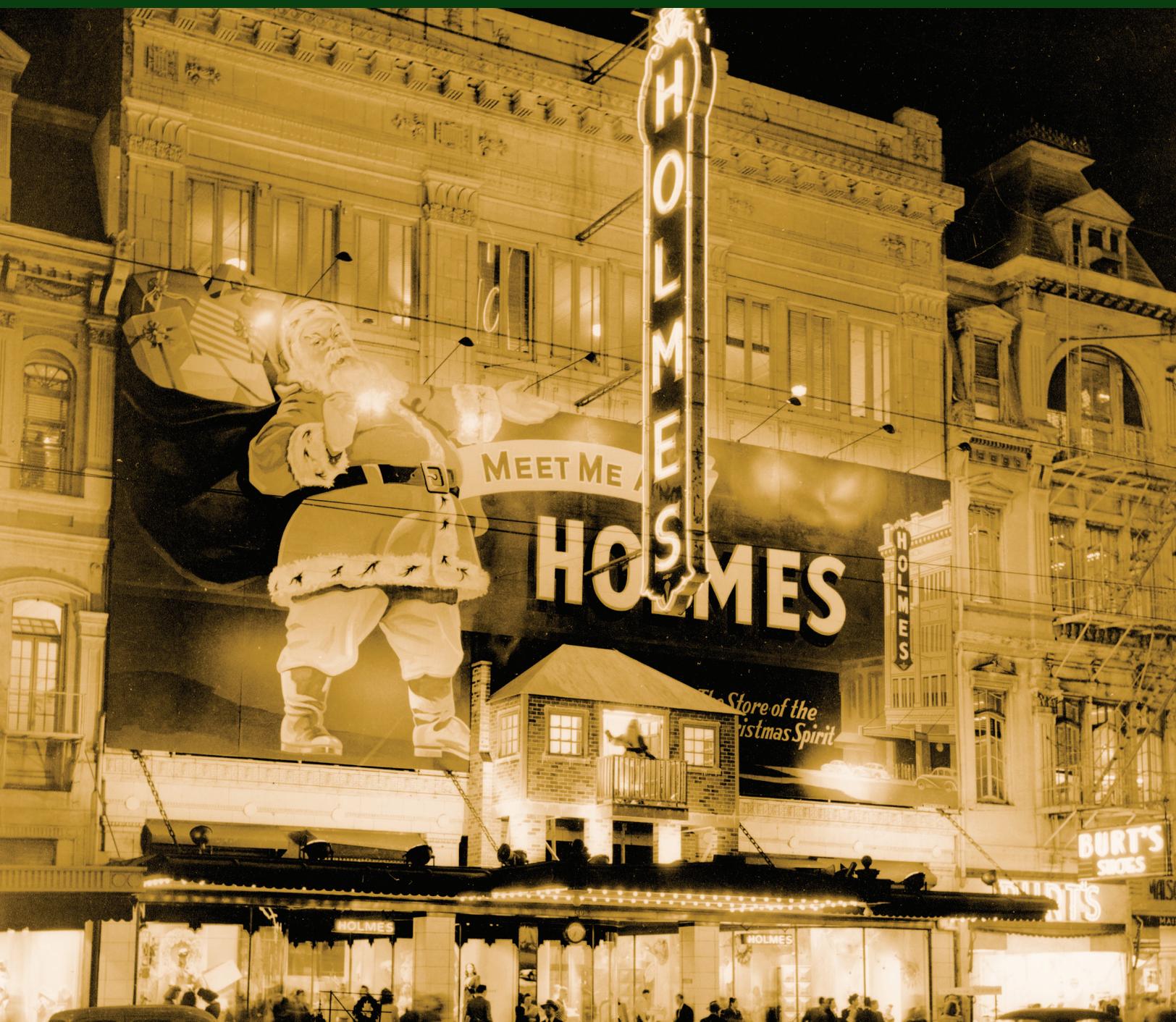


Christmas IN NEW ORLEANS

PEGGY SCOTT LABORDE AND JOHN MAGILL



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AND JOHN MAGILL

Magnolia leaf wreaths and tiny white lights elegantly adorn homes along St. Charles Avenue while greenery drapes from one lamppost to the next on Canal Street. A flurry of last-minute shoppers fills the French Market, and a merry Mr. Bingle, with his wings of holly, beams from the store window of Maison Blanche. These are the collective memories of Christmas in New Orleans.

From the festivities of yesteryear, revolving around religion and faith, to today's events, such as City Park's Celebration in the Oaks, New Orleanians observe Christmas with inimitable style. Late-night feasts, or *réveillons*, and rare occurrences of a winter-white Christmas are just a couple of nostalgic moments readers may stumble upon while perusing the pictures and warm recollections of notable locals, including Irma Thomas, Anne Rice, and Deacon John Moore.

In a celebration that has become as unique as the city itself, the images of a Christmas in New Orleans are classic and unforgettable. Descriptions of merriment, dating from the 1800s to post-Katrina, delicious recipes from Chef John Besh, bonfires along the levees, and the seasonal melodies of a city world renowned for its music are presented in this brilliant volume.

Christmas
IN NEW ORLEANS



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PEGGY SCOTT LABORDE AND JOHN MAGILL



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Frontispiece: Kermit Ruffins, playing his trumpet in front of Jackson Square, welcomes in the 2008 snowfall. (Courtesy the Clarion Herald)



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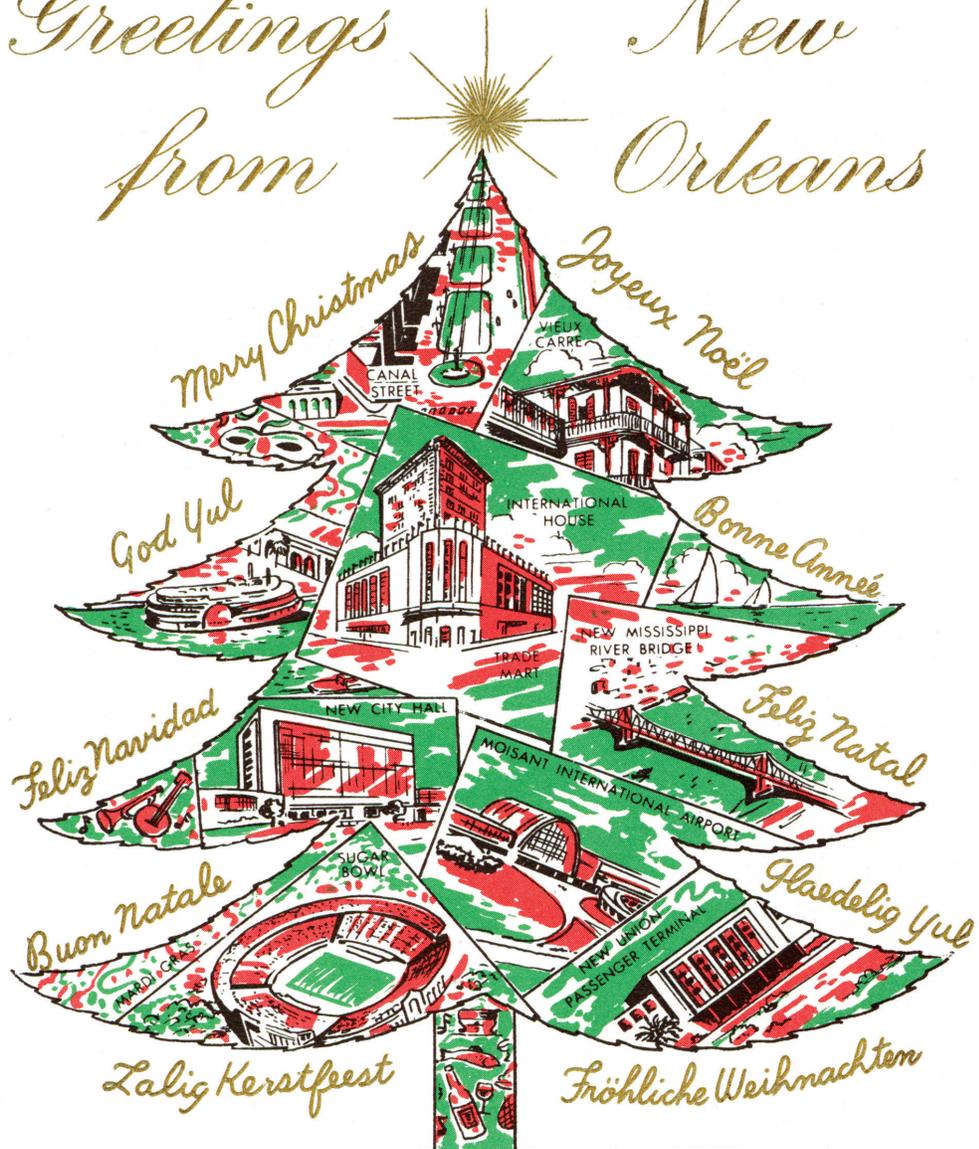
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Greetings from New Orleans



The International City

Mayor deLesseps "Chep" Morrison celebrated the City of New Orleans' recent accomplishments, as well as its international ambitions, on his official Christmas card in 1960. (Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)

Acknowledgments



The foundation for this book was laid by two programs produced for New Orleans Public Broadcasting Service affiliate WYES-TV: “Creole Christmas” and “Christmas in New Orleans.” Thanks to WYES’s Beth Arroyo Utterback and Randall Feldman for their continued interest and support of the production of programs that focus on the history and heritage of our city.

