The Eaton's Santa Claus Parade and the Making of a Metropolitan Spectacle, 1905–1982

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The Eaton's Santa Claus parade in Toronto emerged as form of "commercial spectacle," forged in the decades after the First World War, that blended older and newer forms of popular culture with the changing dynamics of family, audience, community, and commerce. Although it was a local event, its creators were part of a network of parade-makers in the big cities of North America, who shared ideas and drew upon the same cultural forms. With the advent of television, the Santa Claus parade reached a wider audience across the country. In between the parade's local performance and its Canadian audience lies the creation of a metropolitan spectacle, a local event that not only synthesized international ideas and fit into larger networks of cultural producers, but also had broader reach, projecting power and influence outward to a vast economic and cultural space.

La parade du père Noël d'Eaton s'est transformée en « spectacle commercial », forgé au fil des décennies qui ont suivi la Première Guerre mondiale, alliant des formes plus anciennes et plus modernes de culture populaire à la dynamique changeante de la famille, du public, de la collectivité et du commerce. Même s'il s'agissait d'un événement local, ses créateurs faisaient partie d'un réseau d'organisateurs de parades, s'étendant aux grandes villes d'Amérique du Nord, nourrissant les mêmes idées et s'inspirant des mêmes formes culturelles. L'avènement de la télévision a permis à la parade du père Noël d'atteindre un auditoire plus vaste à l'échelle du pays. Entre sa production locale et son auditoire canadien repose le berceau d'un spectacle métropolitain, d'un événement local qui, en plus d'être le creuset d'idées venues d'ailleurs et de se rallier à de plus vastes réseaux de producteurs culturels, jouissait d'un plus grand rayonnement, brillant de sa puissance et de son influence sur un vaste espace économique et culturel.

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TORONTO WAS hot in August 1982, but Alfreda Hall was upset about Christmas. Eaton's, the city's iconic department store, had just announced that it would no longer organize its annual Santa Claus Parade. "Is this another insidious encroachment on our Canadian and Christian heritage?" Hall wondered in a letter to the editor of the *Globe and Mail*. "Who will come to Santa's help? For the sake of our dear children and our delight in seeing them enjoy the world of fantasy . . . the parade must be preserved — for Toronto's tradition, too."[1] In an immediate sense, Hall's lament was understandable. For much of the twentieth century, the Eaton's Santa Claus Parade was the most popular moment in Toronto's festival calendar. Initiated in 1905 as a relatively simple public event, the parade was re-cast into a new form of local spectacle in the decades after the First World War, becoming the now-familiar mix of clowns, fairies, floats, bands, and (of course) jolly old St. Nick. Throughout this process of cultural invention, the parade was a key part — indeed, *the* key part — of the company's public relations strategy, the most dramatic of many efforts to insinuate what we would now call "the Eaton's brand" into local community life. By any standard, as Hall made clear, this project was successful. The year before the Eaton's announcement, tens of thousands of delighted spectators had lined the downtown route. The company itself, though falling on increasingly hard times, remained a "national institution," and the Eaton family was firmly ensconced in Toronto's business and philanthropic elite. The parade form that the company had pioneered was ubiquitous, attracting wide imitation by civic organizations, Chambers of Commerce, fraternal societies, and entrepreneurs across Main Street North America.

Hall's lament is analytically rich beyond the bare facts of popularity and longevity. In her mind, the parade was a fusion of secular, spiritual, fantastic, and familial traditions. Childhood, religion, heritage, civic identity, and national life were all at stake in its survival. My interest here, however, is in the intriguing but less obvious slippage of scale in Hall's lament, which begins with a national claim ("Canadian" heritage) and ends with a local one ("Toronto's tradition"). Perhaps Hall was just behaving as the typical Torontonian, imagining that local practices had broader Canadian resonance. Yet the dynamic she described was real. While thousands of spectators lined Toronto's sidewalks to enjoy the Eaton's parade each year, many more huddled in living rooms across the country to watch the event on television. In between the parade's local performance and its Canadian audience, I argue, lies the creation of a metropolitan spectacle, a local event that not only synthesized international ideas and fit into larger networks of cultural producers, but also had broader reach, projecting

1 Alfreda Hall, letter to editor, *Globe and Mail*, August 17, 1982, p. 1. On the cancellation, see *Globe and Mail*, August 10, 1982, p. 5, and August 16, 1982, p. 6.

power and influence outward from a cultural centre to a vast economic and cultural space.

To be sure, a parade begins as an intensely local event. For more than two centuries, North Americans (rich and poor, elite and ordinary, religious and secular) have organized parades, processions, and public performances for a wide range of purposes, from celebration through commemoration to protest. In recent decades, historians have viewed these events as opportunities to glimpse deep structures of thought and belief, analysing parades as texts or documents whose structure, content, and organization could be "read" to reveal clues to the always imperfect and incomplete processes of identity formation and meaning creation. "The parade offers a well rounded documentation of past culture," Mary Ryan wrote in a classic essay. "It conjured up an emotional power and aesthetic expressiveness that the simple literary formulation of ideas or values lacked. . . . It reveals, in a particularly powerful, publicly sanctioned way, how contemporaries construed, displayed, and saw the social order."[2] This scholarly project has revealed much of analytic interest: we now understand the importance of parades to invented traditions, social identity, the public sphere, urban space, and several other issues. Yet, even when they lead to broad conclusions, close readings of parades by their nature focus the analytic gaze on a small scale, stressing the local performance and the community politics of processional culture.[3] Historians have also tended to focus on what Brooks McNamara called "the great age of public celebrations," a long nineteenth century stretching back to the American Revolution and forward to the First World War, a period when vibrant parading cultures were sustained by their place in relatively compact urban geographies, by intense battles over democratic politics, and by conflicting norms of public behaviour.[4]

2 Mary Ryan, "The American Parade" in Lynn Hunt, *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 133, 138.

3 Influential works include Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Susan Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theater in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Scholars of public pageants have stressed the trans-local network of pageant producers, who often travelled on hire to organize events. See H. V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); David Glassberg, *American Public Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

4 Brooks McNamara, *Day of Jubilee: The Great Age of Public Celebrations in New York, 1788–1909* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Ryan, *Civic Wars*. For Toronto, see Peter Goheen, "The Assertion of Middle-class Claims to Public Space in Late Victorian Toronto," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 29 (2003), pp. 73–92; "Negotiating Access to Public Space in Mid-Nineteenth Century Toronto," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1994), pp. 430–49; and "Symbols in the Streets: Parades in Victorian Urban Canada," *Urban History Review*, vol. 18, no. 3 (February 1990), pp. 237–243. For a sampling of work on twentieth-century parades, see

As a commercial spectacle forged in the decades after the First World War, the Eaton's parade was as much an expression of continental consumer capitalism as of Toronto's parading culture. As Hall made clear, the procession had important local dynamics, but it also had a metropolitan history. Its creators were part of continental network of cultural producers, mainly tied to department store display departments, who invented new Christmas spectacles by synthesizing several trends in commerce and popular culture. These parade-makers shared a common set of influences and marshalled a similar set of cultural resources — they drew their new parades, in other words, from a common cultural well. The connections went deeper, however — department store parade-makers consciously communicated, forming a loose but ongoing network of cultural producers in the big cities of North America. The Eaton's parade was metropolitan in another way as well. The company cast the parade outward and influenced local communities and audiences, first by literally moving the parade to other places, then by influencing local actors to come up with their own versions, and most importantly by broadcasting the spectacle through emerging forms of mass media.[5] Not surprisingly, neither side of this metropolitan dynamic — neither the movement of ideas nor the breadth of influence — was simple or seamless, but this framework does help to illuminate the power of the Eaton's parade, a local tradition with much larger import.

Both of these metropolitan dynamics paralleled Eaton's own place within the larger history of consumer capitalism. On one hand, the company was a local expression of international trends in mass retail, a Toronto and later Canadian version of the department stores that were helping to revolutionize consumer culture in Europe and the United States. On the other

Jim English, "Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2006), pp. 247–276; Jordan Stanger-Ross, "An Inviting Parish: Community without Locality in Postwar Italian Toronto," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 87, no. 3 (2006), pp. 381–407; Timothy Kelly, "Suburbanization and the Decline of Catholic Public Ritual in Pittsburgh," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 28 (Winter 1994), pp. 311–330; Peter Jackson, "The Politics of the Streets: A Geography of Caribana," *Political Geography*, vol. 11, no. 2 (March 1992), pp. 130–151.

