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Will he stay or will he go?

page 9

A century of Christmas



Vancouver Public Library Stuart Thompson photo 18052

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'Twas the edition before Christmas, 1906, and the prostitutes of Canton Street in Chinatown were in the headlines.

On Dec. 24, 1906, the lead story in the *Vancouver Daily Province* focused on the "Christmas cards" Vancouver Police Chief C. Chisholm had handed to 32 individuals, charging each with either being a "keeper" or an "inmate" of a brothel.

The women—"Washington and Oregon birds of brightest plumage" who gave their names as "Garnet," "Ruth," "Daisy," "Myrtle" and "Della"—pleaded guilty and were sentenced to fines ranging from \$35 to \$50, plus costs. The brothel's piano player received a \$25 fine.

The brothel's madam, whom the newspaper

dubbed "La Belle Canton," picked up the tab.

As the newspaper put it, "La Belle Canton today gracefully accepted Chief Chisholm's blue Christmas card, smiled at the decision of Magistrate Williams, and freely handed to Chancellor Robinson of the Cordova Street Court exchequer out of her long and prodigal purse \$1,169.25. Then, carefully gathering up her silks in one hand and holding high in the other the still-rounded purse and the gold-and-pearl parasol, La Belle, with a parting 'Merry Christmas, ha, ha,' disappeared down the private stairway and was gone."

In world news, the *Daily Province* reported on a "desperate" famine in China, and that Britain and France had established an "entente cordiale" that would see one defend the other in event of attack.

Continued on page 4

Santa, seen here distributing gifts at a Vancouver Christmas party early in the last century, has changed over the decades, and the celebration of Christmas in this city changed with him.

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