Some of the interviews in the book are from those programs. Appreciation goes to Annette Campo, Ashli Richard, and Kelsi Schreiber for transcriptions. Much gratitude to Dominic Massa for his transcription assistance and for his ongoing encouragement. Thanks also go to Ann Masson, whose love of New Orleans’ past is a continuing inspiration. Doris Ann Gorman, Sally Kittredge Reeves, Mary Lou Eichhorn, and Betty Bagert have always been available for their very appreciated input. Patricia Brady and John Kemp have always been generous with essential advice.

Special thanks to Priscilla Lawrence, who was responsible for my initial collaboration with John Magill in *Canal Street: New Orleans’ Great Wide Way*, also published by Pelican, in 2006. John’s extensive knowledge, enthusiasm, and good humor make for a delightful work experience. Also thanks to the Collection for sharing many of the photos that are in this book

Larry Roussarie’s assistance and good humor in technical matters pertaining to visual images were most valuable. Friend and photographer George Long helped spread the word in the New Orleans photography community that we were looking for present-day Christmas images.

Pelican Publishing Company’s continuing interest in publishing books of a local and regional historical nature is encouraging to those of us eager to contribute and to enjoy reading a body of work in print on our city’s rich heritage. Many thanks to Dr. Milburn Calhoun, Kathleen Calhoun Nettleton, Nina Kooij, Scott Campbell, and their fine staff, with whom it remains a continued pleasure to work.

Another treasure trove for New Orleans history research is the New Orleans Public Library’s Louisiana Division/City Archives. Irene Wainwright and Wayne Everard were so very supportive. John and I want to thank Libby Bonner for sharing the nineteenth-century

journal of Victoria Raymond. These childhood memories added much to our early history section.

Photographers Joe Bergeron, Jan Brantley, Syndey Byrd, Alex Demyan, Brad Edelman, Cheryl Gerber, Del Hall, Coleen Perilloux Landry, Frank Methe, Frank Methe III, Kerri McCaffety, and David Rae Morris have contributed to our book, making it all the more attractive.

And on a more personal note, growing up in a warm and loving family whose parents fostered an interest in New Orleans history has been invaluable in every historical project I've tackled. Thanks to my father and my mother, Warren and Gloria Walther Scott, along with brother Kurt and sister Nancy for many fine Christmas memories. I want to also express gratitude to Uncle Irving and to Aunt June Scott for loving the city so much and instilling in me an appreciation of the city's history.

If ever there were two fans of Christmas, it was Ellis Laborde, my dear father-in-law and for many years manager of City Park, and my friend Martha Hart, a longtime volunteer at WYES. Memories of both, especially during the holidays, make that time all the more special.

Finally, yet foremost, thanks to my husband, Errol Laborde, whose own appreciation of the city's culture, rituals, and celebrations is most inspiring. His wisdom and support make any project I work on all the more possible.

—PEGGY SCOTT LABORDE

Introduction



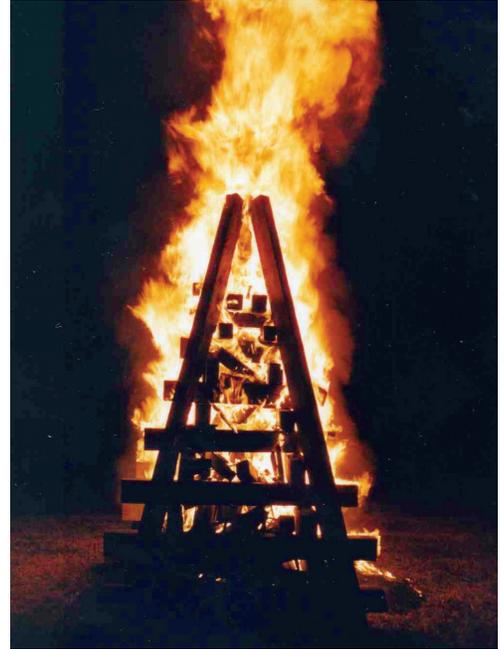
There are two faces of Christmas, the spiritual feast day of the Nativity of Jesus and the winter celebration, embraced by many cultures. New Orleans, a city with a spiritual legacy but one that also likes to party, embraces the traditional holiday celebration while adding its own embellishments.

Memories of shopping with the family on Canal Street; visiting the decorated homes around town such as the lavish Centanni home on Canal Street or, later, the Copeland home in Metairie; going to see the

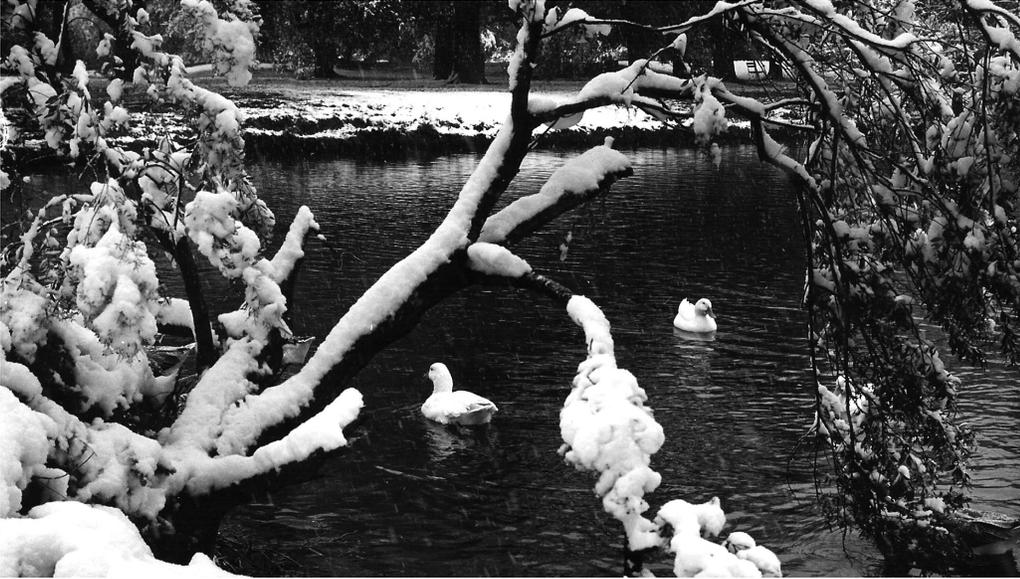


Mayor Victor H. Schiro acknowledged the potential that NASA's Michoud plant represented for the city on his 1961 Christmas card. (Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)

Today, most of the Christmastime bonfires upriver from New Orleans are designed in a teepee shape. Laura Plantation builds such a fire each year. (Photo courtesy of Laura Plantation Company)



From 1946 through 1966, visiting the Centanni family home on Canal Street was a highlight of the Christmas season. (Courtesy of the family of Myra Centanni Mehrstens)



Ducks in a City Park lagoon didn't seem to mind the rare snowfall of almost four inches that took place on New Year's Eve, 1963. (Photo by Frank H. Methe III, courtesy of the Clarion Herald)

bonfires in St. James and St. John Parishes, perched on the Mississippi River levees, the flames brilliant against the black winter sky—all part of Christmas in the New Orleans area. Since Christmas is also very much a musical celebration, caroling in Jackson Square on a December Sunday evening is another of those treasured local traditions.

It can't be a surprise that a city known for its culinary heritage also has a few traditional dishes for the Christmas table. We'll look back at how New Orleanians feasted at this time of the year, even in the most modest and trying of the early days.

For those who have grown up in New Orleans, certainly there is a collective Christmas memory that more often than not contrasts with popular notions of cold weather during the holidays. In a climate that allows for the doors of homes to be thrown wide open, allowing views of the Christmas tree to passersby, a common sight is a neighbor wearing tropical garb in the dead of winter. A white Christmas is the stuff of songs and childhood wishes. Of course, there are those rare days of actual snow, and in this book we'll recall some of them.

