

"Christmas Decorations in 1896"

Carroll County Times Article for 15 December 1996

By Jay A. Graybeal

A century ago a number of Westminster's retail merchants decorated their storefronts for Christmas. Their efforts were described in the December 19, 1896 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"Christmas Decorations

Never before have the merchants of Westminster made such elaborate preparations for Christmas as they have done this year. What they have inside is told in their advertisements in the ADVOCATE. We propose to speak only of their special window attractions.

AT MILLER BROS.'

One of their windows contains the large and handsome Doll and Patrol Wagons, which they will give away, besides an endless variety of toys of all kinds, from a top to a large drum. The artistic manner in which the toys are arranged makes one feel as though he was in wonderland. This is the delight of the juveniles, and they are to be found admiring it in groups from early morning until late at night. The other window is one of rare beauty and displays exquisite taste in its get up. In the center is a handsome fountain with a spray of water falling over electric lights into a basin, surrounded by evergreens. The sides are handsomely festooned with evergreens and the base of the whole is covered with white handkerchiefs, representing a landscape or scene after a snow storm. This is really one of the most handsome and artistic arranged windows ever seen in this city, and is much admired by the throng of people who daily crowd the large stores of this young and enterprising firm in search of holiday goods.

AT THEO. DERR & SON'S

This is the only furniture and carpet house, exclusively, in the county, and they display in their windows beautiful gilt chairs, one of the most acceptable of Christmas gifts, carpets and fire screens, &c.

AT SCHNEEBERGER'S

The Christmas display at Schneeberger's Trade Palace surpasses any of their previous efforts in this line. Nooks and all corners present a grand holiday attire, from which radiate endless varieties of tempting "Gift" suggestions, with the object of meeting every wish, and pleasing every taste, for all womanhood, all manhood, and the little ones from babyhood to childhood.

AT ORNDORFF'S SONS

Among the unique and interesting attraction presented by the windows of J. Orndorff's Sons is a bushel basket of bright new pennies. The lucky person who guesses nearest the number will be presented with a handsome doll 36 inches high. In the same window is a life size doll, said to be one of the handsomest ever imported. One window presents a machine and blacksmith shop in full operation, run by a miniature steam engine in full view.

AT WM. F. DERR'S

One of the most beautiful and Christmas like places to be seen in many days' travel is the Model Emporium of Wm. F. Derr. Before entering the store you are greeted by two magnificent window displays, which are truly works of art. The east window represents a lovely and very home-like room, on the night before Christmas. Santa Claus has just finished decorating the beautiful tree and left an abundance of gifts on the floor for the children, then bidding all "A Good Night and a Merry Christmas"

is just about to take his departure through the fireplace and chimney. The West window represents a snow-scene, and shoppers from the Model Emporium on Christmas Eve. This is a very striking window and worth looking at. Upon entering the store your eyes behold one of the grandest displays ever seen in Westminster, or even elsewhere. But we did not intent to enter stores, only to speak of the show windows. Every store is elaborately prepared for Christmas, and each has spent a considerable sum in display and attractions.

At Matthews & Myers' the display of pictures, frames and stationery, is beautiful. At all the grocery, furniture and hardware stores there is a display of the best and handsomest things in the stock, notably that of T. W. Mather, J. Wesley Biggs, S. R. White, E. O. Grimes, N. I. Gorsuch & Sons, M. W. Babylon, J. W. Shunk, George W. Morningstar, Gilbert & Gehr, M. Schaeffer & Co., Strasburger's, A. H. Wentz, W. L. Reaver, the carriage works of F. K. Herr & Bro. and John E. Eckenrode, the tailoring establishments of Sharrer & Gorsuch and John T. Anders, the several drug stores, and all the bakers, green grocers and butchers."

As mentioned in the article, the paper also carried extensive local store advertising. Both sources provide information about what was popular and how storekeepers marketed their merchandise. Photo caption: M. Schneeberger and his employees stand in front of his store at 33 E. Main St. in Westminster in c.1890. He and other merchants prepared elaborate storefront decorations for the holiday season in the 1890s. Also visible in this image is photographer Julius Hebbel's outdoor display unit and the old Westminster Fire Department Building. Historical Society of Carroll County Copy Photograph Collection.