

1906 McFaddin Ave Episode 2: Transcript

A Merry McFaddin Christmas

Music

KT: December is a month of celebration - Nicholas Day, Hanukkah, Winter Solstice, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Boxing Day, New Year's Eve, the list goes on.

For the McFaddin family, Christmas was the biggest celebration of the year, involving food, gifts, decorations, and entertainment.

Full disclosure: this episode is a bit longer than we anticipated because there's great information from our archives and research to share. We really enjoyed putting this episode together.

So get comfy with some hot chocolate and warm jammies then join us as we dive in and explore some of the holiday traditions of the McFaddins and of Southeast Texas.

Music

RH: Hello, and welcome back to 1906 McFaddin Ave, a podcast where we connect the people, places, and things of the McFaddin-Ward Historic House Museum to a greater historical context.

Music

I'm Rayanna Hoeft, the Director of Educational Programming.

KT: And I'm Kara Timberlake - the Communications/Marketing Manager at the McFaddin-Ward House. Believe it or not, it is already December, and we've got our minds on the holidays as well as the traditions most associated with this time of year.

Geography plays a role in how holidays are celebrated & it's no different in our case. Christmastime at the McFaddin-Ward House would have been greatly influenced by its Southern locale.

In her book "Emyl Jenkins' Southern Christmas," the author provides two reasons for the Southern Christmas traditions. Number one - the earliest Southern Anglo settlers - think mostly Anglican English, Irish, German - came from European cultures that

reveled in the “festivity and enjoyment” of the holiday. So think of that in comparison to their New England Puritan counterparts. Number two - the mild weather of the South allowed people to congregate and celebrate.

RH: Both W.P.H., who is from Southeast Texas, and Ida, who hails from West Virginia, were products of this Southern culture, so it makes sense that Christmas at the McFaddin home would be a blend of two Southern traditions.

KT: Absolutely. Since that time, materialism, media, advertising, and mass marketing has made Christmas what we consider it today. A lot of the traditions that we enjoy at Christmas are actually a fusion of different customs from several countries and cultures.

RH: The 1920s were a period of great social, economic, and political change for Americans. The decade began by an economic transformation from war mobilization to one focused on consumer consumption, which was new for America. Manufacturers were eager to sell radios, ready-made clothing, and toys manufactured on assembly lines. Unfortunately, this time period marked a time of racial unrest evidenced by an upsurge in racially motivated violence across the country and membership in the KKK grew exponentially. Federal, state, and local governments were also attempting to eradicate the Bubonic Plague which appeared in various port cities, including Galveston. The *Beaumont Enterprise* reported in 1921 that the city was disgruntled about the federal government’s decision to no longer fund rat catching and testing for the disease-causing bacteria. The burden of cost was now on local governments. Despite the headlines of the day, the McFaddin and Ward families along with the staff at 1906 McFaddin Avenue craved a return to normalcy after World War I, just as the rest of the nation did. The holidays provided a chance to look forward to joyous gatherings, but first required weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks of preparation.

KT: One tradition we still enjoy is that of seasonal decorating. The decor in the 1920s was basic, compared to the various options available today. Decor consisted of florals and greenery. Embellishments with ribbon were common. Cecelia Smith, the long-time upstairs maid and companion of Mamie in her later years, recalled long-stemmed pink roses in an oral history interview. She also spoke of how the family used a ton of silver on the dining room table, so much so she often wondered how the table didn’t collapse under the weight.

RH: Our current curator chose to highlight some of the family's silver pieces in the breakfast room for our current interpretation of the house. The *Beaumont Enterprise* editions from the 1920s provide excellent insight into how events were decorated for the holiday season. Decorations at the Neches club often included palms, ferns, blooming carnations, and poinsettias. The *Enterprise* also reported how some families hung wreaths by ribbon in their windows. Longleaf pine garlands framed entry ways, while mistletoe along with pinecones added additional seasonal touches. Albertine Parker, the wife of W.P.H's chauffeur Tom Parker, remembered poinsettias used as Christmas decor in the McFaddin's house. The *Enterprise* also reported how a tea for prominent ladies, attended by our McFaddin ladies, was decorated with red and green crepe paper hung from the ceiling.

KT: We can't talk about Christmas and the McFaddins without talking about shopping and gift-giving. Our ladies really knew how to shop it big. Giving topped the list of family traditions.