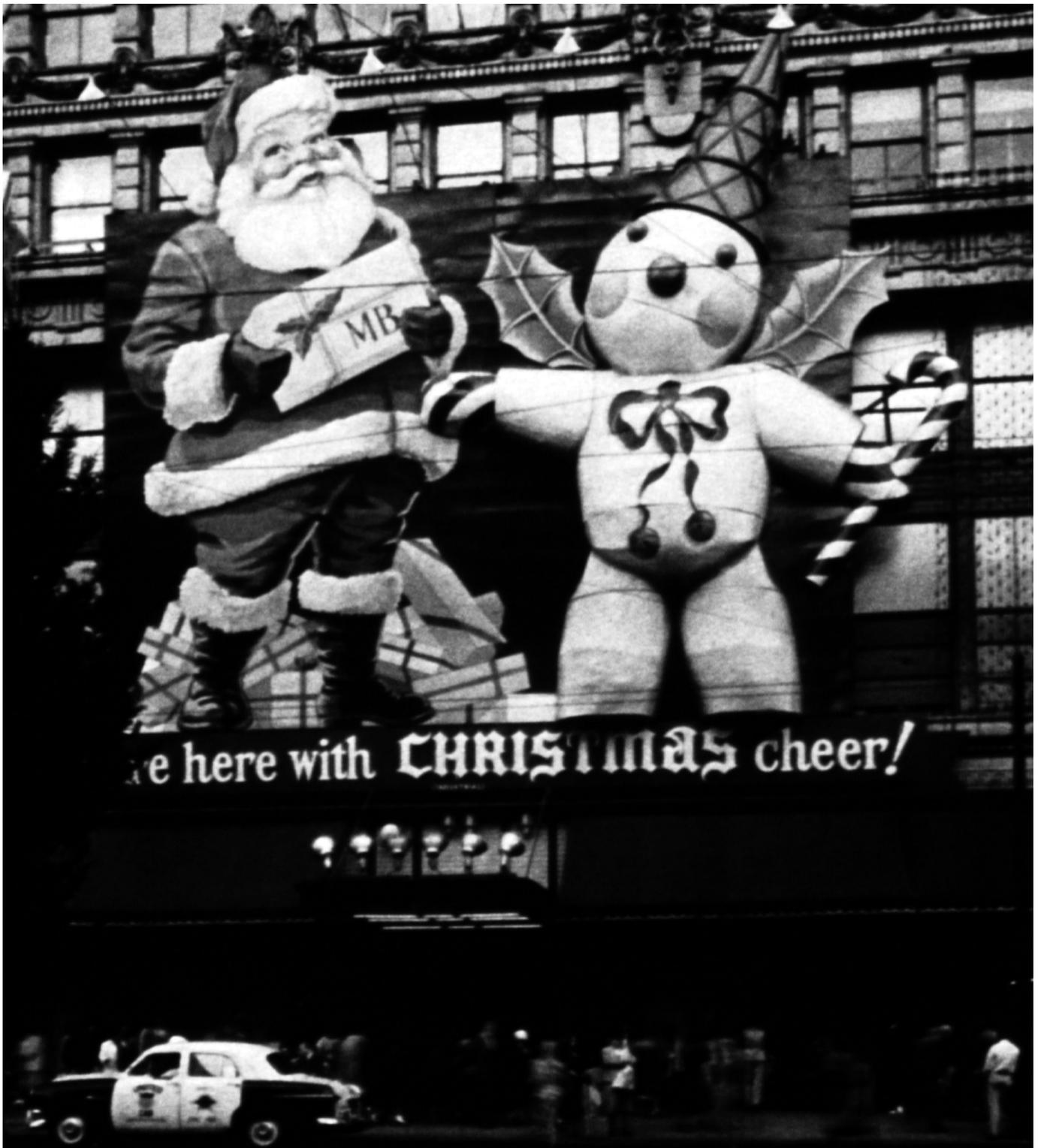
In New Orleans, post-Christmas letdown simply doesn't exist. Thanks to the initial settlement of the city by French Catholics, today, regardless of faith, you can't escape the fact that on January 6, Twelfth Night marks the traditional end of the Christmas season and the beginning of the Carnival season. Pretty seamless, except that the red and green decorations are suddenly replaced by purple, green, and gold. And fruitcake vanishes to be replaced by king cakes. May you find some "sweet stuff"—shared memories—in the following pages.

—PEGGY SCOTT LABORDE



Mr. Bingle, perched above the Canal Street entrance to Maison Blanche at left, reminds shoppers 'tis the season. (Photo by Del Hall)

Christmas
IN NEW ORLEANS



By the time this photograph of Maison Blanche department store was taken by Charles L. Franck Photographers in 1952, the store's Christmas mascot, Mr. Bingle, was as much an icon of the New Orleans Christmas season as Santa Claus himself. (Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection)

Canal Street at Christmas



If there's one collective memory of Canal Street, New Orleans' historic main thoroughfare, it's of Christmastime. Before America's expansion to the suburbs caused a shift in shopping patterns in most large cities, Canal Street was *the* place in New Orleans to buy Christmas presents and to have your photograph taken with Santa.

There were window displays of luxurious merchandise such as furs and designer evening gowns at Godchaux's, Gus Mayer, and Kreeger's. Decorated window displays were D. H. Holmes' gift to New Orleans. Each year the department store presented a different theme. These windows often depicted wonderlands of imported animated figures that could momentarily transport a window shopper to a Venetian or Dickensian Christmas fantasy, even if the weather outside was a temperate 72 degrees.

Maison Blanche, referred to by locals as "MB," featured Mr. Bingle, a snowman marionette that, from his inception after World War II, did not "melt" even in the subtropics of New Orleans—or under the hot lights of his daily television program during the Christmas season. Although MB has closed, the Dillard's department store chain has continued to feature the snowman. The Mr. Bingle figure that graced the front of MB's lavish facade on Canal Street for many years is today included in City Park's Celebration in the Oaks annual light display. Maison Blanche was once part of the City Stores chain, and other department stores in the group, such as Lowenstein's in Memphis, also adopted the loveable Mr. Bingle as its Christmas mascot.

In addition to the giant Mr. Bingle, a four-story Santa was a downtown fixture for many years. Domenico Marino, who worked for General Outdoor Advertising, designed the St. Nick that greeted shoppers at Sears, on the corner of Baronne and Common Streets. It was a holiday fixture from the early 1940s until 1979. According to Eddie Deubler, who was the Sears building engineer, the Santa was made of plywood and had to be erected in sections: the boots, the legs and round tummy, and finally the smiling face. Santa held a wrapped package labeled, "From Sears."

Most children got to see Santa up close when their parents took them to visit the big fellow at such department stores as D. H. Holmes and Maison Blanche. In the case of the latter, Mr. Bingle also popped up with Santa in many of those photos.

Here Comes Mr. Bingle!

*Jingle, jangle, jingle,
here comes Mr. Bingle
With another message
from Kris Kringle,
Time to launch your
Christmas season,
Maison Blanche makes
Christmas pleasin',
Gifts galore for you to see,
Each a gem from MB!*

In New Orleans, with its semi-tropical climate, how unlikely is it that a little snowman with an ice-cream-cone hat and holly wings would become a symbol of New Orleans Christmas? His name—Mr. Bingle.

The concept for Bingle came from Emile Alline, Sr., the display director for Maison Blanche department store. On a buying trip to Chicago, Alline discovered that some department stores had their own Christmas mascots. Marshall Field's featured Uncle Mistletoe, a whimsical Santa's helper. Looking as if he sprang from a Dickens novel, this tiny gent sported a sprig of mistletoe on his top hat and a pair of wings on his back. Montgomery Ward department store promoted a holiday character that ultimately became a national treasure: Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.

Alline pitched the mascot idea to Maison Blanche executives Louis Schwartz and Herbert Schwartz. He called his pint-sized personage a "snowdoll." In an interview in the 1980s, Alline recalled, "I wanted to appeal to kids. I wanted it to be flexible, that we could tie him in with all kinds of displays and so I thought of the ribbon, I thought

Stores on Canal Street were like old friends. Many were locally owned. Even those stores like Woolworth's that were part of national chains employed friendly people who knew their city and their customers, and the stores seemed local even if ownership was not.

From the 1930s through the 1980s, Canal Street was also the setting for occasional Christmas parades. In the early 1960s, miniature renditions of balloon figures resembling those featured in the New York City Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade floated down the thoroughfare. During Mayor Sidney Barthelemy's administration in the late 1980s, wife Mickey fostered a series of citywide Christmas activities, including a parade.

Crowds watched the parades from the center of Canal Street, on what locals refer to as the neutral ground or median. From the 1930s until 1970 the City of New Orleans employed an official decorator named Betty Finnin. At Christmastime she would transform the historic cast-iron lampposts on the neutral ground into candles or chimneys or adorn them with Christmas wreaths.

Right off Canal, a must-visit during the Christmas season was the Roosevelt Hotel. Its block-long lobby featured a canopy of spun fiberglass known as "angel hair" and almost a thousand ornaments. Not as lavish, but still a special place to visit was the lobby of the St. Charles Hotel, later known as the Sheraton Charles. Strings of colored lights dotted the mezzanine balcony while flocked trees "took root" in the hotel lobby. The hotel was demolished in the 1970s; on the site today is the Place St. Charles office building.