5 Canadian historians will no doubt recognize the metropolitan thesis here, which long ago aimed to show the importance of urban elites projecting their ideas and influence outward. See especially the brilliant (almost deconstructionist) discussion by J. M. S. Careless in "The Toronto *Globe* and Agrarian Radicalism, 1850–67," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1948), pp. 14–39, and his elaborations of the metropolitan thesis in "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1954), pp. 1–21, and *Frontier and Metropolis: Regions, Cities, and Identities in Canada before 1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). I draw on the metropolitan framework loosely and with conscious disregard of its full meaning and elaboration. My aim is modest — not to revisit the thesis or the many debates it engendered, but to understand one aspect of cultural production in the twentieth century. Nonetheless, I think elements of the metropolitan thesis do have much to offer recent discussions of "transnational history," so to a degree my analysis of the Eaton's parade tries to play on these two frameworks.

hand, the national scale of the parade loosely followed the company's project of building a coast-to-coast retail empire. It is symbolically striking, though certainly coincidental, that Eaton's opened its first branch store (located in Winnipeg) in the same year as it initiated the parade in Toronto. Over the following decades, Eaton's continued to spread its corporate tentacles outward, reaching for markets beyond its initial home base in Toronto, and the parade followed. This is a study, then, of the way Eaton's own metropolitan status shaped a local event within the broader impulses and institutions of North American consumer capitalism and made a Toronto parade into a larger national tradition.

For all its storied history, the Eaton's parade began somewhat inauspiciously. In 1905, Santa arrived at Union Station by train and travelled in a wagon through Toronto's central streets to Eaton's downtown store. By this time, Eaton's was already the dominant presence in the local retail scene. Founded as a dry goods store in 1869, the company grew progressively larger over subsequent decades. By the early twentieth century, its five-storey downtown store covered several acres, and sales reached across Canada through a popular mail-order catalogue.[6] Despite the company's dominance of the local retail scene, Santa's early journeys to the store were anything but spectacular. This "parade" was really just an extension of the company's indoor Christmas display, which at various points before 1905 featured a Toyland menagerie and a live Santa Claus. Though rudimentary as a spectacle, even by the standards of the time, the idea proved popular: crowds of children and parents arrived to greet the old saint, and, over the next decade, the company experimented with new characters and different routes, not always with great success. In 1913, eight live reindeer towed Santa, but they turned out to be too small to have any dramatic visual effect and too timid to endure the large and boisterous crowds. The following year, Santa made a 30-mile trek down Yonge Street (still the closest thing to a "main street" of the city) before arriving at Massey Hall for a concert and party. Along the way, many children ran out to greet the portly old saint, but, if company reminiscences are to be believed, some also ran out to pelt him with snowballs.[7]

6 See David Monod, *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Joy Santik, *Timothy Eaton and the Rise of his Department Store* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Cynthia Wright, "The Most Prominent Rendezvous of the Feminine Toronto: Eaton's College Street and the Organization of Shopping in Toronto, 1920–1950" (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1992); Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

7 Archives of Ontario [hereafter OA], T. Eaton Company Collection [hereafter EC], F229-162-0-585, Christmas – Santa Claus Parade – Description File, "History of T. Eaton Company Ltd. Santa Claus Parades"; *Toronto Star*, November 19, 1949, p. 2.

Figure 1:   Mother Goose Float, Santa Claus Parade 1930 (City of Toronto Archives, *Globe and Mail* Collection, Fonds 1266, Item 22538).

The modern and more familiar form began to emerge during the First World War. In 1916, seven floats (each representing a well-known nursery rhyme or fairy tale) joined Santa in the parade. This approach — presenting, in the company's words, a "whole cavalcade of dear, queer people from the story books, nursery rhymes, and picture pages" — was elaborated over the next few years and formed the basic structure of the parade well into the 1970s.[8] Santa, of course, anchored the procession, but Mother Goose also appeared every year (see Figure 1), while Cinderella, Humpty Dumpty, and Bo Peep were mainstays of the post-1920 decades. Over time, the company integrated characters from mass culture, ranging from specific icons from comic strips, radio shows, movies, and then television (for example, Amos and Andy, Mickey Mouse, the Lone Ranger, Yogi Bear, the Flintstones) to more generic cowboys, Indians, and Mounties. In between, an assortment of fairies, elves, animals, and exotic displays filled out the parade. Throughout this process of addition, subtraction, and

8 The 1916 floats were Cinderella in a Pumpkin Coach, the Old Woman who Lived in a Shoe, Miss Muffet, Little Boy Blue, Little Bo Beep, Mother Goose, and Little Red Riding Hood. See OA, EC, "History of T. Eaton Company Ltd. Santa Claus Parades." For the cavalcade quotation, see *Toronto Star*, November 18, 1927, p. 11.

Figure 2: Old Woman Who Lives in a Shoe Float, Santa Claus Parade 1945 (City of Toronto Archives, *Globe and Mail* Collection, Fonds 1266, Item 100238).

revision, however, "traditional" storybook characters remained the core of the spectacle (see Figure 2).[9]

This narrative strategy was somewhat novel. Unlike the great parading traditions that dominated the nineteenth century — the Glorious Twelfth, St. Patrick's Day, trades processions, coronation celebrations, and city anniversaries — the Santa Claus parade made no serious reference to civic, national, fraternal, ethnic, or religious identity. The parade was filled with people: children recruited from local schools sat on floats; teenagers pulled mini-displays or danced along the route; teachers dressed up to act as marshals; Eaton's employees skipped along as clowns and fairies. Identities were generally obscured, however: participants wore masks, make-up, or costumes; even children, easily recognized by their size and much appreciated for their cuteness, were dressed up and reduced to the generic adorable. In a way, masking and dressing up sent its own message. In this parade, identity was less important than theatre. Spectators would look in vain for the typical members of Toronto's Victorian and Edwardian era processional culture: the parade had no

9 The outline of parade characters from 1905 to 1975 is consolidated in "History of T. Eaton Company Ltd. Santa Claus Parades."

unions, no fraternal orders, no Orangemen, and no civic officials.[10] There were no churches, either. Though ostensibly marking a Christian holiday, the parade contained almost no biblical or religious references, and the few displays that did played more on character and story than on spiritual principles. In 1926, for example, Noah and his Ark appeared on a float, but the religious message was muted.[11] Indeed, there were few substantive references to the outside world at all: the company occasionally added touches of the moment, like national or historic symbols during significant anniversaries and celebrations of cultural diversity in the 1950s. Such references, however, were few in number, romantic or folkloric in thrust, and ruthlessly subjugated to the aesthetic agenda of the parade-makers.

The parade was more than its characters — it was a total assault on the senses. Visually, it combined motion, light, colour, inversion, juxtaposition, and distortion of scale into a thrilling display. Clowns spun around on gymnastic bars, mechanical dolls waved, heads bobbed up and down, mouths opened and closed, ferris wheels and mini-trains spun and whirled. Colour heightened the visual effect. "It was an extremely brilliant pageant that used all the colours on the futurists' palette," the *Star* enthused in 1926. Eaton's also created spectacle by distorting size and scale. Parade entries included "great tall creatures with huge heads" (1925), "clowns of gigantic proportion" (1928), a "Christmas cracker, big as a Zeppelin" (1929), and a candy cane "as long as a street car" (1930). Many presentations evoked a sense of whimsy, creating a comedic effect by, for example, dressing bears in suits like "ladies and gentlemen." The company was also fond of depicting the unusual and exotic, often playing on stereotypical images of Zulus, Eskimos, or sombrero-topped Mexicans. In 1936, nine "nubian slaves, each taller than the one ahead, with big golden faces and red lips, leered at everybody" on the sidewalks.[12] The parade was also loud. Many costumes had bells attached for "added jingle," and most characters carried noisemakers of various sorts. "It's tradition . . . that every parader carries something to blow, to jingle, whistle or wave," the company declared.[13] By the late 1930s, Santa was equipped with a microphone and loud speakers that "made his voice audible for hundreds of yards," a technological innovation that both overcame and contributed to the cacophonous effect of the parade. Bands were the loudest of all, blaring out Christmas carols and proliferating as time

10 For a summary, see Craig Heron and Steve Penfold, *The Workers' Festival: A History of Labour Day in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), chap. 1; Goheen, "Negotiating Access" and "Symbols in the Streets."

11 *Globe*, November 22, 1926, p. 13.

