

Busy Season for the Local Aids to Santa Claus



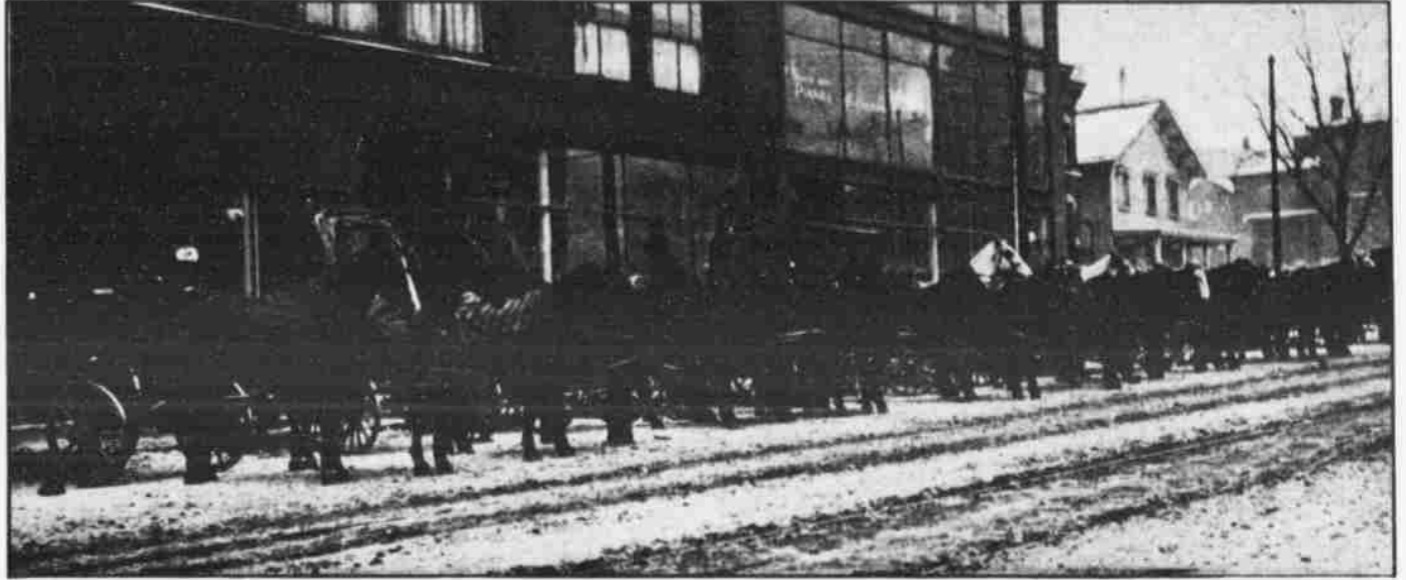
HUGE FREIGHT VANS THAT RUMBLE ALL DAY LONG—Photo by a Staff Artist.



EXPRESSMEN ARE BUSY DAY AND NIGHT—Photo by Staff Artist.



COMING WITH LOADS OF CHRISTMAS FREIGHT—Photo by Staff Artist.



DELIVERY TEAMS OF A RETAIL STORE LOADING UP—Photo by a Staff Artist.



MAIL CARRIERS WHO INVADE THE RESIDENCE DISTRICTS WITH LOADS OF PRESENTS WEIGHING FROM SIXTY TO EIGHTY POUNDS, AND WHO MAKE TWO AND THREE TRIPS A DAY OVER THEIR ROUTES—Photo by a Staff Artist.



IT WOULD not be exaggerating a great deal to say that these conditions were such that a Christmas present started from Omaha to a baby in San Francisco, New York or Tampa would reach that baby about the time he was ready to matry and run for sheriff. Now the gift could be delivered at his front door in approximately sixty hours.

Then the number of presents sent and received each year was about equal to the number of teeth in a young hen's mouth. Now they are so numerous that whole armies of men are required in their handling and whole trains for their transportation. Christmas giving has progressed in proportion to the progression in carrier service.

Carrier service, used in this connection, must be accepted as a broadly comprehensive term. It suggests great cars drawn over expansive prairies and towering mountains so speedily that one town has scarce waved them a parting before another waves them a welcome. It suggests lumbering wagons hauled over slippery pavements as fast as the snow and the city ordinances will let them go. It suggests sturdy messenger boys fitting about with bulging bags and a reckless determination to win a tip. It suggests bundle-smothered mail carriers plodding from door to door with aching arms and a temporary yearning for some other occupation. It suggests a general activity as strenuous as the president of the United States, but equally cheerful and well-intending.

