition to his regular duties of listening to wish lists and handing out candy, Santa distributed Mickey Mouse rings at Newberry's (1958), ate breakfast with children at Shriver's (1967), and over the years had his photograph taken at nearly every business establishment from downtown to the Empire Mall. The Chamber of Commerce or other retail association usually sponsored his "arrival" in town. In 1958, a helicopter deposited him in the downtown business district. In 1960, he arrived in a jet (presumably towed) at the intersection of Ninth and Phillips. In 1970, a bus took him to the Park Ridge Shopping Center when high winds prevented his scheduled parachute jump. Malls began replacing the downtown shopping area in the seventies and eighties, and each one had its own Santa. At various times, Santa held "Center Court" at the Western Mall, resided in his "Toy House" at the Empire, and supervised his own "village" at the Downtown Mall.<sup>52</sup>

In their effort to draw customers, merchants offered special promotions and ever-longer shopping hours during the Christmas season. Until the mid-fifties, retailers usually remained open late for just three or four days before Christmas. In the early 1960s, however, they began staying open until nine o'clock in the evening during the first week of December. With the arrival of discount stores

51. *Ibid.*, 16, 18, 23 Nov. 1948, 18 Nov. 1950, 9 Nov. 1952, 18 Nov. 1962, 24 Nov. 1985, 25 Nov. 1994.

52. *Ibid.*, 8, 9 Dec. 1958, 1, 7 Dec. 1960, 22 Nov. 1962, 10 Dec. 1965, 3, 4 Dec. 1967, 19, 26 Nov., 5 Dec. 1970, 21, 22 Nov. 1973, 16, 27 Nov. 1975, 27, 29 Nov. 1980, 25 Nov. 1985.



# Santa Claus arrives today



## Kids!

Come meet Santa Claus  
today at 10 a.m. at  
the south entrance to  
New Town.

Due to the heavy holiday  
shopping traffic, Santa and  
his two elves will arrive in  
the New Town parking lot by  
parachute with Christmas  
goodies for the kids.



## NEW TOWN

*Santa Claus modernized in the 1970s and 1980s, adopting new modes of transportation and adding the city's outlying shopping malls to his list of stops.*

such as K-Mart in the mid-sixties came longer hours throughout the year and the introduction of regular Sunday shopping. As in years past, giveaways and free entertainment were employed to stimulate business. In the 1950s, Farmer's Market gave Christmas trees to customers who purchased twenty dollars worth of goods, while Shriver's held two drawings nightly throughout December for free luggage, vacuum cleaners, and other appliances. In 1962, Newberry's gave away four turkeys, and Sears held a Christmas-eve drawing for a mink stole. Various merchants also held drawings for trips—Shriver's sent the lucky winner to Monte Carlo in 1973, and the Empire Mall gave a Hawaiian vacation in 1985. Until at least the mid-1960s, the Frank Hyde Jewelry Company, the "Diamond King of South Dakota," still gave away an automobile at Christmas. Free movies for children, which allowed their parents time to shop unencumbered, were common downtown after the war. The Western Mall adopted the idea in the 1970s.<sup>53</sup>

While the material aspect of Christmas played a major role in the holiday observance, Sioux Falls citizens were consistently able to look past the tinsel and gimmicks to the core of Christmas—the spirit of giving and caring. Just as they had in the years before World War II, various groups stepped forward to aid the poor. The Salvation Army put out its kettles and erected a "Tree of Lights," turning on one Christmas bulb for every twenty-five or fifty dollars received. By 1982, the kettles were bringing in fifty thousand dollars during the holiday season to provide food certificates for needy families. The Volunteers of America used their red chimneys to do likewise. Together, these organizations supplied several hundred families with Christmas dinner and toys during the seventies and eight-

