

Holiday season shopping brisk in Vancouver, despite Great War raging in Europe

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"The Kaiser has been effectively isolated, and the relations between France and England now practically bind the German Emperor to keep the peace," the newspaper reported.

Closer to home, Reverend H.W. Fraser of First Presbyterian Church sharply criticized the Royal Bank of Canada for making carpenters at its East End branch work on Sunday. "He was also outspoken regarding the fact that many butcher shops and other places of business were yesterday requiring their employees to do inside work."

Late-night openings on Christmas Eve didn't seem to be a problem. The Hudson's Bay stayed open until 10 p.m. on Christmas Eve for last-minute shoppers.

W.M. Harrison & Co. gave away a doll with a candy-box body with each purchase of \$1, while U. Kawasaki & Brother on Powell Street lured Christmas shoppers with an in-store prize draw; first prize was \$100 diamond ring.

Then, as now, a tie was a popular gift for dad. A.E. Lees & Co. offered ties of "beautiful silks made up in dainty shapes of four-in-hands, Imperials, Tecks, Ascots, puffs, bows, [and] club-house strings."

On Christmas Day, B.C. Electric Railway reduced service on its street-car lines. But that didn't stop people from enjoying a favourite pastime of the early 1900s: roller skating. The Vancouver Roller Skating Rink at Abbott and Pender streets—"Vancouver's popular pleasure resort"—offered a pair of three-hour sessions on Christmas day with "special music" for the season.

A SCAN of newspapers published just before Christmas, from 1906 to 1996, offers an intriguing glimpse of life in Vancouver in decades gone by. Some of the stories



Staff at Woodward's department store prepare for the Attorney General's Christmas party of 1948.

Vancouver Public Library Art Jones

seem almost current—reports of the crush of last-minute Christmas shoppers or the traffic chaos caused by a heavy snowfall. Others are very much a product of their time.

In the Dec. 23, 1916 *Vancouver Daily Province*, stories of what was then being called the Great War crowded out most of the traditional Christmas news. Christmas might traditionally be a time of peace on Earth, but a peace plan by American president Woodrow Wilson had fallen on deaf ears.

Prime Minister Robert Borden cited the "100,000 Belgians... torn from their homes and forced into worse than slavery," and vowed never to yield to Germany's military aggression.

Other leaders made similar speeches.

Meanwhile, Vancouverites prepared packages of "comforts" for Canadian soldiers overseas.

The government did its bit. The paper reported that every man in the trenches would receive plum pudding and "a 'taste' on which to drink their comrades' health" on Christmas day.

"Even in the wards for wounded German prisoners, the Christmas spirit will not be lacking, for doctors and nurses hate only one thing—death."

At police headquarters in Vancouver, 150 needy children sat down to a "Yuletide feast" presided over by police matron Lurancy Harris. Santa Claus—played by W.H. Collier, superintendent of the Children's

Home—distributed "little stockings of candy, nuts and fruit and the more practical gifts of shoes, stockings and other articles of wearing apparel."

Despite the war, Christmas shopping was brisk.

"Everywhere there were signs of money being spent more freely than has been the case for the past three years at Christmas time," the newspaper reported. "The sidewalks were taken up with two endless procession of busy shoppers, and almost everyone had one or more parcels..."

"Customers stood in rows, which in some cases were two and three deep before the counters, where assistants were working like demons to cope with the demands of buyers.

"It certainly looked more like an old-time Vancouver Christmas than the city has seen for several years."

Ads in the newspaper extolled the virtues of King George IV Whisky, "the top notch scotch" and Vancouver-brewed Cascade Beer, "the beer without a peer." But there was also an ad for the Institute at 2102 West Sixth Ave., which offered treatment for "drink and drug habits."

"A few days' visit to the Institute and you can face the world a clean, healthy person, clear of eye and keen of mind," the ad promised.

Despite the hardships of war, there was entertainment galore. The Pantages Theatre offered four vaudeville shows on Christmas day, featuring a banjo player, a singing comedian, opera selections by La Scala Sextette and blackface comedians described as "the limit in laughter."

The headline act combined "water lions" and "diving nymphs." Two female humans and 10 seals took turns performing trick dives into a water tank on stage.

"The performance of each trick twice, once by human and once by water lion, forms an interesting comparison, showing just how far advanced the human race is in its aquatic abilities," the newspaper reported.

ON DEC. 24, 1926, the *Vancouver Daily Province* reported on the "first white Christmas in years." More than eight inches of snow had fallen on the city the previous night, "and as a result traffic this morning was demoralized until after 9 o'clock. Street cars everywhere were late and on a number of lines complete trips were omitted. Motorists, endeavouring to get to their offices, did so with great difficulty, many being 'stuck' a number of times before their destinations had been reached.

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