

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Shown here is Santa Claus as lived and portrayed by Charles W. Howard 1896-1966. During his life time he engineered many community activities, all with great showmanship. The world's largest pie in 1929 and the world's largest cake, 1931, both at the Orleans County Fair, were only two of his spectacular ideas. In 1937 he established and opened his renowned Santa Claus School to train department store Santas. In 1949 he made his debut as Santa in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. In 1953 he began to convert his farm located at the junction of Route 31, Phipps Road and Gaines Basin Road, into his world famous Christmas Park. Here boys and girls could see Santa's stable, sleigh, toy shop, castle, Christmas Village, train, wishing well, and Santa's farm complete with a variety of animals.

By 1965 however, Christmas Park as a corporation was beginning to suffer serious financial problems which lead to bankruptcy. The following year of 1966 was the last season for Christmas Park. It was also on May Day of that year that Charles Howard suffered a fatal heart attack. Two days later the Medina Journal-Register printed an editorial which sums up the life of a man who still lives in the hearts of those who knew him. Here follows that tribute:

"If there ever was an opportunity of contemplating the values of living, it could be done in evaluating the life of Charlie Howard. Looking at it from a purely material point of view, here was a man who never caught up to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. He spent his entire lifetime of commercial pursuits in projects that never made many dollars and most of them ended in financial failure.

"Yet, in his lifetime he brought more joy and fulfillment to thousands of boys and girls than any living man. He had the ability of imparting to them complete confidence in the intangible something called Santa Claus when all the rest of the world about them was seemingly falling apart and men tearing at each others throats.

"There must have been times when Charlie Howard was saddened and discouraged.

"But we have seen him a hundred times or more and we have never seen his face wreathed in anything but a smile.

"He bounced from one failure to a new project with an enthusiasm and courage that could only be born in a being with vision and love of living. Regretfully, perhaps, this could not have been translated into greater financial rewards.

"But he has left something behind that could not be purchased with all the gold in Fort Knox. His countenance may have been hidden with the false appurtenances that attend the personification of Saint Nick; the boys and girls who sat on his knee or stood by his side and poured their young hearts out to him in frank confession, might have little knowledge of the physical attributes of the man; but beneath it all was the face of a man who was getting far more than he was receiving in spiritual wealth.

"Christmas times may come and go but there will be something about a Macy parade that will not just be the same.

"There will be thousands of other Santas bending an ear to thousands of other kids but in the books of many there was one supreme."

Charlie used to say 'They err who think Santa Claus enters through the chimney. He enters through the heart.'