

Rethinking of Old Orleans

Vol. XXII

C.W. Lattin, County Historian

No. 52

12-27-00

Charles and Ruth Howard

For those of us who knew Charles Howard, a Christmas never comes or goes without remembering this remarkable individual.

His imagination was unlimited, his character supreme and his portrayal of Santa Claus was with complete integrity right down to every last detail. He often used to say they err who think Santa Claus enters through the chimney. "He enters through the heart."

It was to this philosophy that he generated the meaning of Christmas to untold believing children for several generations.

Our picture is a Christmas card which Charles and Ruth Howard mailed to their friends around 1958 or 1959. It simply stated "Seasons Greetings" and was sent to my grandparents who were neighbors. On the back side of the card

Charles wrote: "Can you tell which is a dummy?" We note here that this photo was taken in Santa's workshop at Christmas Park.

Charles W. Howard was born in the town of Albion in 1896 to an old stock, farm family. He first took the part of Santa while still attending District School. He graduated from Albion High School in 1916. During World War I he set up a toy-making business in Medina but it soon failed so he went into farming.

In the 1920s he set up a Santa Claus toy shop in a front window of the J.B. Merrill Furniture Store in Albion. He gained fame by several very imaginative exhibits at the Orleans County Fair. In 1928 he created a miniature Niagara Falls using 10,000 gallons of cider.

In 1929 he brought about

the world's largest apple pie. In 1931 it was the world's largest cake measuring 14 feet in height. But the Santa Claus theme was still with him. In 1937 he established his world famous Santa Claus School for the training of department store Santas. In 1949 he became the Santa Claus in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, which he did until his death. In 1953 he began to turn his farm just west of Albion, into Christmas Park which delighted children for a generation or so. Unfortunately this operation went bankrupt and its contents were auctioned in 1968.

One local observer noted: "Charlie Howard never made a million dollars but he made a million friends." He indeed, touched millions as Santa Claus and will never be forgotten by those who knew him.



Ruth & Charles Howard at Christmas Park