

The Race for Christmas in Lehi

By John K. Haws Jr.

It is the first week of November, election ads between Mia Love and Jim Matheson have subsided and Christmas has exploded on the screen. We are barraged with the sounds of Jingle Bells and the promise of the greatest sale of the Christmas season coming up this weekend. On the weekend, some channels have advertised non-stop Christmas movies for the whole weekend. We hear the same old complaints that they rush Christmas, and Thanksgiving is a forgotten holiday and the Turkey gets forgotten.

This is not new. The same thing happened over 50 years ago in Lehi. Many people would trim their Christmas Trees after the Children went to bed, to have a magical scene in the morning. Others liked to enjoy their trees all month and would have it up by the middle of December. My grandmother would rush to put up her Christmas Tree. She always wanted to be the first person in Lehi to have her Christmas Tree up. She would have that Christmas Tree up long before Thanksgiving.

Her Tree was Lavender and Turquoise. Her lights were a special type that came from the Paris store in downtown Salt Lake. I can remember traveling on the bus with her to see if their were any of her bulbs, some more doves, or bulbs to matched her tree. Her ornaments did not include Santas but beautiful purple and turquoise blue bulbs that were covered with sparkly material. The lights were also covered in a glittery material that made them shine. It was a visually awesome creation.

The tree did not have Santa Clauses, or reindeers or snowmen. The tree was not made to appeal to the grandchildren. It was a glittery tree with large gold tinsel and gold and white doves. It was a up-scale creation made for a showy home.

She would always invite all of the grandchildren to come help decorate the tree. We would drink hot chocolate and eat toast made of raisin bread. Grandma had Santa Claus mugs that we would drink out of. Each Santa had a different facial expression. Some were winking, some were aglow with the excitement of the time and some were asleep. It was a fun time for all. She had a Santa, sleigh and reindeer, a sitting elf and a windup church that played Silent Night. Those decorations were there until she died. Even when she was in her 90's, her daughter Elaine would come over and decorate her home.

This doesn't sound much different than most Grandparents and their Grandchildren. The difference was that it was usually before Halloween. The tree was put in the window so that all could see that she had her Christmas Tree up. Even as my children grew up, we would bring them in their Halloween costumes to see Grandma and they would have their picture taken in front of the Christmas Tree with their costumes. My children still laugh about that to this day.

The funny thing about this pre-Halloween Christmas Tree was that she had a nemesis that she competed with to have the first Christmas Tree up in Lehi. Grandma's competition was Virginia Gurney, wife of J. Ferrin Gurney. She would often beat Grandma Edith in having the first Christmas Tree up in Lehi. While

there was no trophy given, Mrs. Gurney and my Grandma were victorious when they had the first Christmas trees up in town. Grandma kept track of when each person put up their Christmas Tree.

Grandma Haws never drove. Grandpa Haws had to take her wherever they went. Many evenings, she would get Grandpa to drive her up the street to make sure that Mrs. Gurney did not have her Christmas Tree up. Many a time, I went with them. Oh it was a sad day for Grandma when Mrs. Gurney had her tree up and Christmas lights of all colors were in her window. It seemed like the tree was put up earlier and earlier each year. Edith Broadbent Haws would take great pride in having the first Christmas Tree in Lehi.

As the years went by, others began putting their trees up earlier and earlier. It became less important to be able to compete or keep track of, but she always had her tree up by the first part of October.

So as you hear those Christmas Carols being sung by witches and goblins on Halloween Night, understand that this pushing up of the Christmas Season is not a new thing. It was happening in Lehi over 50 years ago.