

# 1926 Christmas gifts included hand-cranked record player, Paris frocks and Briar pipes

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“On hills about the city numerous automobiles were unable to proceed and the assistance of pedestrians had to be obtained to remove the cars from traffic lanes or from streetcar tracks.”

B.C. Electric Railway put out an appeal for drivers to steer clear of the tracks.

Telephone service and telegraph service from eastern Canada were also affected by the snowfall.

Prohibition in the U.S. was in full swing. In B.C. (where booze was legal) locals got into the bootlegging act in the month leading up to Christmas. In New Westminster, auto mechanics were trying to decide what to do with a car that had been abandoned at their repair shop. The gas tank, ruptured during an accident, turned out to contain a concealed tank filled with 20 gallons of rum.

Elsewhere in the world, Japanese emperor Yoshihito died of pneumonia. His successor, Hirohito, was reported to be a “crack billiard player” who spoke English, French and German, and who had modernized the palace by adding

electric lights. Hirohito also, the newspaper reported, held “advanced ideas of world peace and international morality.”

Hirohito would go on to preside over the Japanese invasion of China, an alliance with Nazi Germany, and war with the Allies.

The 1926 Christmas Eve newspaper included an ad for the new Phonola hand-cranked record player. Another ad, from David Spencer Ltd. department store, offered 350 evening dresses and dance frocks from New York, Paris and Canada. Yet another urged Christmas shoppers to buy the perfect men’s gift—a Kola de Luxe Briar, “the gentleman’s pipe.” With a price tag of \$1, it was promised to “smoke cool and sweet from the start.”

IN 1936, Vancouver City celebrated its 50th anniversary. On Dec. 24, 1936, the *Vancouver Daily Province* reported on the fallout that resulted from a monetary shortfall from this event. Mayor Gerald Gratton McGeer vociferously criticized the ticket sales committee for the “glaring mismanage-



**The B.C. Electric Sales Room on Granville Street, all decked out for Christmas of 1932. Signs in the window advertise the Philco radio “like a thousand gifts for the family” and gas toasters and fireplaces.** King Photo Studio Vancouver City Archives 5-70431A

ment” that had resulted in a \$3,000 net loss.

These were the Depression years. The newspaper’s Santa Claus Fund distributed 3,200 hampers to needy families.

When the contract was given

to Dominion Construction to build the First Avenue Viaduct, council stipulated “fair wages” and insisted the company hire labourers who had lived in the city for 12 months or more—a move designed to favour lo-

cal workers over the legions of homeless men who had drifted into the city since the start of the Depression.

While Britain and France entered into “urgent consultations” to prevent a Nazi coup in Spain, Pope Pius offered up a prayer for peace. He also decried the “spread of atheistic Communism” in Europe.

Vancouverites could still find an escape in vaudeville at theatres like the Beacon, however, and in movies like *Tarzan Escapes*, starring Olympic gold medal swimmer Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O’Sullivan.

THE CHRISTMAS of 1946 was a return to celebration, after six gruelling years of a world at war. On Dec. 24, 1946, the *Vancouver Daily Province* reported that Christmas shoppers were “smashing records” with a buying spree.

“In the last week citizens, breathing the sweet air of relief from the war years and intoxicated by the sight of familiar pre-war merchandise glistening in the windows and on the counters, threw caution to the

winds. Christmas purchases not only exceeded the war years but boomed to all-time peaks...

“One of this city’s biggest department stores reported that last Saturday was the biggest day in its history.”

This, despite a thick fog on icy streets that resulted in numerous traffic accidents and three collisions between ships in Vancouver’s harbour. Christmas Eve, the paper warned, was “perilous for ships, motorists and pedestrians.”

Elsewhere the newspaper reported about children succumbing to polio, an earthquake in Japan that had left 100,000 homeless during a “bitterly cold” winter, and a “crime wave” that began with a robbery in which masked gunmen escaped with \$4,400 from the Bank of Commerce on Victoria Drive.

Many Vancouverites, however, were still focused on the recent war. In one story, veterans recalled their wartime Christmases. Ted Fairfax spoke of a Christmas attack by Japanese bombers on the Royal Air Force base near Calcutta where he’d been stationed, two

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