

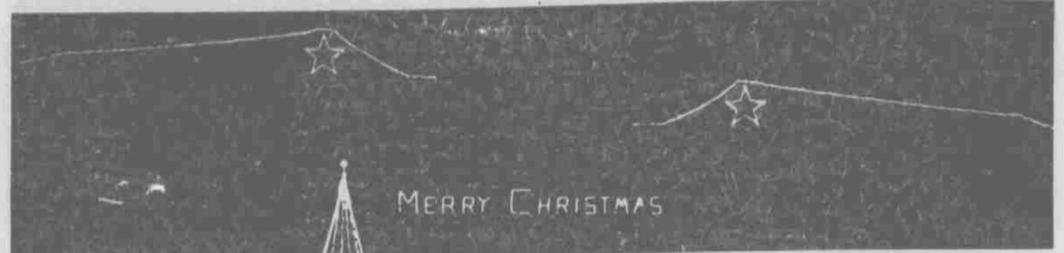
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Minden trips the light fantastic; Morey's continue family tradition

By Richard Cooper
 Daily Nebraskan Staff Reporter

Many great cities boast famous Christmas pageants: New York, Bethlehem, Mexico City, and Minden, Nebraska?

Minden is a small town near Kearney, with a population of 2,800 — mostly of Danish or Swedish ancestry.

During the past 40 years, the town has sponsored on the first two Sundays in December, a most spectacular Christmas pageant. Good Housekeeping Magazine said Minden has one of the best Christmas pageants in the United States. TV networks NBC and CBS have filmed the pageant.

The idea for the pageant came from the Rev. Arthur Johnson in 1946. Johnson asked Clayton Morey to write the script and organize the show.

In 1971 Morey retired, and his son Ben Morey carried on the family tradition.

"I have been involved in this

pageant almost all my life," Morey said. "It is a tradition in this town."

The pageant is a play about the birth of Christ. Most of the main characters in the play, except for the soldiers and the angels, have been on the cast since the first pageant was put on.

Morey said only one member has retired, and that is one reason why the event is such a tradition in Minden.

"Everybody gets involved, even though some of the people don't even appear in the production," Morey said. "Some people help out with setting up; some help out with parking. It is a community thing."

The soldiers and angels are picked out every year from the local high school.

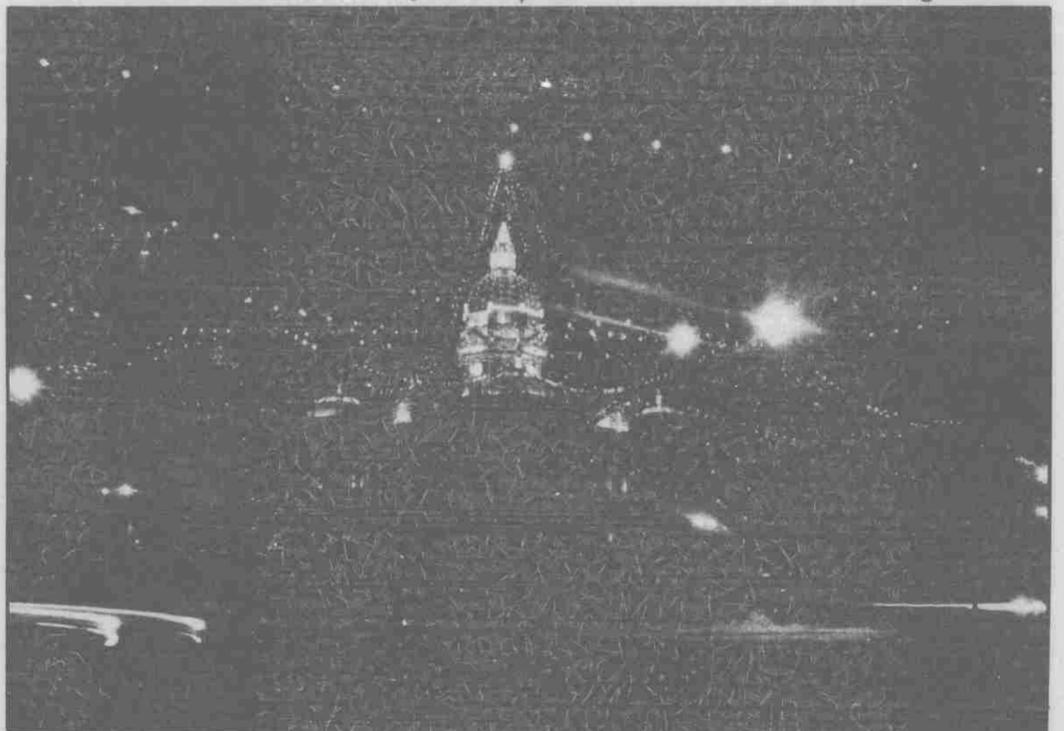
Morey said the play starts beginning in the Old Testament and continued through the birth of Christ. The whole script is on tape, so none of the actors has to worry about any lines.

Morey said his job as director keeps him busy all year. Workers must begin decorating the town with Christmas lights near the first of October. Morey starts getting the cast members together during the second week in November.

Morey said it only costs about \$100 to put on the show. That total includes dry cleaning of costumes, flairs, and other necessities. He said the town is not charged for electricity.

"People from all over the country come to see this show," Morey said. "Some years we will have hundreds of people coming out to see the show, and other years we will have barely fifty people show up."

Morey said the pageant has seen some less-than-solemn moments. He said that one time between acts, his father heard screaming in the courtyard. When the lights came on for the next act, high school kids were doing the screams in the midst of a massive snow ball fight.



Holiday lights brighten the Kearney County Courthouse in Minden during last year's Minden celebration. Daily Nebraskan file photo

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