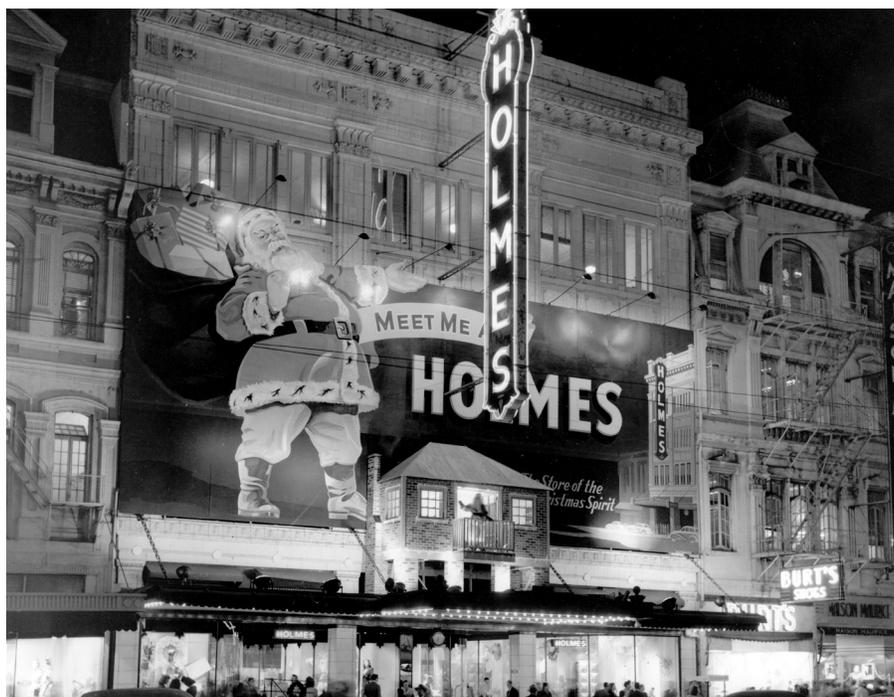
The celebration of the Christmas season on Canal Street changed during the last half of the twentieth century as most retailing shifted to suburban shopping malls. In 1960, Lakeside Mall opened. One of its major stores was a branch of downtown's D. H. Holmes. For a period, it continued its tradition of lavish decorations inside the store, including a wonderland. Over the years, the mall itself has presented annual Christmas displays, including an almost life-size toy train ride for children and a miniature village. While downtown department stores are no more, still remaining in the old Canal Street shopping district are Adler's jewelry store and Rubensteins clothiers. The Shops at Canal Place and the Riverwalk Marketplace are more recent additions to the street. Beyond those recent memories, we have newspapers and memoirs to thank for keeping the more distant past alive.

Canal Street's Early Days

On December 26, 1865, New Orleans' *Daily True Delta* reported, "The Christmas just passed will long be remembered as probably the most demonstrative one witnessed in New Orleans." The streets were thronged with shoppers. Servants carrying market baskets containing Christmas dinner followed many of them. Shops in 1865 opened on Christmas after having stayed open late on Christmas Eve. By midday businesses began to close as people were "visiting place to place, and



This photo from the 1970s shows the bell display that hung above the entrance to D. H. Holmes for many years. The bells tolled in synchronization with Christmas music. (Courtesy of Louis R. Roussel)



Santa greets passersby from his "cottage" above the entrance to D. H. Holmes department store. (Photo by C. F. Weber, courtesy of Bergeron Gallery)

of the ornaments, the leaves and the little mittens of course, just to make it sweet and cute." A contest to name the "snowdoll" was held among employees, and the general manager decided on the winning entry.

Ashleigh Austin, a Mr. Bingle fan who devotes part of her web site to the snowman (ashleighaustin.com), thinks the name may have come from a 1915 novel called *Mr. Bingle*. Written by George Barr McCutcheon, whose most famous tome is *Brewster's Millions*, this is the story of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas S. Bingle, a childless New York couple who provide gifts and a meal to less fortunate little ones on Christmas Eve.

Also fitting in nicely was the fact that Mr. Bingle's initials were "MB," a popular local reference to Maison Blanche.

New Orleans Grammy Award-winning vocalist Irma Thomas remembers Bingle—"I thought he was the cutest little thing. I didn't have a Mr. Bingle doll, but I thought he was kind of cute"—as does local rhythm and blues guitarist/singer/bandleader "Deacon John" Moore. "I do remember Mr. Bingle 'cause my mother used to take us window shopping on Canal Street around Christmas. And Maison Blanche always had a big Mr. Bingle display in the window with Mr. Bingle flying down and then they would make Mr. Bingle talk after a while."

Even before the arrival of Mr. Bingle, plans were underway to present Christmas shows in Maison Blanche's Canal Street store windows. The shows were to include marionettes, wooden figures with strings or wire. Alline

found his “Geppetto” just a few blocks away from the store, on racy Bourbon Street.

Edwin “Oscar” Isentrout’s Bourbon Street show consisted of marionettes that performed a strip tease, one of many vaudeville-style acts that were sandwiched in between the exotic dancers’ performances. Originally from New York, the puppeteer had been traveling around the country with a marionette troupe and, on a whim, decided to buy a bus ticket to New Orleans.

Isentrout initially retained his Bourbon Street nightclub engagement. Since his schedule made it difficult to work for Maison Blanche all day, he sought the help of two talented teenagers, Ray Frederick and Harry J. Ory. The two had achieved some acclaim around town with a marionette act of their own and assisted Isentrout in the early years of the window shows.

According to Ory, “Oscar came in one morning and he was holding a snowman and it had wings. It looked pretty cute. He said, ‘Well, Alline wanted us to use the snowman as the star of the show rather than our little blond-headed fellow that we were creating.’ We said, ‘Maybe it’s a good idea.’ So we went along with it.”

Mr. Bingle made his debut during the 1947 Christmas season. Isentrout and his assistants created a winter wonderland that featured an assortment of characters, but Bingle was center stage. Isentrout became the voice of Mr. Bingle.

Ory adds, “Oscar took that doll and animated it and he gave it character because it was



This nineteenth-century scene from a D. H. Holmes window display included a train called the DHH. (Courtesy of Louis R. Roussel)

imbibing egg-nog. . . . All streets contained living streams of happy ‘humans,’ merry, joyous and contented; but Canal Street as usual, was the centre of fashion, and all the beauty of the city seemed congregated there.” This was the first Christmas after the Civil War. It was in stark contrast to 1861, when the city’s economy was in near collapse, right before New Orleans fell to Union forces in April 1862.

By 1865, Canal Street was considered the main street of New Orleans, as it overtook Chartres and Royal Streets as the city’s most fashionable shopping district. It had not only evolved into the showcase of upscale trade in New Orleans, but it had become the place where just about everybody in town wanted to congregate during Christmas.

The thoroughfare of Canal Street was born in 1807 as a planned navigation canal connecting the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. The canal was never built though the name stayed. The street’s great width and median are all that are left of the canal plan that appeared on many early maps. By the 1830s, Canal Street, up to its intersection with Royal Street, was a commercial area, but beyond this point it was residential, lined with elegant townhouses. A remaining example of one of these fine houses is the residence built in 1844 for Dr. William Newton Mercer. It still stands as the Boston Club, a private men’s club. Beginning in the 1840s, dry goods stores started to invade the residential section of the street and during the next half-century some of those establishments grew into big department stores.

Beginning in the early 1800s, as the Industrial Revolution mass-produced abundant new merchandise, American retailing experienced dramatic changes. Former luxury items became commonplace. The



D. H. Holmes department store's Christmas window decorations were often extravagant. (Courtesy of Louis R. Roussel)

purchase of ready-made clothing, once considered not particularly respectable, became the norm. Newspapers and magazines with mass circulations increased space for advertising. Out of a growing middle class were new consumers eager to buy.

Even if the shops of New Orleans were small and unassuming during the 1830s and 1840s, retailers sold some of the finest merchandise in the United States, befitting the growth and wealth of the city. Stores specialized in very narrow product lines: particular types of fabric, ribbons, hats, or bonnets. The French Quarter showed its French roots in its shops, which were similar to the small eighteenth-century shops of Paris, where merchants more often went to the mansions of their rich patrons than serving the patrons in the shops.

In the 1850s, architect T. K. Wharton, who was the superintendent of construction for the U.S. Custom House, took his children to see the beautifully decorated Christmas windows along Chartres and Royal

his voice. And of course we had a part in that because we designed the mechanical bodies. And you can't have life without movement. So Oscar gave it personality."

For Isentrout, performing Mr. Bingle was much more than a job. Jeff Kent, an apprentice to the puppeteer in the 1980s, recalls the first time he met him. "There was this old, thin, skinny man smoking cigarettes, without filters too. He was a workaholic. All he had was Mr. Bingle. When someone came up to him and started talking to him and if he said, 'Oh, I'm the voice of Mr. Bingle,' then they would just go nuts. It's almost like meeting a star. So that was very important to him."