12 *Toronto Star*, November 20, 1926; November 17, 1928, p. 2; November 16, 1929, p. 27; November 13, 1936, p. 36; November 14, 1936, p. 11.

13 EC, OA, F229-151, J. A. Brockie Files [hereafter BF], Box 4, File: Santa Claus Parade, 1954, "Santa Claus Parade" (press release).

went on (from three or four in the 1920s to six and eight during the Depression and Second World War to almost a dozen by the late 1940s and early 1950s).[14]

None of this was unique or particularly surprising. Eaton's often claimed that it had invented the Santa Claus parade, having run the first such procession in the world in 1905. Such who-was-first boosterism seems less relevant, however, than the way the procession fit into an emerging, continent-wide culture of commercial expression. Indeed, as the parade took modern form after World War I, several other department stores began to mount their own Christmas pageants. In 1920, J. L. Hudson's of Detroit set up its own parade. Macy's of New York and Wannamaker's of Philadelphia followed in 1924, with Bamberger's of New Jersey and many others initiating their own spectacles in subsequent years. These Christmas pageants — which, over time, gravitated toward the American Thanksgiving weekend — were institutionally and aesthetically similar, organized by department stores that deployed the same basic characters and styles.[15] Hudson's first parade featured seven bands, ten storybook floats including Mother Goose, and several marchers with oversized *papier maché* heads. Macy's first parade adopted a similar strategy, with children's characters, floats of Robinson Crusoe and Little Red Riding Hood, and various costumed and whimsical marchers. In 1927, the company introduced oversized animal balloons, measuring more than two storeys tall, an element that soon became emblematic of the Macy's pageant; at the time, however, the balloons simply represented a particular take on the spectacle of size common to all the department store parades.[16]

Two factors — one broad and cultural, the other more precise and institutional — explain the similarity of department store Christmas parades. It was partly the result of everyone dipping into the same set of cultural influences, creating a spectacle by blending a variety of aesthetic trends and reworking familiar forms of performance and display. The parades owed something to public pageantry, particularly its heavy theatricality and its

14 *Display in Canada* (December–January 1950–1951), p. 23; *Toronto Star*, November 20, 1937, p. 2; "History of T. Eaton Company Ltd. Santa Claus Parades." On the importance of sound in historical experience, see Mark Smith, "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2007), pp. 841–858.

15 In a few cases, other commercial institutions took the lead, as in Chicago, where the State Street Business Association initiated the first Christmas procession in 1934.

16 On other Christmas parades, see William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: 1994); Karal Ann Marling, *Merry Christmas! Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). See also the picture books: Ronnie Minor and Laurie Anne Tamborino, *Detroit's Thanksgiving Day Parade* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2003); Robert Gripo and Christopher Huskins, *Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2004).

saccharine sentimentality.[17] The most powerful influences were less earnest and more popular, however. In many ways, department stores borrowed from circuses and circus parades, particularly their boisterous, colourful, noisy, and exotic performances: in 1931, Eaton's made this influence explicit, promising "a whole circus of animals and clowns and bands and wagons."[18] To an even greater extent than the larger operations that were stripping away the disreputable elements of the circus by the turn of the century, department stores took the style in sophisticated and artistic directions, turning this form of popular theatre toward more respectable and stable commercial ends.[19] Christmas pageants also resonated with the visual style of amusement parks and midways, where fair-goers confronted a boisterous atmosphere, frenetic motion, colourful design, and the distortion of scale. Places like Luna Park at Coney Island in New York set the international standard and became widely copied across North America. In Toronto, three large amusement parks operated at various points in the first quarter of the twentieth century: at Hanlan's Point from the 1880s, Scarboro Beach after 1907, and Sunnyside Beach after 1922. Not only did the invention of department store Christmas parades coincide with an upsurge in amusement park development across North America, but some parks had turned to parade-like pageants to attract attention, the most famous version (again) at Coney Island, where after 1903 the annual Mardi Gras carnival included a raucous procession with colourful floats and oversized costumes.[20]

Companies also created their spectacles by adapting contemporary styles of commercial display. Strategies of presentation in the parade — colour, motion, scale, juxtaposition, and abundance — merely extended standard Victorian and Edwardian methods of presenting commodities. These strategies were familiar to North Americans from industrial and commercial exhibitions, advertising, merchants' windows, and department

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17 Glassberg *American Historical Pageantry*; Nelles, *The Art of Nation Building*.

18 *Toronto Star*, November 13, 1931.

19 Janet Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Tina Loo and Carolyn Strange, "The Travelling Show Menace: Contested Regulation in Turn of the Century Ontario," *Law and Society Review*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1995), pp. 639–668.

20 On Coney Island, see John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Woody Register, *The Kid of Coney Island: Fred Thompson and the Rise of American Amusements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Gary Cross and John Walton, *The Playful Crowd: Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). On Toronto amusement parks, see Diane Beasley, "Walter Dean and Sunnyside: A Study of Waterfront Recreation in Toronto, 1880–1930" (MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1995); Mike Filey, *I Remember Sunnyside: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Era* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1996). On the Mardi Gras processsion, see Michael Immerso, *Coney Island: The People's Playground* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 122–123.

stores themselves. Across North America, department store windows in particular were the cutting edge of display, hosting elaborate presentations that became small but powerful forms of commercial theatre. Each year, urban residents eagerly anticipated Christmas windows in particular, with their miniature trains and ferris wheels, elaborate town scenes, and portrayals of Santa's workshop. In Toronto, Eaton's and cross-street rival Simpson's were the key agents in bringing this new commercial aesthetic to local consumers, undertaking an annual rivalry that pushed the windows to new heights of appeal. By the 1920s, across North America, these basic strategies were being professionalized and regularized into the dominant display aesthetic of the period, with specialists often taking the lead in designing or overseeing Christmas pageants. At Macy's, for example, pioneering commercial artist and puppeteer Tony Sarg designed the first oversized animal balloons, while at Eaton's, long-time parade producer Jack Brockie was merchandise display manager for the Toronto store.[21]

If the style of the parades synthesized several international trends in display and performance, their fantastic and storybook vocabularies drew on shifting trends both in Christmas and in amusement. Santa Claus and Mother Goose shared in a process of Victorian reinvention, so twentieth-century department stores inherited a series of tame but miraculous icons ripe for systematic commercialization. From the early nineteenth century, when images of Santa were heterogeneous, authoritarian, and not entirely respectable, St. Nick was tamed by the triple Victorian processes of standardization, domestification, and commercialization. By the 1880s, illustrators had steered Santa's early visual variety into more standard and familiar modern symbols: chubby, white beard, and red coat. Meanwhile, poems like Clement Clark Moore's "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" presented Santa as a jolly saint, distributing good cheer to North American families, essentially stripping him of his authoritarian streak while retaining his miraculous meanings.[22] Critics often contrast Santa and Christ as symbols of the contest between commerce and religion at Christmas, but Santa himself, although not fully Christian, was not fully secular either. Penny Restad notes that the Victorian Santa acted as a "medium through which children and adults . . . acted upon spiritual

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21 Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of Late Victorian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), and "Speaking Modern: Language, Culture, and Hegemony in Grocery Store Window Displays, 1887–1920," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 70, no. 3 (1989), pp. 285–310; William Leach, "Strategists of Display and the Production of Desire" in Simon Bronner, ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and the Display of Goods in America, 1880–1920* (New York: Norton, 1989), pp. 99–132; Register, *The Kid of Coney Island*, pp. 274–284, 293–297; Lorraine O'Donnell, "Visualizing the History of Women at Eaton's, 1869 to 1976," (PhD thesis, McGill University, 2002).

