

# A Palm Springs Christmas story

## How a children's holiday celebration became a tradition

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The story begins in 1919 when a Christmas celebration was planned for the children who attended the Community Church in the little village of Palm Springs. The Community Church was a white framed building surrounded by a white picket fence that was located on the southeast corner of Palm Canyon Drive and Andreas Road, where the Carnell Building sits today.

Two young teachers planned a Christmas party for the children who attended the Palm Springs Community Church. They set up a Christmas tree outside the front doors of the church and the decorations on the tree sparkled in the desert sun. The children of the congregation played around the tree and many youngsters whose parents were not members of the Community Church began to gather around the picket fence.

Both the children and the teachers began to feel uncomfortable playing around the tree while their friends from school stood outside the fence. The teachers did not know what to do and then they saw Nellie Coffman, the owner and operator of The Desert Inn, walking by the corner with a bag of groceries in her arms. The two young teachers asked her if they should invite the children to join the party, but they realized that they did not have enough cookies or gifts for all of the children.

Mrs. Coffman answered, "On Christmas, there should be a tree and a gift for every child in Palm Springs. Bring them over to the Inn." The Desert Inn always had a decorated tree for its guests during the holidays, and when the children



Community Church celebration c. 1919. PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

arrived they were welcomed with refreshments and given apples, oranges, raisins and dates to take home as their Christmas gift.

In the years that followed, the Community Christmas Tree became one of the village of Palm Springs' and The Desert Inn's annual holiday traditions. Every child was invited to attend the celebration which was held the week before Christmas. Members of the Women's Business Club collected and wrapped gifts for all of the children who attended. Local businesses gave toys and candy or money to purchase gifts so

the village could keep this very special Christmas tradition going.

The village-wide tradition of the Community Christmas Tree at The Desert Inn continued for many years and each year more extravagances were added. By the 1930s, visits by old St. Nicholas were arranged and he handed out stockings stuffed with goodies. During the war years, toys were collected and repaired by the Boy Scouts and then the repaired dolls were put in newly made dresses by the Girl Scouts. After Mrs. Coffman's death in 1950 the location of the event changed but the annual

tradition was honored for many more years to come.

In 1952, Earle Strebe opened up his theatre and hosted the village's children to see "Miracle on 34th Street" for free at his movie house downtown and stockings were handed out by Santa to all of the children who attended. In 1958, the Business Women of Palm Springs put together over 2,000 gift packages and distributed them to every elementary school in the city.

The tradition of the Palm Springs Community Christmas Tree lasted for over four decades.

	
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Sold Out <b>Ronald Reagan Library</b> * Titanic Exhibit * Sat, Jan. 6 \$45 + admission	<b>L.A. Fashion District</b> Fri, Jan. 26 \$45 per person Fri, Feb. 23 \$45 per person
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<b>Los Angeles Movie Star Homes Tour</b> Sat, Jan. 13 \$90 per person	<b>Los Angeles City Tour by Night</b> Sat, Feb. 3 \$85 per person
<b>Kings vs. Ducks Staples Center, L.A. Hockey Game</b> Sat, Jan. 13 \$150 per person	<b>Price Is Right Taping</b> Wed, Feb. 28 \$60 per person
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