And much of that popularity can be attributed to the personality that Isentrout gave Bingle. "Mr. Bingle is a child," says Kent. "He is a child that likes to have fun. He gets into mischief. It's usually Mr. Bingle that gets into trouble and Santa Claus usually gets him out of trouble."

The sketches that Isentrout wrote for the window shows turned out to be a big hit. Alline recalls, "People would wait in



Puppeteer Edwin "Oscar" Isentrout gave Maison Blanche's Mr. Bingle a voice and personality. (Courtesy of Jeff Kent)



Oscar Isentrout was hired by Maison Blanche display director Emile Alline, Sr., to create a Mr. Bingle puppet show for the store's Canal Street window. (Courtesy of Jeff Kent)

line and you'd have to walk out in the street, bypassing the sidewalks, to get by. They would wait there just to see the show. We put up rails to keep the people back. We ran ads, almost half-page ads, to say, 'Please stand back and let the little ones see the show too.'

And literally pulling the strings were Isentrout, Ory, and Frederick. Ory remembers those early years vividly. "We were back there looking down at the marionettes. We had a fan on both sides cooling us off. We got kind of sweaty you know, you would get a little tired doing the same thing over and over and hearing the same record."

In addition to the snowman's appearances in the store's front window, a giant Bingle was mounted above the store's Canal Street entrance.

Alline recalls, "We made a fifty-four-foot Mr. Bingle and put him up on the front of the store. I had to go up to Chicago. They had a manufacturer there; it took two flat cars to get it down from Chicago."

From Thanksgiving to Christmas, the snowman even had his own television show on WDSU-TV. "The kids used to make a



This Venetian scene is a prime example of the effort and expense that went into the window displays at D. H. Holmes at Christmastime. (Courtesy of Louis R. Roussel)



This D. H. Holmes window, depicting an eighteenth-century scene, is an example of the lavish displays that were a Christmas tradition. Louis R. Roussel was in charge of the display department for all of the Holmes stores for many years. (Courtesy of Louis R. Roussel)



This nearly life-size locomotive is an example of the creativity of the display department at D. H. Holmes. (Courtesy of Louis R. Roussel)

Streets. By Wharton's time fashionable New Orleans shoppers were gravitating a block away to Canal Street, where newer, bigger, better decorated stores were becoming stiff competition.

Manufacturers produced children's toys, dolls, and games in ever increasing quantities, and each holiday season new playthings appeared. By the 1870s there were must-have Christmas items such as Christmas cards, with the holiday further focused on children.

As the main shopping street of one of America's biggest cities, Canal Street was in the midst of this trend. While merchandising expanded and Christmas grew in commercial importance, Canal Street developed into one of the most important shopping streets in the nation. For nearly 150 years it was the Crescent City's best shopping street and the center of the city's secular Christmas celebration.

Canal Street Becomes a Shopping Street

Daniel H. Holmes, a Chartres Street merchant who opened for business in 1842, was among the earliest pioneers to move to Canal Street. In 1849, Holmes, a Kentuckian, opened his new emporium on Canal between Bourbon and Dauphine. Although his contemporaries considered him a madman for moving so far from the heart of the retail district, albeit only a few blocks away, D. H. Holmes' store became an instant success and a pacesetter in New Orleans' growing marketplace.

The store was decorated in the elaborate English Tudor Gothic style, and to enter its rarified halls was like walking into a cathedral of



Puppeteers Ray Frederick, left, and Harry J. Ory worked with Oscar Isentrout to create the early Mr. Bingle marionette shows that were presented in Maison Blanche's Canal Street window. (Courtesy of Harry J. Ory)

special effort to watch," Alline says. "It was a little comics along with merchandising, promoting merchandise. At one time our competitive store had Santa Claus on at the same time and the kids would sit on Santa's lap. And he would say, 'What do you want for Christmas?' And this is live television. They'd say, 'A Bingle doll.'"

Bingle even visited children in hospitals. More than a pitchman, Bingle was also a goodwill ambassador.

Other downtown department stores tried to find ways to compete with the popularity of the little snowman. Krauss department store president Hugo Kahn remembers Bingle well. "I was envious of Mr. Bingle. That's not a very nice Christmas thing to be thinking about but I wish we had something like that. And we were always trying to think of what kind of gift we could get that would be like Mr. Bingle. But Mr. Bingle, I think for New Orleans, was real special."

Isentrout died in 1985 and was buried in an unmarked grave in Hebrews Rest #3 Cemetery at the corner of Elysian Fields and

Gentilly Boulevard. Donations and proceeds from a novella called *Saving Mr. Bingle* by Sean Doles were used to construct a grave marker. On it, a sketch of Mr. Bingle is etched into the granite.

The Arkansas-based Dillard's department store chain eventually bought out Maison Blanche and continued producing Bingle items, including dolls and ornaments. Mr. Bingle's initials may not be the same as the store he "represents" but to locals it only matters that he's still around.



This D. H. Holmes window depicts a snowy eighteenth-century forest. (Courtesy of Louis R. Roussel)



This entrance to a Christmas wonderland shows how elaborate the decorations were during the holidays at D. H. Holmes. (Courtesy of Louis R. Roussel)



While visiting New Orleans in December of 1951, Indiana amateur photographer Charles Weever Cushman shot this photograph of downtown Canal Street. (Charles W. Cushman Collection, Indiana University Archives)

merchandising. Holmes' showcase was the elegant Silk Hall, which rose two stories and featured some of the finest fabrics and accessories to be found in the South. It was all designed to make the lady shopper feel rich and to entice her to spend money as if she were.

Dressing up in one's finest to go shopping was *de rigueur* since the shopper was going to see and be seen. During the holiday seasons of the 1870s and 1880s, a visit to D. H. Holmes was like walking into a Christmas card, especially with the store bedecked with garlands and wreaths.

One block from Holmes, between Bourbon and Royal, the Touro block of buildings was built by Judah Touro in the 1850s. This row of fine shops and offices with a common facade was ringed with ornate cast-iron galleries, which were not only fashionable at the time, but protected shoppers from sun and rain. Similar lacy galleries were soon built all along Canal Street's commercial area.

The Touro block was home to some of the Crescent City's finest dry goods, notions, jewelry, silver, and music stores. It had gaslit



As shown in this 1957 photograph, Santa is the main attraction during the Christmas parades that have rolled down Canal Street through the years. (Photo by C. F. Weber, courtesy of Bergeron Gallery)

show windows stretching three hundred feet along Canal Street. At Christmas the windows were adorned with greenery, ribbons, flags, and flowers.

By the 1870s, Canal Street was the center of ladies' fashion. It was also host to most of the city's sewing machine sellers, for this was an era when the majority of women made their own garments. Although most of the men's tailors were in the financial district a block or so away, a few men's haberdashers such as S. N. Moody, Walshe's, and H. B. Stevens were on Canal near the intersection of St. Charles.

S. J. Shwartz, renamed Maison Blanche in 1897, beat Holmes in becoming the city's first full-line department store. It was touted as a "New York-style department store." Its five floors were packed with



During the Christmas season, shoppers and their children would stop at the window of Maison Blanche to see the popular Mr. Bingle marionette show. (Courtesy of the family of Emile Alline, Sr.)

merchandise, including the latest fashions and modern housewares. The store had about 150 feet of big show windows along Canal Street. By the time the store opened, electricity was common in the commercial district and MB's windows, which were lined with mirrors lit by hundreds of bare light bulbs—the fad in store design at the time—that not only showed merchandise to full advantage both day and night, but threw rays of bright light into nighttime Canal Street.

Not wishing to be left behind, D. H. Holmes doubled its Canal Street frontage in 1898 and built an addition along the back of the store on Iberville Street in 1904. There were other department stores coming along the thoroughfare such as Krauss at Basin Street; Fellman's, which became Feibleman's at Carondelet; and Marks Isaacs



Before the debut of marionette shows featuring Mr. Bingle, the perky snowman that became Maison Blanche's "mascot," the Canal Street department store presented themed windows such as this 1945 Christmas display featuring a circus. (Courtesy of the family of Emile Alline, Sr.)

in the Touro block. As ready-made clothing became not only of higher quality but respectable, fashionable clothing stores such as Godchaux's and Kreeger's expanded, and Gus Mayer, Rubenstein Brothers, Keller-Zander, and Mayer Israel emerged. Some were in business on Canal Street into the 1980s; Rubensteins is still in business. Numerous jewelry stores such as Hyde and Goodrich, Tyler's, Schooler's, and Hausmann's also called Canal Street home. All but one, Adler's, are gone.

As stores grew so did their show window displays. From haphazard arrangements of merchandise in the 1850s, displays grew more organized and elegant as the century moved on. During Christmas of 1884, according to the *Daily Picayune*, Canal Street was "gaily decorated, ablaze with light, with the mammoth stores displaying fairy treasures to delight passers-by." Two years later the *Picayune* reported that store clerks vied with each other on Christmas Eve to see who could arrange the most attractive display, while "every bit of fancy goods was shown [which were] visions of delight." At Christmas 1890 the *Picayune* boasted that "artistic enterprise has made the line of [Canal Street] show windows wondrously beautiful."