53. *Ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1945, 16 Dec. 1948, 15 Nov. 1950, 17 Nov., 4 Dec. 1955, 25, 27 Nov. 1958, 13 Nov., 15 Dec. 1960, 19, 21 Nov., 11 Dec. 1962, 3 Nov. 1965, 3 Dec. 1967, 16 Nov. 1970, 11 Nov., 5, 6 Dec. 1973, 28 Nov. 1985.

ies. The American Legion continued its tradition, begun in the 1920s, of hosting an annual party for residents of the South Dakota Children's Home and the Presentation Home. The group added the McCrossan Boys Ranch to its Christmas list after the ranch's founding in the mid-fifties. The Jaycees enlisted the help of Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and penitentiary inmates to collect and repair used toys for between two and three hundred children, a project begun in 1936. By the early 1980s, the state penitentiary's Granite City Jaycees had taken charge of this program and later aided groups such as the Crippled Children's Hospital and School. The Elks, Lions, Shriners, Knights of Columbus, Goodwill, Inc., and even college fraternities all pitched in to help make Christmas a merrier time for the poor and lonely of Sioux Falls. Starting in 1950, the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity from the University of South Dakota began taking children from the South Dakota Children's Home to Vermillion for an annual Christmas party complete with turkey dinner, presents, movies, and a visit from Santa Claus.<sup>54</sup>

Gift-giving among family and friends entered a whole new age after 1945. Toys available for children, especially boys, multiplied rapidly. Western outfits were tremendously popular in the fifties, as were war toys during the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. Eventually, space toys, monster toys, and electronic games dominated store shelves. Toys remained fairly gender specific and sexist, with a focus on creative and constructive playthings for boys and dolls and related "domestic" items for girls.<sup>55</sup> One 1955 *Argus-Leader* article detailed the multitude of accessories for dressing, feeding, and bathing that came with the season's new dolls. Any little girl receiving such a gift ensemble would

54. Ibid., 30 Nov., 17 Dec. 1945, 26 Nov., 5 Dec. 1948, 15 Dec. 1950, 24 Dec. 1952, 7 Dec. 1955, 30 Nov., 13, 17, 21 Dec. 1958, 6, 18 Dec. 1960, 4, 19, 21 Dec. 1962, 17, 19 Dec. 1967, 20 Dec. 1970, 23 Dec. 1973, 10, 21 Dec. 1975, 19 Dec. 1982, 14, 19 Dec. 1985, 24 Dec. 1994.

55. Ibid., 5 Dec. 1948, 7 Dec. 1952, 18 Nov. 1962, 12 Dec. 1965, 21 Dec. 1980.



KRESGE'S



Come On, SANTA! Give Them The  
**Toys They Want**  
Priced Low at  
**KRESGE'S WONDERLAND**



Others  
at  
50c to  
1.98

\$5  
to  
\$1



*Santa's  
HERE, Kiddies*

Come in Friday or Satur-  
day! See Santa and get  
your **FREE FUN BOOK**. 16  
pages of cut outs, paper  
dolls, color and puzzle  
pages and beautiful toys.

98<sup>c</sup>

I'm ready for out-of-doors in  
my pastel flannel coat and  
bonnet. I shut my eyes  
(real lashes!) and cry.  
My arms and legs are  
jointed!

Don't forget the  
Big Toyland Pa-  
rade and Circus  
— Sioux Falls.  
Tues., Dec. 3rd.







**AMERICAN LOGS**  
For young builders of  
fence, bridges, pioneer  
cabins! Each piece dis-  
tributed in look-and-build!  
All mounted in fit tightly.  
Big set given set.  
Other Log Sets 25c and 39c.

98<sup>c</sup>

Use our lay-away plan—  
small deposit will hold any  
item until December 20th.



**CHILDREN'S DISH SET**

98<sup>c</sup>

Boys and girls will spend hours with this  
**DIAL TYPEWRITER**—because it really  
writes! Prints letters, scrapbook titles, any-  
thing! Directions and extra ink included.

25<sup>c</sup>

These **METAL DISHES** will last a  
long time because they can't break.  
See their pretty design. She'll have  
fun exercising playing house and  
having tea parties.