For millions of people the late December holidays are the busiest days in all the

year, and yet they are happiest then. The man in the wired wagon misses his meals; the man in the gray suit misses his rest; the boy in the red sweater misses both. Yet all are cheery, all are glad and all are willing it should be so. They do not pause to tell people their troubles. It is no time for tales of woe. No one cares to hear them—even the policemen. It is a time for willing sacrifice at the altar of common joy and each must spare his brother the pain of a personal grievance. More people contrive either to forget their troubles or to keep still about them during Christmas week than during any other period of the year.

And that is how it happens that so few have any adequate conception of the amount of labor required in accomplishing the prompt transmission of the gifts that are sent each year from every town in the United States to every other town in the United States—and to some towns that were not in the United States until the constitution followed the flag and the supreme court followed the trend of public sentiment.

For example, take the work of the servants of Uncle Sam, in his postal department. At the Omaha postoffice the outgoing mail averages, through the year, between three and four tons per day. Between December 20 and January 1 it averages eight tons per day. In the number of packages received there is an increase of 150 per cent over the normal. The fifty-three carriers who serve the residence district, making from two to four trips per day, carry, in ordinary times, about thirty-five pounds of mail at a load. During

Christmas times they carry sixty-five and even eighty pounds when they start from the office. In the registered mail department last month the total of domestic letters was 2,132, of domestic parcels 405, of foreign letters 210, and of foreign parcels 30. The total for December will be five times as great. In the money order department the foreign orders average ten per day in ordinary times. Now they average fifty per day—and the foreign orders are not more than 5 per cent of the total. Already this year the local office has issued 58,575 money orders, representing \$448,637.45 in money, and has paid 258,816 orders, representing \$2,181,626.87.

No package sent by mail can exceed four pounds in weight yet packages sent are so numerous that nineteen clerks and two truckmen have all they can do to handle the outgoing and an equal number of men are busy in the office distributing the incoming. To be behind the wicket at any time during Christmas week is as interesting and as dazing as to be behind the scenes while the spectacular opera is on. The actors in the former place wear more clothes and longer clothes than do those in the latter, but they are just as much occupied and just as hard pressed for time.

Carriers come in from their trips with stitches in their sides and perspiration on their brows, but with stories to tell of the little girls who have come to meet them at hundreds of doors, and of little boys who have hailed them from hundreds of front porches, sometimes with rewards and sometimes with bitter disappointments.

On the railway mail cars which bring the gifts to Omaha and carry them away, and

which perform the same work for the people of other cities of the United States there are constantly working about 4,500 clerks, and this number is increased a third during the Christmas rush, the extra men being drawn from among those who are at that time supposed to be enjoying vacations. One hundred and twenty-five of these start from and return to Omaha. An equal number are accredited to Council Bluffs. They are among the hosts who make sacrifice of time during the holidays for the pleasure of other people and who cheerfully heed the instructions from headquarters to take particularly good care of the Christmas packages and keep them undamaged if possible.

To the express companies Christmas means even more. Their business then is twenty times as great as ordinarily and the force at each office is increased to double capacity, with every man doing double duty, for the three days preceding Christmas. The outflow begins about December 19 and continues until Christmas day. It is estimated that at least twenty full carloads of Christmas presents will be sent out of Omaha this year by the four principal express companies. In addition to these there will have to be handled about an equal amount of incoming business. And that is why the manager closes his desk with a slam and lets his correspondence pile mountain high without opening any of it. That is why he engages meals at the nearest restaurant for all his men and lets them see nothing of home or of families day after day. That is why accommodations at a hotel convenient to the railway stations were engaged long ago for the men in the express offices there. That is why no man

in the business stops long enough to say even "Hello" to his best friend and dashes over the town as though pursued by a demon.

Indeed, he is pursued by a demon. It is the demon of fear that he will be "buried." Once an express force is "buried," nothing can save it. The men would rather work straight through the night than begin the new day twenty minutes behind with their work.

What do the express companies haul as presents? An easier question would be "What don't they haul as presents?" They haul anything and everything from a diamond stud to a baby elephant; from a necktie to a wedding gown; from a tooth brush to a bath tub; from a toy wagon to a horse and buggy; from a box of candy to a side of beef. Uncle Hezekiah of Perkinsville sends his nephew, William, of the state capital, the dressed half of an undressed hog much oftener than some people who haven't any country uncle ever would suppose.

The Man Who Likes to See Things spends some very pleasant hours at the express offices in the railway stations at this time of year. Wagons are lined up there at the edges of the platforms like so many ambulances at a foot ball game. They have come loaded and they leave loaded. The sweat never dries on the horses that haul them, cold as the weather may be, and the drivers never know what time it is from daylight until dark. When they haven't anything else to haul, they haul oysters, for at Christmas time the bivalves come to inland cities such as Omaha not by the

(Continued on Fourteenth Page.)