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“Once Upon a Christmas in Brownsville”

Christmas in Brownsville

The Atmosphere of Brownsville: I can imagine that the festive atmosphere of Brownsville during Christmas was like no other! From downtown bustling with people looking into decorated shop windows, to every home lit up with lights strung around their porches, beaming with color! And inside each of those homes telling a family's Christmas story of traditions passed down through the years, from the trees decorated with tinsel and homemade ornaments, down to the family recipes created for Christmas dinner.

The scenes family and friends would have seen walking up to their relatives decorated houses must have been breathtaking! I can imagine the atmosphere outside of the homes to be covered in a thick blanket of snow, since snow was falling almost everyday in December during this time. When the river was frozen, people were able to ice skate on certain parts of the river, and residents smelled smoke from coal burning furnaces and chimneys while enjoying the crisp air.

Another thing I can imagine is every street in Brownsville including downtown Brownsville being strung with big, colorful lights, and colorful tinsel being strung around light poles.

The most jolly image I can see is Brownsville residence being happy, jolly, and spirited as they experience Christmas carols sung by carolers around the town. I imagine that if you walk through Brownsville during Christmas you should immediately be filled with happiness, joy, festivity, and delightfulness, from the bright lights that are shining in your eyes to the enjoyment of knowing you are part of such an amazing town.

The 1950s was known as the “Golden Era Christmas” in Brownsville because this decade is often remembered as the peak of Brownsville Holiday Charm.

The Local Traditions in Brownsville: I can imagine the traditions in Brownsville during Christmas being filled with memories for the kids! Sledding down the snowy hills of Brownsville, specifically going down Cadwallader and sledding down the hill. Santa Claus visits the town via fire truck or parade to greet the kids of Brownsville at a local store or the park in the middle of downtown Brownsville. The kids may get a photo with Santa and maybe even get candy. I can imagine many of the historic churches in Brownsville hosting candlelight services, nativity plays, and carol singing.

Schools also host Christmas concerts, sung by the kids, in the school's auditorium. Another tradition that may have happened in Brownsville is every kid opening up presents from Santa on Christmas morning. I can imagine residents of Brownsville visiting the community Christmas tree and singing Christmas Carols while they hold hands around the tree. The last tradition I could imagine the people of Brownsville did is some people sending each other Christmas cards to spread kindness and joy.

Christmas Eve meant big family gatherings, that included a feast, attending something called a midnight mass and church services, then returning home to open a few gifts or set out some toys for the kids to open in the morning. Of course not forgetting Santa's Christmas milk and cookies! There were probably some that weren't able to do some of their traditions because of the low economy after WWII, but found ways to still make it special.

Shopping in Brownsville During Christmas Most families did their Christmas shopping right inside of the town of Brownsville, but usually the Christmas season was characterized by shopping exclusively in the busy downtown area, before large retail stores and

malls dominated. Some stores that were the center of bustling Brownsville were Murphy's Store, M&S Shoe Store, Karts, Sidlers, Authenrights, Brownsville Hardware, Winters Jewelry, Krause Furniture, McNeany's, and WoolWorths.

These types of stores vary from being able to shop for clothes, decorations, and household items, and furniture. During Christmas time these stores would give out very good discounts and display them in the front windows of the store. The colorful lights and Christmas displays attracted shoppers to come in for a personal shopping experience, where the workers knew the familiar faces, and sometimes new faces of visitors from all around! The store front decor, I can imagine, was decorated with toy trains, nativity scenes, artificial snow, and rotating Christmas displays.

I can imagine needing a fancy suit, walking downtown in Brownsville with all the decorations in the stores, lights being strung over the streets and walking up to a very well decorated front window with dresses, suits, and coats and some Christmas decorations with a sign above this saying "Cohen's Furniture." I would have shopped at R.S. Goldsteins to pick out my Christmas best!

Brownsville didn't have a toy store really, but several establishments expanded into the area seasonally. Besides Murphys, Coulters Hardware, near Fiddles on Water Street put a line of toys out at Christmas.

To buy a Christmas tree people would go to Sheehan's Market, reached taking a narrow arched brick walkway to get to. It must have been so much fun anticipating getting a Christmas tree for their homes!

Decorations of Brownsville... I can imagine the decorations of Brownsville being very colorful and bright. With things like the streets being strung with big, colorful lights with tinsel around the light poles, and the front windows of every store being decorated. From my research East Main Street near Court Square was decorated with traditional bells, with lights and an illuminated cross. What a site that must have been!

A very big part of Brownsville decorations is the community tree. The tree was usually put up near the downtown area, decorated with large light bulbs, tinsel, and sometimes homemade ornaments made by children from the local school. I can imagine walking down Market Street with a lot of bright, colorful and well lit decorations going to the community tree to do many Christmas activities such as, taking a picture with Santa, and maybe Christmas feast/picnic.

Decades of Brownsville during Christmas... The mid 1940s was known as the “Post-War Christmas” in Brownsville because of WWII, there were simpler decorations because of the WWII rationing early in the decade. After 1945, the town celebrated Christmas more brightly decorated, with storefront decorations. I can still imagine citizens enjoying and appreciating all of the traditions.

Even with decorations changing between the 1940’s and throughout 1960’s, one thing that remained the same was the appreciation and dedication of the residents of Brownsville to make Christmas a special, memorable holiday. What a special era in Brownsville’s history to have experienced!

