Digital Delights

By Alex Ames

December 2010

This is the December installment of Digital Delights from Minnesota Reflections, a MDL Listserv monthly feature that highlights interesting objects from the Minnesota Reflections collections.

Is it just me, or does the Christmas shopping season seem to start earlier and earlier every year?

The Holiday Season may be an excuse to hit the mall on behalf of your friends and family, but it is also a time for reliving old memories, and making new ones. Browse through an ample inventory of memories in Minnesota Reflections’ rich collections, many of which contain objects related to holiday seasons of Minnesota’s past. Best of all, you won’t need your credit card to enjoy these holiday treasures from near and far!

Visiting downtown Minneapolis department stores was a holiday tradition for generations of Minnesota families, and for some it still is. Follow this link to see a Christmas streetscape outside the front door of Dayton’s department store (Hennepin County History Museum): http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?hchm,978

This link will lead you to a dream-like, 1937 Dayton’s merchandise display (Hennepin County History Museum): http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?hchm,984

Despite the fame of its 8th-floor auditorium holiday displays, Dayton’s was hardly Minneapolis’ only department store brimming with holiday cheer. On a personal note, my mother has always told me stories about her parents’ trips to Donaldson’s in Minneapolis, where my grandfather bought my grandmother some beautiful furniture that we still own. In fact, the Donaldson’s receipt is still tucked in one of the china cabinet drawers! Happening upon a photo of Donaldson’s at Christmastime helps me to visualize my own grandparents strolling in for an evening of Christmas shopping on one of their exciting trips to the “big city” (Hennepin History Museum): http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?hchm,977

Enjoy this atmospheric Christmas photograph taken outside the Hotel Nicollet and Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis (Hennepin History Museum): http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?hchm,989
As cheerful as civic holiday decorations may be, I would not want the job of putting them up, particularly with a street car zooming underneath my precariously-suspended strand of festive garland... *(Minnesota Streetcar Museum)*: http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?/msn,310

For some, the Holiday season may mean Twin Cities adventures, but Minneapolis has no monopoly on Minnesota Reflection’s holiday-themed collections. Duluth’s aerial lift bridge seems festive, when there’s a beautiful Christmas tree positioned nearby! *(Northeast Minnesota Historical Center)*: http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?/nemhc,3990

Of course, Christmas is just one of several Minnesota religious and cultural traditions that makes midwinter a festive and meaningful time of year. Visit Minnesota Reflections’ collection from the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest (headquartered in Minneapolis) to learn more about Jewish holiday traditions that form an important component of Minnesota’s midwinter celebration. In fact, while in the collection, take time to become familiar with the fascinating history of Minnesota Jewish life through a variety of one-of-a-kind historic artifacts *(Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest)*.

One St. Paul Jewish family decorated their fireplace mantle for Hanukah in 1951: http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?/jhs,478

The students of the Capitol Hebrew School presented a dramatic tableau commemorating the Hanukah festivities in 1928. The students re-enacted the Maccabees’ victory over the Greek Syrians and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, which the Hanukah holiday celebrates. http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?/jhs,333

The impressive *milieu* of Holiday-themed holdings in Minnesota Reflections underscores both the diversity reflected in the state’s midwinter holiday traditions—as well as the common elements of family, friends, reflection and celebration that seem to unite them all. Minnesota Reflections can help you place your own family traditions within the perspective of Minnesota’s rich heritage. Put a stop by Minnesota Reflections high on your list of things to do this December, and Happy Holidays!

Alex L. Ames
Graduate Assistant, Minnesota Digital Library