

**Wanamaker's Christmas Light Show**  
**Annotated Bibliography**  
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Bird, William L. Jr. *Holidays on Display*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007.

*Holidays on Display* revisits past festivities of retailers and mentions the interest John Wanamaker took in the holiday seasons. He incorporated his passion of art into celebrating particularly Christmas and Easter. The materials he used to develop a holiday atmosphere for all to enjoy ranged from traditional medium like wood, stone, and plaster to more theatrical supplies such as papier- mache. Before the classic Wanamaker Christmas light show began in 1956, a simpler display existed inside the department store representing a Gothic pattern, banners, the Madonna and child with angels, and an illuminated star. Overall, Wanamaker viewed the interior of his stores as art. He often chose light and air circulation over selling space when designing the store structure. This shows how much dedication the retail tycoon had to aesthetics in all aspects of Wanamakers, not just during the holidays.

DiGiacomo, Robert. "A City at Liberty to Light Up Inside and Out For the Holidays." *Boston Globe* 2 Dec. 2007: M1.

This article is written by a man who grew up watching the Wanamaker Christmas light show at the Philadelphia flagship store. He began his piece by sharing his own experience in the Grand Court and how, for him, the colorful display meant the arrival of Santa. For the holiday season of 2007 the show will continue in the now Macy's department store after a LED- style makeover. The author goes on to suggest holiday themed events and activities for families in Philadelphia. The Christmas show in the Wanamaker building is the first stop he recommends. The fifteen minute light display is currently narrated by Julie Andrews and in 2007 the show ran every other hour from December 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> and every hour from then to the finale on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Macy's also showed a new version of "A Christmas Carol" exhibit that was created for Strawbridge & Clothier department store. This virtual display was in the Egyptian Room of the building and featured 26 scenes and 100 figures.

Marder, Dianna. "Twinkling of Store's Spirit of Christmas Past." *Philadelphia Inquirer* 24 Dec. 2007: B1.

The author discusses how the disappearance of department stores has diminished the holiday festivities of years ago. The article goes on to state that the existing Macy's in the Wanamaker building still features a version of the original Christmas show, although it's a little different. Within the presentation is the playing of the pipe organ and the Nutcracker light show. One woman in her sixties expresses her nostalgia about a time when Market Street had multiple department stores that are now reduced to one. She was a bit disappointed when bringing her grandchildren to the old Wanamaker's during the holiday season and not being able to show

them a toy department. She recalls a time when, “Wanamaker’s had a supervised shopping area where children could buy presents for their parents and get them gift wrapped.” Another former Wanamaker’s frequenter remembers riding the monorail that circled near the ceiling in the toy department. The article goes on to give the perspectives of those who experienced the modern version of the Christmas show in Macy’s. In 2007 the show started with a short concert of songs played on the organ while a sing-along was conducted by individuals in Victoria costumes. Some have said that the light show is shorter than in the past, there is no waterfall, and the narration is done by Julie Andrews rather than John Facenda. However the first floor of Macy’s exhibits the story of the Nutcracker every hour in a display of lighted figures. Although the show is not what it used to be, one woman put it bluntly by saying, “It’s better than nothing.”

Pray, Rusty. “F. Yost- Created Holiday Display.” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 25 Oct. 2001: B5.

This obituary gives insight into the man responsible for creating the Christmas light show at Wanamaker’s. Frederick M. Yost was an executive for the store in Center City, Philadelphia. His positions included advertising for newspaper, radio, and television, public relations, exhibitions, shows, and visual merchandising for the stores in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Delaware. In 1955 he designed and oversaw the 102-by-60 foot cathedral and Nativity scene made of plywood and papier-mache. Mr. Yost conducted research for the project by spending two years in Europe studying cathedrals. The original light show began in 1956 as a water-fountain display and evolved throughout the years as lights and other mechanical and artistic aspects have been added. His family showed their support of his work with the holiday show. His wife, Jessie, worked on music for the soundtrack and lent her voice, along with her husband’s to the narrative. Mr. Yost’s son Pete has said, “I think he felt as though the show was his visible legacy.” He also points out the irony of his father being well-known for the light show since it was such a small part of his contributions to Wanamakers.

Von Bergen, Jane M. “Retail Revolution of his Own John Wanamaker’s Stores are Long Gone. But his Influence on American Shoppers is Incalculable.” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 21 Nov. 1999: B1.

This author credits Wanamaker’s and other city department stores for fostering the tradition of holiday extravaganzas. At the time this article was published, the Wanamaker building was the department store Lord & Taylor. Although it speaks of the legacy of John Wanamaker as a whole, some sections mention the time-honored Christmas light show. She even goes so far as to state how others suggest that the marketing strategies of previous retail merchants like John Wanamaker are responsible for the commercialization of Christmas. The piece describes how children still visit the now Lord & Taylor store during the holiday season for the light show started in the 1950s as well as for the organ concerts played on the world’s largest musical instrument.

Von Bergen, Jane M. "The Lights Will Shine Again / A Holiday Tradition Will Continue at 13<sup>th</sup>, Market." *Philadelphia Inquirer* 19 Mar. 1997: C1.

Although not much descriptive information can be taken from this newspaper article, it shows that people were concerned about how Lord & Taylor would protect the legacy of the original retailer when it took control of the old Wanamaker store. The author reassures readers that the forty year old Christmas light show tradition will be carried out by the new owner. Lord & Taylor's chief executive, after recently acquiring the store, stated, "We're very respectful of the history." This declaration alone illustrates the number of people that must have been concerned with the possibility of the beloved Christmas display ending. Festive elements such as the balcony-high colored water fountains, dancing snowflakes, toy soldiers, and Frosty the Snowman will remain staples during the holiday season.