22 Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), pp. 70–79, 93–94.

principles. . .. Santa issued from the realm of dreams, hopes, wishes and beliefs, not from the realities and compromises necessary to negotiate contemporary life." Jean-Phillipe Warren makes a similar point in his study of Christmas in Quebec, noting that, as Santa rose to Christmas hegemony, he served not as a one-dimensional commercial icon but as a "total social phenomenon" that fused many symbolic meanings.[23] Paradoxically, as Warren and other scholars point out, Santa's non-commercial character made him an even more attractive promotional device: as a tame but fantastic figure, he was a perfect fit for marketers anxious to spin carnival meanings around their products.[24] Merchants even experimented with live Santas in their stores — Eaton's in 1903, only two years before sending him on his first trip through Toronto's streets. By 1910, the company had fully embraced the modern approach to Christmas displays, making Toyland into an elaborate and sumptuous "Place of Delight for Young and Old."[25]

In a parallel process, these same Victorian forces recreated fairy tales. Even into the early nineteenth century, fairy tales had been mainly for adults, but, over the course of the Victorian era, domesticity and commercialism re-shaped the genre to the parental aspirations of the emerging Euro-American middle classes. By the twentieth century, many commercial institutions were drawing on and extending this process of cultural selection, stripping the stories of their ambiguities and complexities and re-fashioning them into one-dimensional tales of fantasy and wonder. Walt Disney became the most powerful agent of this transformation, translating fairy tales into movies that were simple in story but rich in visual appeal.[26] This aspect of storybook characters was exactly what interested department stores like Eaton's. Christmas pageants by-passed the fairy tale genre's rich history in favour of evoking its sense of familiarity, fantasy, and image. One issue was simply practical: in aggregate, the

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23 Penny Restad, *Christmas in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 150–152; Jean-Phillipe Warren, *Hourra pour Santa Claus! La commercialisation de la saison des fêtes au Québec, 1885–1915* (Montreal: Boréal, 2006), pp. 103–104. See also Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Leslie Bella, *The Christmas Imperative: Leisure, Family, and Women's Work* (Halifax: Fernwood, 1992).

24 *Toronto Star*, December 30, 1954, p. 4; T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

25 The "Place of Delight" quotation is from an Eaton's advertisement in *Globe*, November 15, 1910, p. 16. On Eaton's Toyland, see Bella, *The Christmas Imperative*, pp. 155–156. On Toylands and delight, see Register, *The Kid of Coney Island*, pp. 293–297.

26 Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and their Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Lucy Rollin, *Cradle and All: A Cultural and Psychoanalytic Reading of Nursery Rhymes* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992); Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 25–80.

Eaton's parade was a mile long, but each individual presentation moved by quickly and needed to communicate its message succinctly, placing a premium on familiarity and visual impact. Even as it met this practical issue, Eaton's also engaged in a broader process of cultural selection and invention. Although based on storybook characters, the floats did very little storytelling. Eaton's used sounds and images to evoke a richer back story, but, like Disney, the company privileged colour, sound, and dramatic effect over moral context and literary meaning. In the simplest sense, where once there had been words and story, there were now sound and image. "There was almost too much for little heads to remember," Jack Karr wrote in 1954, "so that it blended into a kaleidoscope of gay colours and bouncing music."[27]

All of this meant that department store parades fit perfectly into the mainstream of the emerging emotional, visual, and commercial impulses of twentieth-century amusement. Children understood fairy tales, knew the visual approaches of the parade, and were increasingly the subjects of sustained commercialization. By the turn of the century, and even more after 1920, department stores, mass-market manufacturers, and copywriters worked to exploit the advertising potential of children, amplifying their pluck, desire, and sass, in contrast to their Victorian predecessors, who had been most interested in elaborating on children's innocence and passivity.[28] Eaton's aimed its parade squarely at children, a principle that connected broader cultural changes in childhood and Santa lore to the specific design strategies of the parade. "To a child, anything that is out of proportion is funny," noted parade producer Jack Brockie. "But we deliberately avoid anything grotesque or horrifying. . . . We want to evoke the child's sense of wonderment, not to frighten him."[29]

Fairy-tale wonder and Christmas magic had much wider appeal. Woody Register points to the importance of adult yearning for childhood play as an antidote to the sacrifices and challenges of modern life, a condition that emerged alongside new commercial amusements in the early twentieth century.[30] Santa Claus parades played on exactly this sense of adult yearning. Children in the crowds on Toronto's sidewalks, a *Star* reporter observed in 1928, "were outnumbered by the adults in a proportion of

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27 *Toronto Star*, November 15, 1954, p. 5.

28 Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), especially chap. 1; Gray Cross, *The Cute and The Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), chap. 3.

29 Cited in Margaret Munnoch, "The Santa Claus Parade" in Mary Burben and Flora McPherson, *Christmas in Canada* (Toronto: Dent, 1959), p. 116. Thanks to Craig Heron for sending along a copy of this piece. See also OA, EC, Jack Brockie Files [hereafter BF], Box 4, File: Santa Claus Parade, 1954, "Santa Claus Parade" (press release), p. 2.

30 Register, *The Kid of Coney Island*.

about three to one the majority being members of the stronger sex, sup-
posed to be working in their offices with their noses to the grindstone."
Across the twentieth century, adults spoke of being transformed into chil-
dren by the sight of Santa. "I haven't missed one for twelve years," claimed
one 72-year-old spectator in 1947. "It makes me feel young again." Four
years later, another Toronto resident made the same point more poetically:
"A shout went up as he passed by/ Time was forgotten then;/ For
captivated by the spell/ I was a child again."[31] Returning to an imagined
childhood was evoked by the feeling of fantasy built into the parade,
but also by the presence of happy children. In 1968, columnist Bruce
West admitted the parade could be an exhausting chore — "standing
there at the chilly curb with one youngster on your shoulders and
maybe one in each arm" — but advised heading downtown anyway.
"[Y]ou'll be able to witness that increasingly rare and precious thing
called wonder," he wrote. "No matter how old you may be it is still
possible ... to share in the wonder that is written on the face of a child
as those magic Christmas floats go by. How pleasant it is to peek once
more, even for a moment, at the land of color and glitter and make
believe, through the eyes of a child."[32] For adults like West, in other
words, the children in the crowd became a crucial part of the spectacle.

   If department store parades all played on international cultural trends,
they found their institutional foundation in the leading personalities and
emerging continental networks of commercial design and display. At
Eaton's, parade producer Jack Brockie, who took over the job in 1928
and served at its head for more than three decades, was merchandise
display manager for the Toronto store, responsible for the design of
price tags, special exhibits, fashion shows, the Christmas Toyland, and
street-level window displays. Unlike many parade designers in the
United States, however, he was not a professional artist, although he
became a member of the American Graphic Arts Society through his
work at Eaton's and, at various points in his life, he was involved with
amateur theatre in Toronto. Indeed, Brockie had a quite traditional back-
ground. He joined the company as a teenager in 1914 after graduating
from business school, eventually landing a permanent job supervising
the correspondence and secretarial Staff. Hoping to build *éspirit de
corps*, he mounted a series of successful plays and revues for Eaton's
employees. This "flair" earned him a transfer to Merchandise Display,
where he soon found himself at the helm of the Santa Claus parade.

31 *Toronto Star*, November 17, 1928, p. 2, and November 15, 1947, p. 2; poem by Helen Hill Young,
    Toronto Star, November 17, 1951, p. 6.
32 *Globe and Mail*, November 15, 1968, p. 27. On adult yearning for childhood fun as one of the central
    experiences of twentieth-century masculinity and consumerism, see Register, *The Kid of Coney
    Island*.

Brockie's skills, then, were perfectly suited to the corporatization of wonder. Combining business training, organizational proficiency, and a natural (rather than formally taught) artistic sensibility, he was the man in the grey flannel suit with an eye for colour.[33] Over time, Brockie built a permanent staff of professional artists, sculptors, designers, and trades-men. Throughout this process, key staff did long service: costume designer Margaret Morrison started in 1932 and continued for more than four decades, while construction supervisor Jim Carmichael joined in 1952 and stayed for more than 20 years. Even when Brockie relinquished his duties in 1963, not much changed. His replacement, Jack Clarke, who had been connected with the parade since the early 1940s, took over the Santa Claus duties as part of his new job as Toronto area display manager.[34]

In their backgrounds, inspirations, artistic approaches, and professional networks, Brockie, Clarke, and their staffs operated in a North American commercial context. Not only did Brockie and Clarke borrow ideas from a mass culture that was North American rather than local and national in scope (amusement parks, radio, movies, and later televi-sion); they also consciously cribbed from other, similar parades. In 1948, Eaton's developed its Punkinhead character to respond to Montgomery Ward's successful invention of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer.[35] For other ideas, both Brockie and Clarke collected images and newspaper clip-pings of the Rose Bowl parade, Macy's Thanksgiving Parade, and similar processions by Bamberger's of New Jersey and Hudson's of Detroit.[36] This continental context fit the broader corporate history of Eaton's. Though widely perceived as a Canadian icon, from the beginning Eaton's was mainly a local expression of broader developments in North American and European retailing. Company founder Timothy Eaton, a thrifty and hard-working Victorian Methodist who nonetheless revolutionized the local retail scene, would have fit nicely alongside more famous

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33 On Brockie, see OA, EC, F229-221-0-6, Eaton's Archives Office People Files, Box 1, "Brockie, J. A. – Toronto, Ontario." On art and business, see Register, *The Kid of Coney Island*; David Garland, *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 68–97.

