

# Vintage photo: First Christmas tree arrives in St. Mary's Circle



The 1914 Syracuse Christmas tree arrives in St. Mary's Circle on Dec. 18, 1914. (Photo courtesy of the Onondaga Historical Association)



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Thousands turned out on Nov. 25, 2016 for the annual Christmas **tree lighting** in Clinton Square.

The Post-Standard the next day said that the holiday season begins then:

"The season doesn't start in a line outside of a department store. It doesn't start when the radio station switches to all-holiday music. No, the spirit of Christmas in Syracuse ignites when the community gathers to light the tree in Clinton Square."

It's been this way for over a hundred years, though the date and place may have changed.

Last year, the Onondaga Historical Association traced Syracuse's first public municipal **Christmas tree** to 1914.

The 40-foot-tall hemlock was placed in St. Mary's Circle, now Columbus Circle, and the lighting festivities took place on Christmas Eve, not the day after Thanksgiving.

It took a crew of workmen employed by the Parks Department all day Dec. 17, 1914 to cut down the tree and load it onto a sleigh and bring it to the city. And it took a large part of the next day to erect in the circle.

It came from the State College of Forestry at Rockwell Springs and the Syracuse Herald called it "a handsome tree, easily the most suitable for its purpose."

"An eager gathering of bystanders" watched the process of unloading the tree and even more watched as it was hoisted with numerous poles and rope pulleys to its position in the center of the circle.

The tip of the tree was broken off when it was cut down, and a smaller tree was spliced "neatly on the tip." It was said to be "scarcely noticeable."

The newspaper hoped that a fresh snowfall would cover up the tracks of the workmen so that the tree would have "a natural and realistic appearance in the center of the circle."

Everything was ready for the lighting on Christmas Eve, the lights had been tested the night before.

The voices of a thousand children would be joined with church choirs from around the city on the steps of the cathedral to create "an upward paean to Christmas time in Syracuse."

On the steps of the courthouse, a pageant would be held to celebrate "The First Christmas."

With World War I raging across Europe, the schoolchildren would carry a "spray of evergreen," as a way to demand peace all over the world, "a peace such as exists tonight in Syracuse," the Herald wrote.



## Vintage photos: Remembering downtown Syracuse Christmas parades

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