



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

# Charles W. Howard Day is Saturday

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This Saturday has been designated Charles W. Howard Day in Albion.

Activities begin at 9 a.m. in front of the courthouse, when a procession of more than 100 Santas will lead the way to the First Methodist Church where Charles Howard was a lifelong member. Here, the Howard story will be told with an Oath Ceremony for Santas.

An overflow crowd is anticipated, therefore other church buildings at the courthouse square will be open for historical window and architectural appreciation, beginning at 10:30 a.m. and lasting through 6 p.m. This also includes the Cobblestone Church Museum at Childs.

From 3:30 to 6 p.m., as county historian, I will host a guided bus tour that will visit the Cobblestone Museum, site of Christmas



Park, Courthouse Square and Mount Albion Cemetery. Reservations for limited seating on the bus tour will only be available for signing up Saturday morning at the courthouse. The bus will depart at 3:30 p.m. from Erie Canal Schoolhouse (formerly St. Mary's School) on Brown Street.

The Erie Canal Schoolhouse has been designated "North Pole Central." Here, one will find Santa's Gift Shop, lunch items, the Harold Hudson Miniature Midway Exposition, Santa's Oath Exhibit and Charles Howard Santa Claus School and Christmas Park memorabilia.

Today's picture is a

panoramic view of Christmas Park taken about 50 years ago from the intersection of Gaines Basin Road and the railroad looking southwest onto the grounds. To the far left is the Howard residence, where Charles Howard established the world famous Santa Claus School in 1937.

The little building to the far left, originally a horse barn, was the first barn developed with a Christmas theme in the late 1940s. It was used as Santa's stable, sleigh and workshop. The other gambrel roof barn was later developed into a restaurant in the early 1950s, when the whole barnyard and ground became Christmas Park.

Our panoramic view also shows a Ferris wheel, Merry Go Round, roller coaster, miniature train ride and small buildings for Santa's petting zoo, which included goats, lamas, sheep, fowl and — of course — reindeer.

Charles Howard died in 1966, and Christmas Park closed in 1967, with contents being sold off at auction in 1968.

Reinhold Niebuhr, the 20th century liberal theologian, has written: "Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history." At the time the park closed, there was no groundswell to save it. In historical perspective, what a loss not only to our community, but to thousands of children who have missed the excitement of the theme park.

My final thought is: Not one person in a thousand has the strength of mind or goodness of heart to follow through on his visionary commitments with such zeal as did Charles W. Howard. He put Albion on the map! A day devoted to his memory, what he stood for and his accomplishments, now a fragmented part of our history, is well deserved.