As previously mentioned, the 1920s were a time of mass consumption due to the availability of new consumer products. One popular product of the time was the Perc-o-Toaster that served as a combination toaster, waffle maker, and coffee maker.

RH: I really wish we had a Perc-o-Toaster in our collection!

KT: I wish I had one at my house.

RH: That would be so cool!

KT: Oh yeah! As typical for a lot of Beaumonters in the 1920s, Ida and Mamie shopped for Christmas gifts - and everything else - along Pearl Street.

Sounds of shopping + traffic

Shops along Pearl were abuzz with activity. Department and dry goods stores such as Dorfman's and the White House converted stores into "toylands." Advertisements were also at an all-time high. Newspapers such as the *Beaumont Enterprise* and the *Journal* tailored their ads to entice would-be shoppers. New gifts such as vacuum cleaners and other appliances were available and ads specifically targeted middle and upper class housewives who conducted the work in the home. Sara Woods, a writer for the *Beaumont Enterprise* in 1927 entreated her readers to "stroll over to Feinberg's" or "drop by McCree's Novelty Gifts."

On Christmas Eve 1928 the *Beaumont Journal* reported that "Thousands of men, women and children milled through the stores in the downtown business district....Traffic was congested to such an extent that all motorcycle officers of the

police department were assigned to uptown duty...Despite their efforts, however, several times during the day, it was practically at a standstill.”

Mamie shopped not only for friends and family but also for employees and even sales clerks and employees in the downtown stores.

“Shopped, I think, all day,” she wrote in her diary in 1921.

RH: Part of Ida and Mamie’s shopping experience was related to their philanthropic endeavors. They paid special attention to the Beaumont Day Nursery, later the Beaumont Children’s Home, where both women served on the board of directors for many years. In addition to monetary donations, Mamie often bought Christmas presents for the children who lived at the nursery.

KT: Mamie would finish wrapping gifts on Christmas Eve before delivering them the same evening and into Christmas day.

Gift wrappers in the 1920s had to secure packages with string, sealing wax, sticky ribbon or small sticky paper circles. What we use today, Scotch tape, wasn’t invented until 1930, and dispensers with blades didn’t come along until 1932.

“Wrapped presents...then Caldwell & I delivered presents,” she wrote in her journal on Christmas Eve of 1920.

While Mamie was able to do most of her shopping in Beaumont, she felt the stress of the holiday whirl - girl who doesn’t - describing herself at least once as “dead tired.”

RH: Another tradition the McFaddins participated in during the 1920s was sending Christmas cards, which seems to be a dying tradition. Do you send cards to your family and friends, Kara?

KT: I don’t, but I do love receiving them.

RH: Me too! Truth be told - I haven’t mailed cards in years, actually I haven’t mailed anything in years thanks to the Internet. I don’t even know how to buy stamps anymore. Do you get those at the post office still?

KT: Umm, so the post office for me is my Mom & Dad’s house.

RH: Yeah, I usually put that on my husband's to-do list if I perchance need a stamp. Anyway, holiday origin stories are really interesting to me, so here's a little tidbit on the tradition of sending cards via the mail. Sir Henry Cole, a prominent British gentleman from the Victorian era, despaired over the amount of holiday correspondence needing answering on his desk. Everyone was on a letter writing rampage thanks to the introduction of the "penny post" system in Britain that allowed senders to mail letters or cards to anyone in the country for the cost of just one penny. Sir Cole had the brilliant idea to commission his friend, artist J.C. Horsley, to design a little card with the images of a family celebrating the holiday along with images of them helping the poor. The card was printed onto a 5 x 3 in. piece of cardboard, give or take. A generic salutation and the greeting "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You" were added. A picture of this first Christmas mailed greeting is posted on our website. This quick fix to the mail problem quickly caught on and was replicated by others prominent in British society.

KT: The first Christmas card to originate in the U.S. was in 1875 by a Prussian immigrant by the name of Louis Prang. This card contained the image of a flower with the message "Merry Christmas." Images of the first U.S. cards were simple and nature-based. The images became more unique and complex as demand soared. People began collecting the cards as new designs emerged every year. Then in 1915, when our very own Mamie McFaddin-Ward was twenty years old, the modern Christmas card industry began. A Kansas city-based postcard printing company owned by Joyce Hall and his two brothers, Rollie and William Hall, published their first holiday card. The Hall Brothers Company changed their name to Hallmark in 1925. They reformatted the postcard into an actual card, measuring 4 in x 6 inches, that opened to fit into an envelope. Folks wanted room to leave a more personalized message but didn't want to write a whole letter. This book format became the industry standard and remains popular today.