34 "March of Rhymes," *The Pru Echo*, untitled story in *Northern Circuit*, and untitled story from *Gossip Magazine*, all in OA, EC, F229-162-0-575, File: Christmas – Santa Claus Parade – Clippings; *Canadian Business* (November 1955), p 86; Bella, *The Christmas Imperative*, pp. 162–170. On Clarke, see OA, EC, F-229-81, Eaton's Santa Claus Parade Files [hereafter Santa Files], Box 1, File: Santa Claus parade, Minutes and Arrangements, 1972, "Parade Personalities" (press release).

35 This idea came together in the first half of 1948. See BF, Box 4, File 118: Sales Promotion Meeting Minutes, meetings of January 2, 1948, June 15, 1948, June 22, 1948, and September 28, 1948.

36 See, for example, miscellaneous clippings in BF, Box 4, file: Santa Claus Parade, 1956, Part I; OA, EC, F229-308, Box B-427, Eaton's Archives Photographic and Documentary Art Subject Files, File: Christmas – USA – New York – Santa Claus Parade – Macy's (Jack Brockie from Ed Hill), miscellaneous photographs.

American department store entrepreneurs, and his successors kept their eyes on international developments. The company operated buying offices in New York, London, and other global commercial centres, and company representatives travelled widely to investigate new retailing ideas (to New York, for example, to investigate the self-service system during the First World War).[37]

Still, Brockie adapted international ideas more than he copied them. While the Eaton's parade was broadly similar to the Macy's or Hudson's pageants, it was hardly identical. Indeed, observers often noted, and Brockie often highlighted, the distinctiveness of the Eaton's parade. "Parade planners are determined their Christmas welcome to Santa will never become the chorus-girl, commercial television-slanted circus which some American cities present," the *Globe and Mail* reported in 1959. To be sure, Eaton's promoted the spectacle heavily with elaborate full-page ads, lengthy press releases, special colouring books featuring each float, and (most obviously) the route of the procession, which after 1917 led spectators to Eaton's flagship store at Yonge and Queen, where Santa ascended through a window to Toyland.[38] Still, while the parade left little doubt as to its corporate identity, "Eaton's" was initially not deeply or explicitly inscribed into the spectacle itself, either by words or symbols. Nor did the parade specifically implore consumers to buy. Even when it dipped into new forms of mass culture, the company consciously eschewed what it saw as the hyper-celebrity, overt commercialism, and rocket-ship futurism of American parades, preferring characters like Yogi Bear and Mickey Mouse that extended and updated the "traditional" children's storybook theme. "They took the idea of the parade from us," one Eaton's official declared in 1951. "But we took our idea from tradition: we kept to happy, dreamlike scenes that have illuminated the childhood of people for more than half a century."[39] These claims tend to exaggerate the national differences, however, since not all American parades were identical. Copying Macy's, Bamberger's initially experimented with large animal balloons, but soon gave up on the idea and returned to oversized *papier maché* characters. Several American parades, moreover, did not use celebrities nearly as extensively as Macy's.[40] Each department store parade,

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37   See Santik, *Timothy Eaton*; Monod, *Store Wars*; O'Donnell, "Visualizing the History of Women"; Wright, "The Most Prominent Rendezvous"; Belisle, *Retail Nation*, pp. 13–44. On the broader network of department store entrepreneurs, see Leach, *Land of Desire*.

38   "History of T. Eaton Company Ltd. Santa Claus Parades."

39   *Globe and Mail*, November 14, 1959; clipping from *Northern Circuit* magazine, 1951, in OA, EC, F229-162-0-575, File: Christmas – Santa Claus Parade – Clippings. Brockie also noted that the company consciously avoided futuristic icons such as UFOs and rocket ships. There were also no human celebrities in the Eaton's parade, a contrast with Macy's, which often featured television or movie actors on floats.

then, offered a local interpretation of similar narrative and aesthetic strategies (colour, distortion of scale, fantasy, and wonder).

In this sense, Eaton's parade was not really a Canadian or Toronto spectacle at all, but a particular version of a North American culture of commercial processions. This dynamic offered a new slant on the longstanding continental character of Canadian popular culture. Canadian scholars long ago gave up on imperial analogies to describe the influence of American culture in Canada, turning instead to concepts like "appropriation" and "reinterpretation" to explore the subtleties and nuances in the reception of American products in Canada.[41] Christmas parades represented a different pattern. Ideas flowed across the border, but these transnational influences were more a function of metropolitanism than Americanization. Brockie was not just a cultural broker transferring ideas from American metropole to Canadian hinterland, nor was he simply "reinterpreting" or "appropriating" American concepts for local consumption. Instead, Brockie and his staff were active and important participants in a broad network of corporate parade-makers in large cities across North America. The flow of ideas was circular and reciprocal. Some American department stores made their debt to Eaton's clear. In the 1920s, Hudson's in Detroit consciously borrowed the parade idea from Eaton's, while Macy's even contacted Eaton's for help, though a plan to borrow floats did not work out.[42] Over time, broader, deeper and more systematic links were formed. Key Eaton's staff often attended American Christmas parades and wrote reports, while American officials visited Toronto and did the same. Reports included notations on the most interesting floats, hand-drawn sketches of noteworthy presentations, and overall assessments of an event's effect. Friendly notes followed, offering thanks for hospitalities that had been extended by local officials to out of town visitors. These yearly travels forged both formal and informal relationships among metropolitan parade-makers, a network in which borrowing, copying, and courtesy were common and expected.[43]

40 *New York Times*, November 29, 1935, p. 16; Minor and Tamborino, *Detroit's Thanksgiving Day Parade.*

41 For Canada, see especially David H. Flaherty and Frank E. Manning, eds., *The Beaver Bites Back? American Popular Culture in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993). The dialogue of American export and local consumption is a standard theme in many studies of American culture abroad. For a general discussion, see Mel van Elteren, "Rethinking Americanization Abroad: Toward a Critical Alternative to Prevailing Paradigms," *Journal of American Culture*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 345–367.

42 Leach, *Land of Desire*, p. 334.

43 See, for example, BF, Box 5, File: Macy Parade, Bamberger's, "Observations by M. Morrison – Three American Parades." See also BF, Box 4, File 116, Sales Promotion Meeting Minutes, meeting of November 13, 1945; BF, Box 4, File 117, Sales Promotion Meeting Minutes, meeting of November 4, 1947; BF, Box 5, File 143, Miscellaneous Reports, Staff Trips, 1944–1945.

These metropolitan links also set department store parades apart from the Christmas pageants that were proliferating in communities of all sizes across North America. Like all good metropolitan actors, department store parade-makers projected their new form outward, a dynamic that intersected with the efforts of many local organizers to mount their own Christmas spectacles. This metropolitan influence was often direct: organizers from many Ontario communities contacted Eaton's for ideas. In such cases, Brockie was an expert offering advice to amateurs, not a colleague exchanging courtesies with like-minded professionals; nor is there much evidence that Brockie established ongoing or reciprocal relationships with local organizers. More importantly, as the parade idea moved into these smaller centres, it was translated into local vernaculars. After organizers visited Eaton's, they returned to their communities to arrange more broadly civic events, with one institution spearheading a parade that took in a wide range of community groups. In Sudbury, Ontario, for example, the Junior Chamber of Commerce organized the first parade in 1958 and contacted Eaton's for help; Brockie invited the group to lunch in Toronto to offer advice.[44] Sudbury's first parade was small but successful. Over time, local organizers built a larger spectacle that looked much like Eaton's more famous version, complete with elaborate *papier maché* floats, storybook characters, clowns, and elves. Its structure, however, was thoroughly civic, including politicians, community institutions, ethnic groups, and several local businesses. If the Sudbury parade never approximated the entire local public — unions, for example, were ubiquitous in the city but little represented in the early parades — it nonetheless relied on what the parade marshal called the "cooperation" of many members of the community.[45] By contrast, Eaton's organized and controlled its entire parade from front to back, recruiting local students to play pre-assigned roles within a rigidly structured presentation (one year, Brockie even declared, "paraders with spectacles — taboo"[46]). In Sudbury, Santa was a local celebrity; in Toronto, he remained a nameless corporate employee.[47] In this sense, the Eaton's pageant and the

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44 BF, Box 5, Santa Claus Parade, 1958, Part II, Barry Cheeseman, Chairman, Programme Committee, Sudbury Junior Chamber of Commerce to Brockie, September 11, 1958; Brockie to Cheeseman, September 15, 1958.

