

HAWARDEN...HOW IT ALL BEGAN

CHRISTMAS IN HAWARDEN

Chapter 48

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Christmas has always been a festive time in Hawarden. Even back in the 1800's Christmas was a time for celebration.

In 1883 a Christmas Ball was held at the Northwestern Eating House on Christmas night. History tells us that the approaching Leap year made all the girls giddy with anticipation.

1888 also reports holding a dance in the Hawarden Opera Hall on Christmas night sponsored by the Knights of Pythia's Lodge. Unlike present times when Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are reserved for Church and family events, the 19th century residents seemed to enjoy large gatherings which included all who wanted to participate. Obviously in that era travel was not an option during an Iowa, South Dakota winter, so the solution was to gather together and spend the holidays with your "community family".

In 1908, the Palace Roller Rink opened on Christmas afternoon for skating and in 1916 Mrs. Irvin Finch opened her home to over 125 people to enjoy and view her decorated tree.

In 1923 history reports a large gathering of people assembled around the Flag pole on main street at 6:30 PM Christmas Eve for singing Christmas Carols, a Christmas Service, and last but not least, the arrival of Santa Claus and his wagon full of treats for the children.

1928 heralded the city's First Annual Store Window Display contest. Bray's Furniture was the recipient of the first award, and merchants have continued to please customers and visitors with their yearly Christmas Window Displays. Window Displays became so popular that in 1995, the Hawarden Chamber of Commerce sponsored its first Living Windows Celebration which continued for several years. The stores on Main Street had live window displays and Santa Claus strolling, handing out treats to the anxious children. The high light of the evening was the Living Nativity complete with animals including 2 camels and at least ten local citizens who depicted the Holy Family, Shepherds and Wisemen. Other activities included special "Hi Tec" letters to Santa that could be faxed to the North Pole at Bomgaars, Pamida and the Hub. There were horse drawn wagon rides, and an electric train display at the old City Hall as well as bonfires located in the middle of Main Street to roast marshmallows; one of the last years there was even a Piñata to break at the end of Main Street. Living Windows was recently held in 2011 to welcome Hawarden's upcoming 125th Birthday.

The Depression of the 1930's did not dampen Hawarden's Christmas spirit. The Hawarden Chamber of Commerce sponsored "Window Shopping Days" and Hawarden Christmas lights were described as "brilliant". At this time, the Christmas lights consisted of several strings of colored lights strung across Main Street, sometimes covered with evergreen roping. 1936 was the year that Santa appeared with his sleigh pulled by six Shetland ponies. In 1939 Seal Van Sickle painted a Christmas scene depicting wisemen on the way to Bethlehem that was placed on the south end of Main Street.

The 1950's brought Chamber of Commerce Pancake days'; feeding 4500 pancakes to 2000 hungry shoppers, Saturday night weekly drawings, and free Saturday afternoon movies for the kids.

The decade of the '60s may be the decade that everyone loves best. Why? Not because of Santa Claus, not because of merchant programs, not because of contests and gifts. The "greatest gift" Hawarden ever received for Christmas happened in 1965 and was given to the residents and visitors by the Hawarden Chamber of Commerce and the City of

Hawarden; each paying one half the cost. The gift was one dozen strings of Christmas lights strung from lamppost to lamppost forming a canopy over Central Avenue. Looking at them from one end to the other gave the appearance that the lights continued on into infinity. The cost of the lights in 1965 was \$6000.00, but a 25% discount was given because all the lights were purchased in one year. Definitely one of Hawarden's BEST Christmas presents. The picture of the Christmas lights was posted on Face Book this year (2012) and there were over forty comments in just a few days. Comments like; "Main Street at its loveliest", "Love this", "One of my favorite memories of Hawarden", "The best", "I was just transported back to my childhood" and finally, "I will always miss these." It only takes a picture, or a memory to fill our hearts with warm thoughts of Hawarden and our time spent there. These lights lit up Hawarden for thirty-eight years from 1965 to 2003.

Sadly, age took its toll on our beautiful Christmas lights, and although they continued to look beautiful at night, their daytime appearance looked less than lovely or festive. The lights had deteriorated to the point that there were safety issues and needed to be replaced. A volunteer committee was formed to work as a group to earn money to purchase replacement lights for the community. "The Hawarden Lighting Committee" began a series of fundraising projects and within a year new lights were ready for Main Street. The committee continued a second year to provide lights for adjoining streets. The new lights consisted of outlining the Hawarden business district with over three thousand feet of white lights for the top of the main street buildings. These lights were installed by city employees on a volunteer basis in their free time; more evidence of Hawarden's volunteer spirit. Main street was also adorned with 24 wreaths with white lights and red bows during phase one of the project. Phase two in 2005 added additional lights going east and west on Tenth Street. The total cost of the project was \$15000.00

The Polar Express was held in 2004 and 2005 to sold-out crowds. Parents, grandparents, and children of all ages and sizes came to Hawarden in their pajamas with their favorite stuffed animal to ride the train and hear the story. Passengers boarded the train at Calliope Village. On the trains were helpers who passed out hot chocolate and cookies while The Polar Express story was read aloud by story tellers in each car. The decorated train traveled north over the bridge into South Dakota and returned to Calliope. Santa Claus handed out "Magic Bells" to all "who believed". L.G.Everist was the essential part of this successful project. They furnished the train, the tracks, the engineers and everything else needed to implement this train ride. The money raised from the Polar Express helped purchase Hawarden's new Christmas lights and was sponsored by the Lighting Committee.

The Hawarden Chamber of Commerce continues to promote Christmas in Hawarden. For many years, Christmas Scrip has been sponsored by the Hawarden merchants allowing customers to purchase \$100.00 in Scrip money for \$85.00. The Festival of Trees has become an annual event in Hawarden and has included an "Advance Preview Luncheon" in the past several years. Each year the exhibitors and the community are amazed with the new ideas and artistic designs that make up the beautiful trees.

Christmas in Hawarden; lights and decorations, churches, fellowship, fun, family, memories. That's what Christmas is to me. Merry Christmas Everyone.