RH: Unfortunately, we don't have many Christmas cards in our collection from the McFaddin and Ward families from the 1920s; however, we have a great deal from the 1930s onward. What you'll see on display inside the McFaddin-Ward House are reproductions.

KT: The Christmas season offered a multitude of entertainment possibilities. The family excitedly partook of movies at the local theater or attended parties hosted by friends and family around town.

Much of the McFaddins' holiday party-going occurred between Christmas and New Year's, after the rush of shopping and exchanging gifts had passed. Ida and Mamie

often had family dinners and large receptions, and New Year's Day was sometimes set aside for a family dinner.

RH: In December, Beaumont was reported to be "the gayest place you've ever seen," according to Perry Jr.'s stepdaughter, Mamie White Edson. She said dances were hosted almost every night of the week during Christmastime. Afternoon teas at the Neches Club, hosted by prominent ladies, provided ongoing social opportunities.

Eggnog parties and open houses were especially popular traditions. One Beaumonter recalled of Christmas, "Socially it was a very entertaining time. There was actually a season....from Thanksgiving to Lent and women bought clothes all year for it. Teas, dances, dinner after dinner."

KT: Everyone in the McFaddin/Ward family enjoyed the season's offerings in various ways. Ida and Mamie spent a great deal of time preparing for holiday guests by extensively cleaning the home with the staff, preparing menus, shopping, and wrapping gifts. The men pursued their own interests; Perry Jr. was active in the Shriner order and loved a party, taking charge of music and programs for the Shriners' holiday dance in 1922. Caldwell, combining his love of music and St. Mark's Episcopal Church, sang with the choir in the oratorio "The Holy City" in 1924. W.P.H., busy at the ranch during the day, was, as his family enjoyed remembering, always willing to go to parties and dances with Ida in the evening.

Music - crickets - sounds of children

They enjoyed seasonal social activities but made sure that the holidays went smoothly, especially if house guests were involved. In 1922, Ida's very young nephews, Teddy and Dabney Caldwell, stayed with the McFaddins for several months, and the McFaddin house briefly returned to the magic of a children's Christmas. Mamie bought the boys gifts and the whole family saw that they had a good holiday. On Christmas Eve, Mamie wrote in her diary, "Folks took ride & kids to see Municipal tree." The next morning she recorded "Had tree for boys." Years later Teddy (Ted by then) still fondly recalled that Christmas.

Music - sounds of bells jingling

RH: Food was a big part of the holiday celebrations for the McFaddin family, just as it is for many folks today. Albertine recalled the family always had so much food at their disposal. I found this interesting that she mentioned that fact numerous times throughout her oral history interview. Albertine helped Ida make fruitcakes in the kitchen which were given to friends and family. Also, the family loved Ida's homemade jellies. Even though the McFaddins enjoyed the services of two cooks during the 1920s - first, a woman named Rebecca, and unfortunately, we don't have a clear last name for her in

our archives - there's also a man named Louis Lemon who was in the kitchen beginning in the mid-20s, we know that Ida still enjoyed spending time in the kitchen with these two people...Mamie...not so much.

KT: Me and Mamie - we're one and the same. The family's food was grown on the nearby farm then delivered to the house by Buck Sam, the farm manager. He brought milk and fresh veggies. Bacon and other meat products were sometimes purchased from the local butcher. I would assume some of the meat would come from the McFaddin ranch.

Our historian, Judy Linsley, who is amazing and knows everything, recently wrote about holiday meals in our most recent publication of *Viewpoints*. Judy found that Beaumonters were limited to what was regionally available for their Christmas dinners. Oranges were a favorite gift, arriving in Beaumont mid-December. Turkey was sometimes in short supply so families cooked duck or goose for the main course. Ham was also a popular alternative. Interestingly, applesauce was mentioned in etiquette books of the time as a popular side dish along with green beans, mashed potatoes, and brussels sprouts. Dessert consisted of cakes, fruit pudding, and vanilla ice cream, followed by coffee.