45 On Sudbury parade, see *Sudbury Daily Star*, November 22, 1958, pp. 1, 3; November 21, 1959, pp. 1, 3; November 26, 1960, pp. 3, 30; November 25, 1961, p. 27; November 24, 1962, p. 14.

46 BF, Box 4, File: Santa Claus Parade, 1937–41, "Comments Re: 1939 Santa Claus Parade and Suggestions for 1940," November 22, 1939.

47 For many years, Wilf Salo played Sudbury's Santa. Salo had deep connections in the community. Born in 1907, he had arrived in Sudbury at the age of 11, when his family migrated from Michigan. As an adult, he was an important figure in the local retail scene, both as floor manager at Silverman's for 36 years and as a small-business owner. He was also heavily involved in community and fraternal organizations like the Lions Club and the Shriners, and played Santa on a local television show for 35 years in addition to his lead role in the local Christmas parade. See

proliferating local parades were aesthetically similar but organizationally distinct. Eaton's shared with Macy's, Hudson's, and other department stores a distinctly corporate-metropolitan version of the Santa Claus parade.

Community parades like the one in Sudbury were also intensely local, while Eaton's operated on a much larger scale. In Toronto, Eaton's was one of the anchors of downtown retail space, but from there, the company extended its corporate tentacles across the country. Early in its history, it published massive numbers of its iconic catalogue, set up a coast-to-coast mail-order service, and opened a branch store in Winnipeg (1905). In the 1920s, it opened outlets in Montreal, Halifax, and Moncton, and, by the end of the decade, the company's sales totalled 58 per cent of all department store revenues in Canada. After the Second World War, it moved into suburban shopping centres and opened more branch stores. By 1962, the company operated 72 stores and 345 catalogue sales offices and distributed 17 million catalogues.[48] Reflecting the company's national aspirations, Eaton's began organizing parades in Winnipeg and Montreal in the 1920s, often simply shipping parts of the Toronto parade and adding some locally generated content. Eaton's also exploited emerging media technologies to broadcast the parade to wider audiences. Radio and newspaper were only partly conducive to parade coverage, but film and later television offered exciting possibilities. In the 1930s (building on earlier, more modest efforts), Eaton's began distributing movies of the parade across the country to theatres, schools, libraries, and volunteer groups; in 1952, it took the parade onto television.[49]

In reaching out to a broader audience, television was an important turning point, raising both possibilities and challenges. In New York, Macy's had already demonstrated the potential of the new medium with an experimental broadcast in 1939 and more regularized local coverage beginning in 1945. Four years later, CBS began to feed its coverage to other American cities over its network. At a time when the United States had more than 100 stations and almost one million television-equipped households, the New York parade could garner wide appeal. Television in Canada was comparatively underdeveloped, however, with

"Wilf Salo: Mr. Santa Claus" in Oiva Saarinen, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Historical Geography of the Finns in the Sudbury Area* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Lauier University Press, 1999), pp. 246–247.

48 See Belisle, *Retail Nation*; Bella, *The Christmas Imperative*, pp. 147–148; Monod, *Store Wars*, pp. 122–124; Thelma Dennis, "Eaton's Catalogue: Furnishings for Rural Alberta, 1886–1930," *Alberta History*, vol. 37, no. 2 (1989), pp. 21–31; Cynthia Wright, "Rewriting the Modern: Reflections on Race, Nation, and the Death of a Department Store," *Histoire sociale – Social History*, vol. 35, no. 69 (May 2000), pp. 153–168.

49 "History of T. Eaton Company Ltd. Santa Claus Parades."

no home-grown stations and only 3,600 television sets in the country (mostly in urban Ontario where viewers could pick up signals from nearby American cities).[50] While the Eaton's parade made its first appearance on television as soon as Canadian stations emerged in 1952 (local outlets in Toronto and Montreal), Canada had no regular system of coast-to-coast broadcasting until 1958, when the government-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) completed its microwave network. Even then, on the ground, the CBC remained a hybrid of major-city stations operated by the corporation and affiliated private licensees who retained considerable local autonomy.[51] As a result, there was no consistent policy on showing the parade: some stations did so as a public service; others required Eaton's to sponsor the broadcast. The procedure seemed to change from year to year.[52]

Initially, then, parade coverage could be frustratingly inconsistent. "Saturday morning four little children lined up in front of our rabbit ear equipped TV set to see the Santa Claus Parade," Jane Warren of Barrie, Ontario, informed the company in 1957. "They waited in vain. We can only receive our local station." Warren was hardly alone. That year, Eaton's received dozens of similar letters of complaint from viewers — most located, like Warren, in small communities a few hours north of Toronto — denied the chance to watch the parade on their local stations because Eaton's had declined to sponsor the broadcast. In the short term, the letters highlighted the rudimentary state of the Canadian networks and undeveloped potential of the broadcast. Over time, the problems of uneven broadcasting declined. By 1960, 47 stations operated in Canada and three-quarters of families had TV sets. The arrival of a second, private national network (dubbed CTV), with its own coast-to-coast relay system by 1963, increased the depth and coverage of Canadian television.[53] By the early 1970s, the parade broadcast regularly reached almost three million Canadian viewers over more than 60 stations from coast to coast, an impressive tally in a country with just under 22 million residents thinly scattered across a vast geography.[54] "Television

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50 *New York Times*, November 21, 1949, p. 44; Mary Vipond, *Mass Media in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 2000), p. 44.

51 Paul Rutherford, *When Television was Young: Primetime Canada, 1952–67* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 41–51.

52 BF, Box 5, File: Santa Claus Parade, 1955, Minutes of Santa Claus Parade Committee Held in Georgian Room, November 7, 1955; BF, Box 5, File: Santa Claus Parade, 1956, Part II, Minutes of Santa Claus Parade Committee Held in Georgian Room; Santa Files, Box 1, File: Santa Claus Parade, Minutes and Arrangements, 1961–1964, Minutes of the Special Committee Meeting, October 24, 1961.

53 Vipond, *Mass Media*, pp. 45–46; Rutherford, *When Television Was Young*, pp. 104–113.

54 In 1972, CTV (the national private broadcaster) attracted 1,287,000 viewers on 23 stations and the CBC (the national public broadcaster) 1,624,000 on 45 stations. See Santa Files, Box 1, File: Arrangements, 1973, "Phone Message for Clarke from Rick Lee of CTV."

coverage has become as important as the event itself," one television reporter noted in 1973, "reaching millions more children across the country in places as far away as Prince Rupert, British Columbia and St. John's, Newfoundland." Indeed, by this point, audiences were continental in scope. Beginning in 1963, the American-network CBS slotted Toronto highlights into its Thanksgiving Parade Jubilee, which was centred on the Macy's procession but also included the Gimbel parade in Philadelphia and the J. L. Hudson parade in Detroit, opening all these spectacles to an audience approaching 70 million.[55]

In this sense, if the 1957 letters expressed the structural limitations of television at the time, they might also be read as powerful omens of the parade as media event, as artefacts of emerging forms of virtual connection between company and audience. Several correspondents carefully enumerated their recent purchases, while others asserted a modern moral economy of consumerism, suggesting that their longtime patronage, the Christmas spirit, the parade tradition, or the company's Canadian ownership created an obligation of loyalty beyond any economic calculus. "You may not realize it," one mother wrote, "but Eaton's belongs to Canada." For these small-town residents, the Eaton's broadcast quickly became a tangible symbol of the "consideration" the company owed to Canadians.[56] More intriguing was the way the letters spoke to the nature of connections between the Toronto event and a wider audience. Some letter-writers that year saw the broadcast as continuing and reinforcing their own childhood experiences in the Toronto crowd, an opportunity to relive the joy and to pass it on to their children. "When I was a child in Toronto we never missed the Eaton's parade," one mother told the company. "Now my children have enjoyed it for years from a distance through the air waves. They were all in front of the set this year as usual waiting, when nothing happened." Yet many others noted that they had never seen the parade in person at all; their only connection was a form of "festive television," one that nonetheless held a powerful appeal.[57] "My children have not seen the parade besides on TV, nor have I myself," wrote one disgruntled mother, "so you disappointed many a child and adult." "I never got to Toronto to see the Parade when I was a child," wrote another. "It was just something we read about ... [so] *it would be deeply appreciated if you would put the Parade over CKVR TV*

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55 *Starweek*, November 11–18, 1972, n.p; *New York Times*, November 17, 1963, p. X17.

