

# Bakersfield's 1915 Christmas Eve Celebration

By Gilbert P. Gia

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**A**s darkness settled over downtown on December 24, 1915, preparations for Bakersfield's Christmas Eve celebration were almost done, and the magnificent municipal Christmas tree by the court house was already an impressive nighttime spectacle. All day, busy and willing hands had draped it with electric lights, stringed popcorn, festoons of tinsel, brilliantly-hued paper, cornucopias and sparkling metal ornaments. At the pinnacle of the living tree stood a glittering star symbolizing the East.

Open trucks appeared at 19th and G Streets for a pilgrimage of Yuletide carols and pleasant sounds. At 6 PM, a band, a bugler, Santa and his young Santas, and choirs from the town's six elementary schools -- Emerson, Williams, Washington, Lowell, Bryant, and Franklin -- boarded the vehicles, and drivers started on paths that took the singers from Brundage to 27th Street and from Oak to King. Autos trailed behind, whose owners had joined in the event to help warm the hearts of those at home celebrating the Christmas Eve.

As the child choirs made their way through neighborhoods, every carol and Christmas song was sung, and festive caravans also stopped in front of the county hospital, the Detention Home, and the orphanage. There at the Children's Shelter the little ones peeped from windows and then assembled out on the sidewalk to reply with a Christmas carol of their own.

By 7 PM the choirs were back at the municipal tree where a gathering of grown-ups and countless children filled the lawn and spilled over onto Truxtun Avenue. The band began to play, and the music of youthful voices lifted in unison enthusiastically. Their songs of Christmastide were something not soon forgotten.

Santa's turn finally came for the 3,000 waiting children. He ascended the platform by the tree and with jolly smiles and pleasant words distributed his bags of candy, nuts, popcorn and oranges. As the program ended, the multitude faded leisurely into the night. There had been no speaker, minister, or formality at this, the town's second annual Christmas Eve celebration.

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