RH: Eggnog was a yummy treat during the holidays, but the recipe just wasn't the same without the prohibited alcoholic ingredients. The Temperance movement which officially organized in 1826, saw their goal of criminalizing the distribution and consumption of alcohol a reality with the passing of the 18th amendment, which went into effect in January of 1920. Beaumonters and many other Americans found a way around the pesky law by purchasing alcohol from local bootleggers. Albertine Parker recalled how Tom, her husband, picked up whiskey in W.P.H.'s farm truck from distillers at a nearby bayou, which was transported up river. W.P.H., in all his generosity, always shared his illegal acquisitions with Tom and other family members, as remembered by Albertine.

KT: We have in our collection, two Prohibition bottles of wine, which are on exhibit in the Butler's Pantry and third story Billiards room.

RH: The McFaddins often hosted these extraordinary tea events in December where everyone in the community who provided some sort of service to the family was invited to attend. This event was a favorite in Beaumont and demonstrated the family's connection to others throughout the city.

KT: From perusing Mamie's diary, it appears as if the family gathered on Christmas day to open presents, enjoy eggnog, play cards, and visit.

In 1920, Mamie writes, "Xmas—Looked at presents had Egg-Nog then Carroll & I went down to Wards to see them after Mama at church aft Family took drive then Carroll & I went by McKees Lottie & Mac there."

In 1921, Mamie records that she got "Diamond ring, neglee [sic] & lots of things." Afterward, she "had Egg nog" and then she and Carroll "took Ma to church & finished delivering presents."

Sometimes the family delivered Christmas presents to nearby families, attended church services, or dined with a friend or relative at their home.

RH: Unfortunately, we don't have a great deal of information about the staff's celebrations during their holiday time off. We know the staff was given limited time off, compared to today's work standards. But we don't know what this looked like for the holiday season. I imagine the staff's duties were increased due to out of town visitors staying with the McFaddins. The house was extensively cleaned in December according to Mamie's diaries. Also, the family entertained a great deal requiring staff presence for those events and all the preparation work needed. Rebecca and Louis Lemon would've worked tirelessly in the kitchen preparing the meal, the butler would've been on site for the bigger events as he was the first contact guests made when entering the home. Only a few staff members lived on site in the Carriage House. Rebecca lived in the Carriage house apartment until her death in the mid-1920s, then Louis moved in when he took over the kitchen.

Cecelia Smith spoke of her family's Christmas traditions when she was a youngster in the 19-teens. Her family was Catholic and celebrated the holiday. Her family had a Christmas tree, they exchanged presents, she said her mom, who was the McFaddin's laundress always took Christmas day off. My assumption is that the staff were allowed time with their families whenever the McFaddins and Wards were out of the house visiting others or were enjoying down time in the evening hours. Mamie writes extensively in her diary about the family playing cards in the evenings or going out to see movies.

KT: So, do you think that it's difficult for historians when parts of the story are missing?

RH: Yeah, it really is. Historians are forced to make these inferences based on the sources we have, so unfortunately, few staff members from the 1920s were alive when this house transitioned to a museum in the 1980s. The oral interviews that were collected primarily focused on the McFaddin family's experiences. However, we do have great interviews with both Cecelia Smith and Albertine Parker.

KT: So what about other primary sources, such as newspapers?

RH: So, we looked for other African American newspapers in the local archives, and unfortunately, they don't exist. That is something we hope to rectify moving forward. We really need to have those sources to have a better understanding of what happened on a full community level.

KT: That's really interesting how historians use sources, including archives and objects, to make an educated guess about the past. Speaking of using objects to learn about history, let's visit with our curator, Victoria Tamez, about what inspired her to use the objects currently on exhibit throughout the home.

Well, hey, Victoria. Thank you so much for joining us. So, we were curious - what were your methods for finding objects from the 1920s out of our huge collection of 35,000 artifacts?

VT: Well, that's a good question. Thank you for having me. What I decided to do is to pick our theme first - 1920s theme. Once I had found the theme, I decided I was going to look through past booklets and get some inspiration from year's past and work from there. I went through a few of the booklets, and I decided I was going to highlight some key objects, some objects that I liked, that were noted as being dated pre-1920s or 1920s themselves. From there, I kind of tried to imagine each room as I would have liked to see it. I actually just walked through the collection, and I looked at everything and if it fit my vision for what I had for that exact room, I picked it. I came back into our archives and looked in the object folders and if the dates fit, then we picked it. That's how our process worked for this interpretation.