Christmas Gift Giving and Advertising

The exchange of Christmas gifts has long been part of the Christian holiday season. Prior to the nineteenth century, gifts tended to be small remembrances. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, newspapers might mention Christmas giving—or Xmas gifts, since at the time X was an acceptable term using the Greek letter *chi* as a symbol



This Christmas display presented by Maison Blanche in the early 1940s depicts the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe but also promoted the store's supply of dolls. (Courtesy of the family of Emile Alline, Sr.)

of the first letter of Christ's name—but there was little if any effort to encourage the exchange of gifts.

Stores, such as those in New Orleans, were small and specialized; their advertisements were equally small. In the newspapers of the day, ads were not more than a column wide and at most an inch or two down the page. As stores increased in size and number—and competition grew stiffer—advertising expanded accordingly.

In the 1860s stores started expressing special Christmas sentiments. Words such as “Christmas” and “holiday” enhanced the still un-illustrated ads to catch the reader's eye. Some New Orleans stores included “New Year” in their advertisements. In 1866, F. G. Barriere, relocated from the French Quarter to Canal Street, advertised both Christmas and New Year's gifts. Eyrich's, the elegant book dealer and stationer, also advertised gifts for the season, while the Canal Street jeweler A. B. Griswold advertised “Holiday Gifts.” Such holiday sentiments would have been difficult to find in Christmas advertising in New Orleans just twenty years earlier.

By 1869 the number of references to Christmas in advertising had grown significantly. The elegant dressmaker Madame Olympe advertised that she had brought new goods from Paris “especially for Christmas and New Year's gifts.” Kreeger's, a ladies' shop then on Magazine Street, stocked “new goods, selected for the Christmas holidays.” Payton and Zebal in the St. Charles Hotel simply declared, “HO! For the Holidays.”

In 1869, Guéblé & Nippert was especially ambitious when the store advertised its abundant stock and quality in its toy department in an eleven-stanza poem, some of which reads:



Emile Alline, Sr., longtime display director for Maison Blanche, created what he called a “snowdoll” as the store’s Christmas mascot, and Mr. Bingle was born. (Courtesy of the family of Emile Alline, Sr.)

Would you thus your children bless—
 On their little hearts impress
 A whole life of happiness
 And of joy—
 Help now their gladsome mirth
 As they gather round your hearth,
 Nor let there be a dearth
 Of their toys.

Now all these, and more, you’ll meet
 At Guéblé’s Toy Retreat,
 One Thirty Seven Canal Street,
 Where one gets
 All that boys and girls admire—
 All that Ma and Pa desire
 For their pets.

Stores were beginning to advertise specialized seasonal items. In 1884, Alphonse Marx on Dryades Street highlighted its “Christmas Cards and Souvenirs,” while bookseller Eyrich’s touted, “Our line of Prang’s Christmas and New Year’s Cards . . . We have some exquisite

Santa Claus and Mr. Bingle arrive Saturday, 9:00 a. m. at the Moisant Airport see them land in their special Eastern Air Lines plane

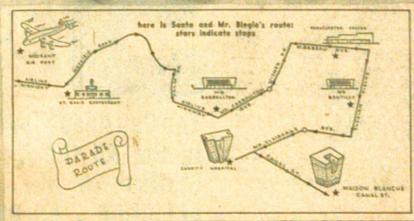


MB's ready to give them a rousing New Orleans welcome—with a parade that goes like this **land note—they're making a lot of new STOPS!!**: leave airport, via Air-Line Highway to St. Regis, Metairie Road to Friedrichs, Friedrichs to Palm Street, Palm back to the Highway, then to MB CARROLLTON; Carrollton Avenue to Wisner Boulevard, Wisner to Mirabeau, Mirabeau to Parkchester Shopping Center; Mirabeau to Elysian Fields and MB GENTILLY, Elysian Fields to Claiborne, Claiborne to Gravier, Gravier to La Salle, La Salle to Tulane, Tulane to Charity Hospital; Charity Hospital to Claiborne to Canal and MB!

plan to meet them at these stops:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 9:30 a. m., St. Regis | 10:45 a. m., MB Gentilly |
| 10:00 a. m., MB Carrollton | 11:15 a. m., Charity Hospital |
| 10:30 a. m., Parkchester | 11:30 a. m., MB Canal Street |

Santa, Mr. Bingle and the reindeer are confirmed fliers by now—and so are the toys they're bringing with them for MB's Toyland. And, as soon as Mr. Bingle gets to Canal Street, he's going to fly into his own MB window with this brand-new Christmas show—come see it!



MAISON BLANCHE
GREATEST STORE SOUTH

During the 1960s, one Maison Blanche promotion during the Christmas season was the "arrival" of Mr. Bingle and Santa Claus via Eastern Airlines. (Courtesy of the family of Emille Alline, Sr. and the Times-Picayune)

*Truman Capote's
Canal Street Christmas*

Even though he was born in New Orleans in 1924, author Truman Capote didn't spend much time in his birthplace. After his parents divorced, his early years were spent in rural Alabama with cousins.

His childhood memory of traveling by bus to New Orleans to visit his father, Archulus "Arch" Persons, whom he barely knew, is the focus of *One Christmas*, which he wrote in the 1980s.

The day before Christmas, we were walking along Canal Street. I stopped dead still, mesmerized by a magical object that I saw in the window of a big toy store. It was a model airplane large enough to sit in and pedal like a bicycle. It was green and had a red propeller. I was convinced that if you pedaled fast enough it would take off and fly!

On Christmas Day, Capote found other presents under the tree from his father, but not the airplane.

I reminded him of the airplane we had seen in the toy store on Canal Street. His face sagged. Oh, yes, he remembered the airplane and how expensive it was. Nevertheless, the next day I was sitting in that airplane dreaming I was zooming toward heaven while my father wrote out a check for a happy salesman.



Caroline Jane Scott displays her pair of Bingles, just unwrapped on Christmas morning. (Courtesy of Stacey and Kurt Scott)

Hand-painted cards, very elegant." In 1886, Wharton's on Canal Street at Carondelet Street sold cards priced from 1½¢ to \$15, an astonishing amount at the time, showing that by the mid-1880s, New Orleans had regained its prosperity after the end of Reconstruction. For many people there was enough wealth to celebrate a Merry Christmas.

By 1885, D. H. Holmes and other Canal Street stores strung electric lines throughout their buildings. As electricity became more and more common in the commercial area, building owners and merchants decorated their show windows with electric lights and began decorating their exteriors at Christmas and Mardi Gras. The impact of lights became especially popular after the spectacular effects of lighting at the 1884 World's Fair, held on the grounds of what today is Audubon Park.

At Christmas, Canal Street soon became a fairyland of twinkling lights and each year light and window displays became more lavish. The decorations gave people another reason to make their way to the street on Christmas Eve, since this was when the lights were switched on to start the season.



In this photograph from the 1960s, two Mr. Bingles are perched above the Canal Street entrance to Maison Blanche. (Courtesy of the family of Emile Alline, Sr.)



From the 1940s through 1979, this four-story cutout Santa Claus figure in front of Sears and Roebuck, just a block off Canal Street at the corner of Common and Baronne Streets, was a familiar sight during the Christmas season. (Photo by C. F. Weber, courtesy of Bergeron Gallery)



Taking a photograph with Santa at a downtown department store was a holiday ritual. In this photograph from the early 1960s, New Orleanian Monica Barthé Turner sits with the Santa from Maison Blanche while Mr. Bingle hovers overhead. Turner recalls: "I just remember how the wait was long, and the line to see Santa seemed endless. All the kids were dressed so nice and the moms and dads kept reminding them how their behavior would make a big difference to Santa when he gave out the toys. Of course some kids would still fidget and need reprimanding, and we'd look up at my mother, who was looking back at us with those eyes that said, 'You'd better not try that.' When we got closer and could actually see Santa, the carnage was everywhere. Kids who had been in line giving their parents a hard time were collapsing in terror or liquefying on Santa's lap. With all the screaming and pulling away, you would think it was the vaccination clinic. Ribbons, barrettes, and bow ties were flying and rosy cheeks were full of tears and spit. Parents left in disgust—either embarrassed because of their child's behavior or blaming the store for the length of time in line. Again we'd look up at my mother, who was looking back at us with those eyes that said, 'You'd better not try that.' Since we were more afraid of her than Santa, we didn't and here's the picture to prove it." (Courtesy of Monica Barthé Turner)

Christmas Eve Shopping

One of the enticements of Canal Street on Christmas Eve was that many of the holiday window decorations were being shown for the first time during the season. (At this time the celebration of the season began on the day before Christmas rather than at Thanksgiving. Stores in New Orleans did not even begin advertising Christmas and New Year's gifts until mid-December, and most shoppers delayed their buying forays until Christmas Eve or after.) By the 1880s store window displays were wonderlands of greenery, ribbons, and other ephemera of the season. With the advent of electric lighting the windows became even more magical.