56 See BF, Box 5, File: Santa Claus Parade, 1957, Part III.

57 Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katzis, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 2. For perceptive thoughts on the relationship between communication and experience, see Gerald Friesen, *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

Channel 3 too in the years to come." In a very real sense, the parade's television age had begun.

Delivering on the promise of such virtual connections raised several narrative difficulties. Showing a parade on television is a deceptively simple proposition: it was easy enough (and from a sight-line point of view, even better) to simulate the act of spectatorship by placing a camera on a raised platform at a particular point along the route; the new medium also required only a few design changes, including new colours that transferred better to screen, a shorter parade that fit the 30-minute segments of broadcast time, and signs along the route to remind marchers to smile for the cameras.[58] These were hardly dramatic innovations, but, once the spectacle was removed from its specific urban context, the nature of audience and the terms of communication were fundamentally altered.[59] Crowds on the street and audiences in living rooms were watching the same parade, but they were hardly experiencing the same spectacle. A television screen (until the 1970s, mainly black and white[60]) could not evoke the parade's scale or colour, its limited speaker could not convey the sound, and neither could provide the sense of carnival and excitement in the streets. In this sense, as with any media event, the central challenge was not to *show* the parade — once TV was truly national, that was easy enough — but to *evoke* it, to create a television experience that was more than simply a series of images on the screen.[61]

In this context, commentary became crucial. The broadcast spectacle required a mediating voice between parade and viewer, both to describe what was being seen and to communicate the broader excitement of the moment. Eaton's took a particular interest in this aspect of the broadcast, since the commentator had to do more than describe and needed a narrative style that evoked the emotional spirit of the parade. The company learned that comedians, hosts of variety shows, and children's performers worked better than news anchors.[62] Once commentators were chosen,

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58 See, for example, Santa Files, Box 1, File: Santa Claus Parade, Minutes and Arrangements, 1966, "Marshals' Responsibility During Parade."

59 On this theme, see Dayan and Katzis, *Media Events*; Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Mike Huggins, "Projecting the Visual: British Newsreels, Soccer, and Popular Culture, 1918–1939," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2007), pp. 80–102; David Morley, *Television, Audiences, and Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750–1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

60 Colour television, introduced in Canada in 1966, remained a minority experience until the late 1970s. See Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Bulletin 62-202, *Household Facilities and Equipment*, 1977.

61 Dayan and Katzis, *Media Events*.

62 Santa Files, Box 1, File: Santa Claus Parade, Minutes and Arrangements, 1966; Santa Files, Box 1, File: Santa Claus Parade, Minutes and Arrangements, 1969, letter to Mr J. Bruce, Advertising Manager, Toronto & Central Division, T. Eaton Co. from J. H. Gibaut, September 30, 1969.

Eaton's left little to chance. The company employed "spotters" to assist commentators, and its public relations staff prepared detailed outlines, using whimsical rather than descriptive language to guide commentators to notable features of floats: "'Yo Ho Ho' sings Long John Silver from his perch on the huge pirate galleon seen on the float TIME FOR ADVENTURE." Scripts also prompted commentators to build the suspense and excitement as the parade led up to Santa: "Everywhere we look we see gay colours and happy people and Oohhhh look! Here come two more of those happy greeters...." "The excitement is mounting and the Parade of Merry Times is becoming merrier...." Another important function of the commentators was to communicate the carnival atmosphere among the spectators, using comments like "The children are stirring excitedly" and "Now there is a hush ... and here and there we hear expressions of disbelief."[63] The scripts were not always successful. The quality of the commentators continued to be a standard complaint: they talked over bands, lacked any sense of drama, neglected to follow the script, and (perhaps most disturbingly) forgot to mention Eaton's.[64]

This last complaint made it clear that broadcasting the parade beyond its local context raised additional problems of brand identity. In Toronto, Eaton's could mobilize an existing institutional and cultural infrastructure to bind the identity of the parade to the corporate personality of the company. Its longstanding connection to the parade, its iconic local image, and the route itself could remind spectators that this was an Eaton's event. Outside Toronto, however, the link was never as certain. Eaton's was certainly a familiar name across Canada, but Brockie did not assume an automatic link between the broadcast spectacle and its public relations effect. The move to television prompted more explicit references to Eaton's, like the "animated nursery blocks" that spelled out E-A-T-O-N-S in 1953 or the opening float three years later, which featured perennial favourite Mother Goose, but included new signs on each side "to carry the wording that the Parade is sponsored by Eaton's. (Up until now we have not included too much commercial mention of Eaton's but TV coverage is becoming greater each year. This being done to cope with lack of mention of sponsorship by commentators covering the parade)."[65]

Such innovations hardly resolved the broader dilemmas of the parade as media event. In the postwar years, Toronto was emerging as a cultural and

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63 These quotations are from the 1957 script. BF, Box 5, File: Santa Claus Parade, 1957, Part I, "Santa's Parade of Merry Times."

64 "The telecast," wrote one "Irate Canadian" from Sarnia, Ontario, "was almost spoiled for me at the close by the commentators hogging the camera like two inferior vaudeville turns" (letter to the editor, *Toronto Star*, November 18, 1954, p. 6).

65 *Toronto Star*, November 14, 1953, p. 9; November 16, 1957, p. 1; BF, Box 4, File: Santa Claus Parade, 1956, "Santa Claus parade – 1956."

media capital for Canada, so at some level it made sense to transmit this local event to a wider audience.[66] Yet the cognitive gap between producer and consumer — inherent in any cultural product — was blown apart by the increased scale. Eaton's was in no position to control coverage in the United States, where the parade was subsumed into the American holiday rhythm, shown as edited highlights in a broader Thanksgiving broadcast. "C.B.S. is taking license with the Toronto parade, which had nothing to do with Thanksgiving," the *New York Times* television correspondent mused in 1963. "Canada observed Thanksgiving on Oct. 14." Audiences too might notice the cross-border difference. "The Eaton's parade always featured storybook characters," recalled Linda Young of Cranston, Rhode Island, "including British ones that I'd never heard of except on the morning of the parade."[67]

Even the Canadian broadcast crossed significant cultural boundaries in a regionally and linguistically divided country with, at best, tenuous commitments to unifying national symbols. In the 1960s, the increasing importance of television audiences intersected with growing nationalist sentiment in English Canada (driven in part by the lead-up to the country's Centennial in 1967), and Eaton's became increasingly interested in making the Toronto event relevant to a "Canadian" rather than just a local audience. In 1967, a Centennial float headed the parade, featuring 10 guards in historic costume, provincial flower banners, and trillium girls dancing around a maypole. Eaton's also arranged for a float featuring Bobby Gimby, the official pied piper of the Centennial celebrations, whose popular song "Canada" in many ways became the unofficial anthem for the year.[68] Dropping in a few nationalist symbols was easy enough, but integrating Canadian content into the storybook script remained elusive, since there were few uniquely Canadian fairy tales. "I had some trouble finding Canadian folk tales and Indian legends which are familiar to children," a Toronto librarian admitted in response to a company enquiry. "The Princess of Tombosoa is certainly well known and Paul Bunyan is very popular too." Her hand-written addition to her letter made the broader point explicit: "Incidentally, Paul Bunyan is really American but the setting is so much like our own that Canadians tend to claim him too." Integrating new mass culture characters from television also meant greater American content, since the most popular TV shows "with child appeal" in Canada were almost exclusively American in

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66   James Lemon, *Toronto since 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1985), pp. 183–186.

67   *New York Times*, November 17, 1963, p. X17; Linda Young, cited in James Baker, *Thanksgiving: The Biography of an America Holiday* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2009), p. 145.