RH: Our archives contain limited information for this time period, especially relating to the holidays. How did your research inform your exhibit decisions?

VT: For our research, since we do have such limited information in our archives regarding the Christmas season, especially in the 1920s, we decided to go for more of a

seasonal feel than just Christmas. If it was a little more centered around December or winter, we could pull those pieces as well. So a lot of those furs aren't directly mentioned around Christmastime, but we have a few diary entries from Mamie and she mentions it was really cold in Beaumont for a while there. So I decided well, furs are for cold, so we pulled the furs and worked with that.

KT: I always like to ask this of curators because I'm always so curious - what is your favorite piece in the house and also do you have a favorite room? If so, why?

VT: Good questions. I actually really love - there's a lace dress we have in the entry hall - that dress when we pulled it out of the box, it looked a little sad, I will not lie. It's more of a peachy,, champagnish color so that doesn't always translate well against a white backdrop or white tissue papers. But as soon as we got it all dressed up and put it on a mannequin and gave the mannequin some arms and put the fur on it, it started to come together really beautifully, and it's such a wonderful dress, and it's got so many details. There's even a little clasp in the front with some sort of stones, pinkish stones. It's a beautiful piece altogether, and I love it so much. And it has a wonderful train, and I love trains.

My favorite room - I really love the Library. Our Library interpretation has a bit more of a family feel compared to the other rooms. The other rooms are more party-based I guess you could say. In the Library, they're opening Christmas presents, and we have a few diary entries where Mamie mentioned that she got certain presents, so we have a negligee in there - scandalous - that she got for Christmas. We have that opened on the couch. We also have a toy train in there because Ted and Dab came to stay around the Christmas season for a year - we have that train out for them. It incorporates more of the family - they're in there, just playing cards, drinking tea or coffee, so I really like that.

RH: What do you want our audiences to take away from their experience when they visit our house?

VT: What I want them to take away is that our house isn't just a museum, it was also a home - it's not just a house. We wanted people to feel that homey feel like it was warm and welcoming. They're going to have a big party and of course you're welcome to the party so come on in and join them. That would be absolutely fabulous.

RH: Thank you for sharing all of that. The behind-the-scenes is not only so interesting to us working here, but also our audience as well, so we appreciate you providing that additional insight.

KT: Thanks so much, Victoria!

VT: You're welcome!

RH: Like we mentioned at the top of this podcast, the 1920s was a time of rapid change for the nation. The huge stock market crash on October 29th, known as Black Tuesday, is probably the biggest event of 1929 that comes to everyone's mind. It's the event historians argue ended the "roaring 20s." Few people know that the West Wing of the White House burned on Christmas Eve that year while President Hoover hosted a Christmas party. If that's not a sign for how that presidency would end then I don't know what is! Meanwhile, in Beaumont, Christmas seemed to continue as normal for the McFaddins and Wards that year, despite economic uncertainty and a looming financial depression that would last throughout the entire next decade. The McFaddins escaped relatively unscathed from that global crisis. In 1929, the whole McFaddin family—Ida and W.P.H., Mamie, Perry Jr., Caldwell, and their spouses—celebrated Christmas dinner at the Harrison Avenue home of W.P.H.'s niece, Kydie McKee, and her husband Norval.

KT: The 1920s are a fascinating time in our nation's history, it's been a lot of fun exploring what that time period looked like in our neck of the woods.

Music

KT: And that concludes today's episode. Thanks for joining us!

We invite you to come see the house all decked out for the holidays!

RH: The 1920s holiday interpretation, A Rip-Roaring Yuletide, is currently on display at the house until mid-January of 2022.

KT: If you have any questions or comments about this episode, you can reach us at mcfaddinwardhouse@gmail.com. Be sure to follow along on social media to learn about our upcoming events and catch behind-the-scenes action.

We hope you'll join us again for another episode of 1906 McFaddin Ave. Happy Holidays!

Music

1906 McFaddin Ave is produced and edited by Todd Hoeft and presented by Kara Timberlake and Rayanna Hoeft. Music composed by Todd Hoeft and performed with Tom Deemer.

We thank Ida McFaddin Pyle for sharing her Christmas memories with us. We're grateful for Judy Linsley's extensive research. Thank you to our curatorial team Victoria Tamez and Julianne Haidusek for their vision of Christmas in the 1920s.