The mob of potential shoppers on Christmas Eve prompted merchants to keep their stores open late, in some cases even after 1 A.M., only to reopen early on Christmas Day. Often people did not begin shopping until Christmas Eve. For some businesses Christmas Eve was payday, and families with children in tow joined other merrymakers, going from store to store and from one store Santa to the next. By then store Santas were becoming a common sight.

Outside the stores were street vendors displaying notions, ribbons, balloons, clothing items, and even birds for sale. Many vendors specialized in noisemakers, drums, horns, and firecrackers, all to contribute to making as much racket as possible.

As Christmas Eve on Canal Street progressed toward the evening, the types of crowds changed. Right after sunset most of the people were shoppers. As a louder crowd began to descend, the shoppers abandoned the street for home or Midnight Mass. Late at night the sightseeing crowd came to Canal Street, and many were very well dressed. They were there to promenade, to see and to be seen, which was a popular part of the celebration. No matter the time of night, the beat on the street continued.

By the mid-nineteenth century, offices and businesses were starting to close early on Christmas Eve and, for some, all day Christmas Day. Even the newspapers took the day off. In 1871 the *Daily Picayune* noted, "To allow our employés and compositors to enjoy the Christmas holiday no paper will be issued." By this time most public offices closed as well. "The public servant and the private citizen alike appreciate the holiday," said the *Picayune*. This was not true of the poor shop assistants, stock clerks, or delivery boys who more than ever had to serve the needs of the ever-growing Christmas-gift-giving public.



This Maison Blanche Santa from the late 1950s seems very willing to listen to what's on the Christmas list. (Courtesy of Peggy Scott Laborde)



Mickey Barthelemy, wife of former New Orleans mayor Sidney J. Barthelemy (who served from 1986-94), promoted citywide Christmas celebrations, including a parade. She is shown here with internationally known New Orleans chef Paul Prudhomme as Santa. (Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)



Mayor and Mrs. Victor H. Schiro pose with Santa Claus, 1966. Schiro served as mayor of New Orleans from 1961-70. He and wife, Sunny, often participated in public events. (Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)



This snowy scene above the entrance to Krauss department store may have left some New Orleanians hoping for a flurry. (Courtesy of Hugo Kahn)



Among the most lavish and popular displays at Christmas was the almost three-hundred-foot-long lobby of the Roosevelt (later Fairmont and once again Roosevelt) Hotel. Flocked trees and a canopy of "angel hair" batting covered with ornaments created a winter wonderland. This photograph is from the 1960s. The tradition was discontinued in 1966 due to fire safety regulations, but with the advent of flame retardant decorations, this popular tradition was revived in 1994. (Courtesy of the Fairmont Hotel)



The St. Charles Hotel, known by the early 1970s as the Sheraton Charles, decorated its lobby at Christmastime with colored lights and flocked trees. (Courtesy R. R. "Tim" Richardson, Canton, Ohio)



For many years Betty Finnin, the official decorator for the City of New Orleans, and her staff adorned the Canal Street lampposts for Christmas and Mardi Gras. (Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)

Late Christmas Eve hours were slowly eliminated, especially since by the late 1880s street crowds were getting more rowdy and boisterous, more in a mood to revel than to shop. As early as 1886, D. H. Holmes advertised, "For the convenience of our customers Our Store will open . . . Until 9 O'Clock." In this expanding age of social conscience, there was finally a growing concern about the welfare of store workers. Stores started adding more staff to relieve stress on the full-time clerks, and in 1895, S. J. Shwartz doubled its sales staff for Christmas sales. In 1904, A. Schwartz announced that it would close at 6 P.M., and D. H. Holmes not only closed early, but also advertised that it would remain closed on Christmas Day, "To give our employees a needed rest."



City of New Orleans decorator Betty Finnin was in charge of an annual Christmas parade in the 1950s. From left, Fred Green, Mrs. William R. Robinson, and Finnin put the finishing touches on a float. (Photograph by Photography Unlimited, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)

Canal Street: "The Battleground"

Canal Street was not only the center of Christmas shopping, but it was also dubbed the "battleground," as the late-night Christmas Eve revels engulfed it with noise and mayhem that had long been a part of the holiday season in New Orleans. By the mid-1860s, as Canal Street became the city's great gathering place, more and more Christmas Eve activity gravitated there, which was different from the antebellum period when there was no particular center of Christmas Eve revelry. Canal Street was already a focus of life and shopping in New Orleans, and at Christmas it was even more enticing with its



From the 1870s into the early twentieth century, retailers gave away colorful trade cards as promotions. This one from the 1880s depicts a Christmas angel from the French Market Tea Depot on St. Ann Street in the French Quarter. (The Historic New Orleans Collection)

smartly dressed window decorations and, later, electric light displays.

As soon as the sun set on Christmas Eve, thousands of people made their way to Canal Street. They came on foot, by streetcar, or by carriage. The crowd knew no class barrier. Many people promenaded in their finery. The occasional shoeless urchin and hoodlum were also part of the mix.

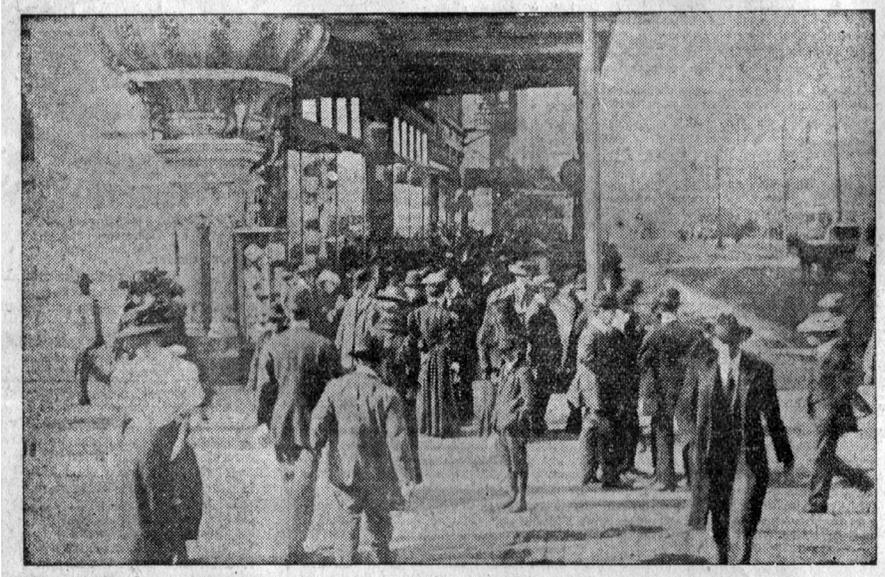
Christmas in New Orleans was announced by the incessant blare of tin and paper horns sold by fashionable shops and street vendors. Part of the milieu was the beat of drums and the boom and blast of fireworks. In spite of complaints from the police and prominent business leaders, fireworks danced and hissed on the streets, causing the uninitiated to jump and leap in fright. Of even greater danger were falling bullets. There were individuals who used Christmas Eve as an excuse to indiscriminately shoot firearms, to the detriment of those unsuspecting people who might get caught in the line of fire. There were every year numerous injuries and even deaths brought about by this practice.

Bands of Christmas merry-makers strolled along Canal Street for hours after sunset. Large parties of young adults rushed through the crowds tooting horns at everybody, creating lots of noise throughout the night and Christmas Day. The *Daily Picayune* called it "Babel and pandemonium and fairyland combined." Many other people less intent on noisemaking went downtown to witness with delight and occasional horror the incessant late-night show.

On Christmas Eve 1884, an enterprising group of young men tried to astound everybody when they fashioned a giant horn over five feet long

designed to make the biggest noise ever. They carried it along Canal Street taking turns blowing into its several mouthpieces. The oversized horn proved to be more fearful looking than loud since its noise could not be heard above the din.