5<sup>c</sup> TO **KRESGE'S** 5<sup>c</sup> TO

209 So. Phillips Ave.

Although toys began to modernize in the 1940s, they remained fairly sexist. Little girls, especially, were encouraged to conform to the traditional roles of wife and mother.

"emerge as a model of housewifely skills," the writer proclaimed.<sup>56</sup> In 1970, one store advertised a doll buggy for "Proud 'Little Mothers.'"<sup>57</sup>

Christmas observances exhibit both change and continuity in the years since World War II. Churches, perhaps, represent the most constant link with Christmases past. Candlelight services, Christmas Day services, cantatas, and children's programs remain common today. The way in which the public schools recognize the holiday has changed significantly, however. Until the early 1960s, school Christmas programs had a heavy religious emphasis, with hymn and carol singing and Christian-oriented plays. In 1962, Longfellow Elementary School students built a nativity scene, and the Washington High School chorus featured one in its annual Christmas concert. Following a complaint in the late seventies that the schools' Christmas programs were basically "religious exercises," the school board appointed a citizens' committee to recommend changes. Under the resulting shift away from a Christian emphasis in celebrating the holiday, Christmas programs became "winter" programs, and the schools worked to include the various cultures represented in the student body. The idea was to observe the Christmas (or Hanukkah) holiday in terms of its cultural and religious heritage. School programs today thus feature music and stories from Christian, Jewish, and African-American cultures. In addition, during the 1970s some educators encouraged their students to think of the holiday as an occasion for volunteering to help the community's less fortunate by, for example, collecting food for organizations like the Food Pantry.<sup>58</sup>

56. *Ibid.*, 17 Nov. 1955.

57. *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1970.

58. *Ibid.*, 12, 17 Dec. 1948, 13 Dec. 1950, 11, 15 Dec. 1952, 21 Dec. 1958, 22 Dec. 1960, 15, 23 Dec. 1962, 7 Dec. 1965, 14, 15, 20 Dec. 1975, 11, 16 Dec. 1982, 25 Dec. 1990; Sioux Falls, S.Dak., Sioux Falls School District, "Policies and Regulations" (1978), and U.S., Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit, District of South Dakota, *Florey v. Sioux Falls School District* 49-5, No. 79-1277, both from Sioux Falls Board of Education, Sioux Falls, S.Dak.

The deemphasis on Christmas in the schools was paralleled by a similar movement on the part of city government, which ceased displaying a crèche on public land in the 1970s. Some Sioux Falls residents found the trend disturbing. In the late seventies and early eighties, Sioux Falls firefighters, acting as private citizens, rented land from the city and erected their own nativity scene. Members of the American Civil Liberties Union argued that the display was improper and in 1981 leased city land adjacent to the firefighters' display to post a quotation from James Madison defending the separation of church and state.<sup>59</sup>

The nativity-scene conflict served as a focal point for those who believed that the celebration of Christmas had indeed lost its religious significance. In recent years, vocal critics have continued to denounce the "commercialization" of Christmas, as did a writer to the *Argus-Leader* in 1988 who proclaimed that Jesus did not come "to bolster the nation's economy once each year."<sup>60</sup> While changes have occurred in public observances of the holiday, the success of its "business side" is simply the continuation of a trend begun more than a century ago. The holiday's noncommercial aspects—the beauty of the Christmas tree and carols, the wonder of the church service, and the spirit of doing good for others—have remained popular as well. Time after time over the past one hundred years, the "angels" of Sioux Falls have reached out to help their fellow citizens. The editor of the *Argus-Leader* put it well in 1990, when he declared that in Sioux Falls the "Christmas spirit, that special feeling of caring and giving, remains in abundant supply."<sup>61</sup>

59. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 25 Dec. 1979, 1 Dec. 1981, 30 Nov. 1982.

60. *Ibid.*, 25.

61. *Ibid.*, 25 Dec. 1990



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