68   Ryan Edwardson, *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); José Iguartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945–1971* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006).

origin — cartoon characters like Bugs Bunny and sitcoms like *The Beverly Hillbillies.*[69]

Managing difference, moreover, was a crucial element in this nationalizing project. The Centennial float featured the newly adopted and still controversial national flag, but also included the Union Jack and the ten provincial flags. Gimby's planning took ethnic diversity as its keynote feature: "Another point which I feel essential to the success of the float," he wrote to Eaton's, "is to have at least three colored and three Asiatic children, as well as a well-thought out mixture of blond and brunettes among the 32 [children on float]."[70] The problem was even more intense in French Canada, where the broadcast had to confront the linguistic politics of the Quiet Revolution, the term applied to the period of intense ferment in Quebec after 1960. For many years, Eaton's had run a parade in Montreal, largely by shipping floats from Toronto, adding a few locally defined features, and sticking on signage directly translated into French. The company cancelled the parade in 1969: amid violent street demonstrations, Montreal's City Council banned all public processions, and, while it explicitly exempted Santa Claus, the company nonetheless abandoned the parade for good.[71] With the Toronto broadcast as the only Eaton's show in town, and with language issues now at the centre of national debate, storybook wonder turned out to be far from the universal message the company had once believed it to be. In 1973, Radio Canada (the francophone version of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) objected strenuously to airing a Toronto parade built around what network officials called "Anglo-Saxon fairy tales" and cartoon characters with names that "can not even be translated," citing three years of viewer complaints.[72]

The parade's problems in French Canada went deeper than just managing audience in a generic way. On American television, slippages in

69 Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1969, Barbara Mackay at Toronto Public Library to Mrs. M. Morrison, February 14, 1969; Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1966, Don Morrison to J. W. Clarke, Display Department, May 25, 1966.

70 Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1967, Gimby to Don Morrison, October 15, 1967.

71 On the city ban, see *La Presse*, November 10, 1969, p. 6. Municipal officials explained the exemption by saying that Eaton's had already secured a parade permit before the ban (see *La Presse*, November 13, 1969, pp. 1, 6). On the Eaton's decision, which the company claimed was made "par respect pour l'esprit du règlement voté cette semaine," see *La Presse*, November 15, 1969, pp. 1, 2.

72 Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1973, Fernand Lachance, Sales Representative, *Radio Canada* to Shirley Hume, T. Eaton Company, September 24, 1973; Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1973, "Meeting Report [Eaton's staff and *Radio Canada* staff]," September 12 and 13, 1973; Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1973, "Meeting Report [Eaton's staff and *Radio Canada* staff]," October 5, 1973; Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1974, "Contact Report, Meeting of 12 August 1974 [Eaton's staff and *Radio Canada* staff]."

meaning were hardly disturbing or dangerous, but British characters that were quaintly different in Rhode Island were culturally explosive in Quebec. Moreover, in the dispute with Radio Canada, the issue was not just appealing to a particular audience but dealing with institutional gate-keepers who could speak in its name. In 1973, national broadcasting was technologically possible, but the structure of television reflected Canada's longstanding duality ("les solitudes télévisuelles" in the words of Denis Bachand and Pierre Bélanger).[73] Both English and French Canada had their own public (CBC and Radio Canada) and private (CTV and TVA) networks, with Radio Canada serving both a large French-speaking majority in Quebec and the increasingly assertive franco-phone minorities in other provinces. With a strong interest in building fran-cophone culture across Canada, the network pressed its agenda on Eaton's.[74] In the long run, the private network TVA offered a promising alternative, but in 1973, concessions were made and compromises reached. Eaton's agreed to build a "French float" in the future (it was already too late to add anything new that year), but apparently balked at the more onerous suggestion of re-mounting its Montreal parade. Radio Canada agreed to broadcast the procession, using its own video feed from Toronto and its own hosts, the children's puppets *Nic et Pic*, sta-tioned in a Montreal studio. With serious issues of bi-national conflict at stake, no one apparently saw much humour in the multiple layers of mediation at play (a public broadcaster's puppets in Montreal describing a department store's parade in Toronto for francophone audiences inside and outside Quebec), but the negotiations themselves revealed the fundamental difficulties of translating a local spectacle for a wider audience.[75]

73 Denis Bachand and Pierre Bélanger, "Un champ culturel : la télévision canadienne" in Caroline Andrew, ed., *Dislocation et permanence : l'invention du Canada au quotidien* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1999), p. 331.

74 Rutherford, *When Television was Young*, pp. 134–145; Jean-Francois Beauchemin, *Ici Radio Canada* (Montreal: Éditions de l'Homme, 2002); Aurélie Luneau, "Radio-Canada et la promotion de la culture francophone (1936–1997)," *Vingtième Siècle*, vol. 55 (July–September 1997), pp. 112–123; Michael Behiels, *Canada's Francophone Minority Communities: Constitutional Renewal and the Winning of School Governance* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), pp. 3–52. On television, nation, and difference more generally, see especially David Morley, "Broadcasting and the Construction of the National Family" in Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill, eds., *The Television Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 418–439.

75 Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1973, "Meeting Report [Eaton's staff and *Radio Canada* staff]," October 5, 1973; Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1974, "Contact Report, Meeting of 12 August 1974 [Eaton's staff and *Radio Canada* staff]." In 1974, TVA showed the Eaton's parade on five of its Quebec stations (unlike Radio Canada, it had no stations outside Quebec). Santa Files, Box 1, File: Minutes and Arrangements, 1974, Shirley Hume to Area Sales Promotion Managers and Area Advertising Managers, November 6, 1974. Unfortunately, the evidentiary trail in the Eaton's collection on this issue ends in 1974.

By this time, the parade was losing some of its shine. In the mid-1970s, the company's decision to move the parade to Sunday drew considerable public criticism. The company was accused of throwing off the balance of Christianity and commerce. More critics emerged when the parade was moved to early November, a decision that seemed to symbolize the hyper-commercialism of the increasingly long Christmas season.[76] In 1982, stung by a decade's worth of criticism and with Canada in a deep recession, the company announced it would no longer organize the parade, owing to the cost of keeping it up at a time when longtime employees were being laid off. "The criticism is very difficult," company president Fredrik Eaton complained. "It's supposed to be a positive event, but, when it creates negative reaction, you have to wonder." Though not everyone was sad to see it go, many Torontonians, like Alfreda Hall, mourned the loss of an important tradition. Eventually, a coalition of local businesses and organizations, including McDonald's of Canada and the Metropolitan Toronto government, rallied to save the procession, but the announcement brought the Eaton's era to a close, and the event passed into a more explicitly civic celebration.[77]

"More is at stake than appears on the surface," Alfreda Hall wrote in her letter to the *Globe and Mail*. Indeed, the analytic importance of the Eaton's parade goes beyond its status as local case study of a North American cultural development. The Eaton's parade was the active creation of continental networks of corporate and metropolitan elites who spoke across the lines of national border, corporate rivalry, and local commerce. It was also one example of a powerful new form of commercial and metropolitan spectacle that could reach out beyond its local context. In mounting its parade each year, Eaton's did more than just amuse Torontonians — it used its corporate power and networks to create a Canadian tradition with considerable reach. What linked the two metropolitan dynamics of the Santa Claus Parade — its synthesis of international ideas and its broadcast to wide audiences — was Eaton's corporate structure, which allowed the company to reach out for ideas through professional networks and to reach out for audiences through new forms of mass media. Much of the parade's cultural power, then, flowed from the company's ability to move between scales, creating a local tradition that became a piece of Canadian heritage and reached continental audiences.

While successful in many ways, this project nonetheless created problems, contradictions, and tensions. Some of these complexities resulted

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76 In 1978, one letter to the editor sarcastically suggested that by 1980 the parade would be held on Easter, allowing for nine full months of Christmas advertising (*Globe and Mail*, November 9, 1978, p. 7).

77 *Globe and Mail*, August 10, 1982, p. 5; August 16, 1982, p. 6. The reorganized event was re-christened "The Metro Santa Claus Parade" (*Globe and Mail*, November 15, 1982, p. 4).

from the inevitable proliferation of meanings that occurs when a cultural product passes from conception to execution — in this case, when floats and presentations moved from company warehouse to street, television, family, and tradition. Cultural meanings, as so many scholars now point out, are always unstable and unpredictable. In many ways, however, the complexities were simply by-products of the spectacle's power. Broadcasting a Toronto parade certainly exposed the cultural fissures in Canadian life, but, if Eaton's failed to build a fully national audience, it did have the economic, organizational, and cultural resources to try. In this context, Eaton's own power was reinforced by its location in Toronto, an emerging cultural metropolis in English Canada and the centre of a growing mass media infrastructure. Compared to other groups, then, Eaton's was able to speak to a much broader audience and to participate in a much larger public, one connected by new communication technologies rather than by the common experience of a particular urban space. Few processions attracted national broadcast attention, and few users of public space possessed the knowledge and resources to compete with Eaton's on this larger scale. At a time when mass broadcasting was loosening the bonds between the public space of the street and the public sphere of communication, this was no small issue. If North Americans continued to use parades for many purposes, department stores were playing in a different league.