Such noisemaking and mayhem on Christmas Eve was not unique to New Orleans, although in the United States it was more associated with New Orleans than with other large cities. As a warm-climate city without extreme December weather, New Orleans lent itself more readily to such winter activities. In 1884 the *Daily Picayune* said, "The New Orleans Christmas is becoming as celebrated and distinctive as the New Orleans Carnival. Strangers concede to the Crescent City a talent for enjoyment . . . and generosity in its exercise." In this World's Fair year with more winter visitors than usual in town, the *Picayune* noted that



By the 1890s, Canal Street had been New Orleans' main shopping district for over half a century. It was especially busy during the Christmas season, as seen in this newspaper photograph. (Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)



Stocked for Christmas, the toy department at D. H. Holmes was pictured in the New Orleanian magazine of December 15, 1930. (The Historic New Orleans Collection)

MAISON			BLANCHE	
Open To-Morrow UNTIL 9 P. M.			Tuesday, Christmas Eve, we close Promptly at 7 o'clock to give our employees an opportunity of enjoying the Christmas Festivities	
TO-MORROW, we inaugurate a				
CLEARANCE SALE				
OF ALL OUR				
TOYS, DOLLS, HOLIDAY GOODS,				
Handkerchiefs, Books, Umbrellas, Hosiery,				
Cloaks, Suits, Waists, Millinery, Dress				
Goods, Sterling Silver Articles, Calendars,				
Men's Furnishings, Boys' Furnishings, and				
Clothing, etc., etc.				
WONDERFUL VALUES				
will be found on our Bargain Counters.				
SENSATIONAL SALE OF				
LADIES' TRIMMED HATS				
987 Fine French Felt and Panne Velvet Shapes,				
elegantly and beautifully trimmed with Wings, Fancy Coques, Flowers, Ostrich Tips, Velvet and Persian Pins—Copies of Imported Models—Manu- factured to be sold at \$6.00 to \$10.00—but money has been scarce lately, and the manufacturer needed Ready Cash—He got it but suffered a heavy loss;— YOUR GAIN				
For the choice of these \$6.00 to \$10.00 Hats, will be offered to-morrow at..... 2.50				

This *Maison Blanche* ad from a December 1907 *Times Democrat* doesn't provide an address for the department store. Everyone knew it was on Canal Street. (Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library)

"strangers within the city gates Christmas Eve and Christmas Day found . . . a great deal of discordant noise." The *Daily Picayune* repeated its opinion in 1890 when it stated, "New Orleans has a characteristic Christmas as well as a unique carnival. Canal Street has always been the main battleground for the elements of discord that marked the celebration."

But across New Orleans there was the growing feeling that time and changing tastes were finally tempering the worst features of the city's Christmas revelry. Starting in the 1890s bands of young men descended on Canal Street on Christmas Eve, but they did not carry guns or firecrackers. They were on missions of mirth; they paraded and sang as long as they were able to survive the night and the "good cheer" dispensed by households and businesses that welcomed their friendly form of merriment. Some of the singing groups wore military or marching uniforms and carried banners and blazing torches to announce their arrival. The *Daily Picayune* commented that they carried "flames and fire of a harmless sort."

In 1904 the *Picayune* reported the Christmas Eve activities of a young nurse who worked at Touro Infirmary. When the young lady got off duty in the early evening, she and friends made their way to Canal Street to take in the requisite sights. The group then went to the theater, after which they went to supper—a *réveillon*—at a Canal Street restaurant. Later they drove up St. Charles Avenue to the home of Dr. Rudolph Matas, the noted medical researcher, where they serenaded him into the evening.

Prior to World War I, Canal Street was still jammed with revelers on Christmas Eve, but the activities became more subdued. The crowds continued to surge back and forth good-naturedly blowing horns and ringing bells, but the shooting of guns and fireworks and the resultant injuries were diminishing on Christmas only to eventually crop up on New Year's Eve. Public protest was becoming more vocal about fireworks and the indiscriminant shooting of firearms. While these acts had been discouraged for years, police rarely interfered with them until the twentieth century, when laws were enacted and lawbreakers subject to arrest.

In 1923 the New Orleans superintendent of police cautioned citizens against allowing their Christmas exuberance to take the form of firing guns. In spite of the warning, people were wounded by careless celebrants, although the numbers were far lower than those of forty years earlier. Front-page headlines in the Christmas issue of the *New Orleans States* summed the situation up when it said, "2 Stabbed Many Hurt In Sunday [Christmas Eve] Revels."

Increasingly more lavish show window displays and spectacular electric lighting helped lure the attention of the masses away from fireworks, but fewer Canal Street stores remained open on Christmas. As the use of fireworks diminished, Canal was no longer the "battleground" that it had been just a decade earlier and revelers looked for other places to vent their energies. Many went to the nearby



During the late nineteenth century large Christmas Eve crowds converged on Canal Street blowing horns, beating drums, and shooting fireworks. In 1884, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper depicted a group of young men who fashioned a giant horn in an unsuccessful attempt to outdo other noisemakers. (The Historic New Orleans Collection)

"Tango Belt" along Iberville Street in the French Quarter, where there were small hotels, restaurants, dance halls, and honky-tonks.

During World War I there was a lull in Christmas celebrations and an abrupt end to most of the noisy events, but Christmas Eve 1917 was welcomed in by thousands of people in Lafayette Square singing carols and listening to speeches that mixed religion and patriotism. Mayor Martin Behrman called it "a splendid thought that we should have this community singing and a tree to greet Christmas." Before the caroling began an eighty-seven-year-old woman flicked the switch that lit the tree and "a star topping its radiance." For many years a Christmas tree was put up in Lafayette Square.

The following year, the death and sorrow of the Great War was compounded by the October 1918 great influenza epidemic. With over three thousand victims of the "Spanish Flu" in New Orleans alone, Christmas, in spite of the November 11 end of the war, was subdued.

In its Christmas edition of 1922 the *New Orleans States* headlined, "Christmas Observed By People At Home." Crowds still made their way into the streets, but the behavior wasn't as boisterous as it had once been. People caroled on Canal Street and in Lafayette Square as well as throughout neighborhoods. Restaurants and hotel ballrooms



As shown in this 1884 Harper's Weekly, in addition to shopping, creating a ruckus on Canal Street was considered a part of holiday activities during the Christmas season. (From the collection of Peggy Scott Laborde)

were filled to capacity with revelers. Churches were packed for both Midnight Mass and for Protestant services. On Christmas Day the poor were fed and orphans were given gifts, but downtown, the streets were practically deserted. "On Christmas Day itself," according to the *States*, "it centered in the homes of New Orleans. For that's where Christmas belongs. At the home hearthstone."

Another blow to the Canal Street celebrations came with Prohibition. Drinking had long been a part of the Christmas celebration. In most cases it was just part of the conviviality of the season. In 1866 after the office of the *Daily Picayune* closed down on Christmas Eve, "[the staff] began our Christmas right early . . . due to the courtesy of Col. E.F. Duncan, of the St. James Hotel barroom . . . who sent us so bountiful an eggnog and such good wine." The indiscriminate shooting of guns and resultant injuries was often blamed on drunkenness.

The 1920s ban against the consumption of alcohol took its toll on public display at Christmas, and many revelers celebrated indoors. In 1923 the *Times-Picayune* noted that "Christmas and the flowing bowl are so closely associated in the minds of some folks" and reported on a man who strolled into a post office—perhaps thinking it a speakeasy—with bottles of wine under each arm. Spied by a federal agent, he was arrested and spent Christmas Eve "getting a bondsman." In 1928 the *States* reported, "Xmas Booze Is Plentiful," and it flowed freely on Christmas Eve, resulting in numerous arrests for intoxication. Nearly every restaurant and "soft drink stand" was reportedly selling liquor.

The massive amount of pedestrian traffic that was part of Christmas in the nineteenth century was replaced by increasing automobile traffic in the first decades of the twentieth century. Forty extra policemen were put on duty in 1922 not only to regulate the increased flow of Christmas traffic, but also to be on the lookout for intoxicated drivers. In 1928 the *New Orleans Item* reported that traffic mishaps with injuries began Christmas Eve and continued into the next day. Such incidents became as common as the gunshot wounds that were still prevalent through the 1920s.

The stock market crash of 1929 and the Depression of the 1930s further eroded traditional public Christmas revels in New Orleans. In 1931 the streets remained relatively quiet, and the *Item* said, "This year the celebration was a little more solemn than usual." According to the newspaper it was a day of "Good will toward men," as the emphasis was on helping the poor, making sure that every person had a Christmas dinner and that every child got a toy. Scores of charitable programs provided dinners and food baskets for those in need. The deepening Depression was evident at the Doll and Toy Fund presentation in



This advertisement for Bernard and Grunning, once one of New Orleans' leading jewelers, appeared in the New Orleanian magazine of December 15, 1930. Eight years later the store crafted the gold monstrance for the Eucharistic Congress held in New Orleans that year. (The Historic New Orleans Collection)



Christmas catalogs such as this 1952 edition from D. H. Holmes have helped promote retailers and the Christmas buying season since the late nineteenth century. (The Historic New Orleans Collection)

Heinemann Baseball Park where twenty thousand white children showed up to be followed by ten thousand black children.

While after World War I, Canal Street may no longer have been the place to be on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, it remained the chief destination between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Although there were other shopping districts such as Dryades Street and Magazine Street, Canal Street was the showplace. Here were the best window displays, the best merchandise, including big toy departments and Santas. Canal Street had been that way since the Civil War, and it continued in that position until the 1980s when suburban shopping centers, which started small in New Orleans in the 1950s, finally won out in enticing shoppers.



On Christmas Day, Catholic families visited church crèches or "cribs." Among the largest and most impressive was that at the Jesuit Church of the Immaculate Conception on Baronne Street, depicted in the Sunday Illustrated Magazine of the Daily Picayune in 1910. (The Historic New Orleans Collection)