

This Day in History... November 27, 1924

First Macy's Thanksgiving Parade

On November 27, 1924, New York City hosted its first Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

In the 1920s, many of Macy's Department Store employees were first-generation immigrants. They wanted to give thanks for their new life in America with a traditional celebration from their European homeland – a parade.

They held the first Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City on November 27, 1924. The pageant featured store employees dressed as clowns and cowboys, with bands and live animals. The procession ended, as it has ever since, with a float carrying Santa Claus into Herald Square, signaling the transition to the Christmas season. Over a quarter of a million smiling faces watched the parade its first year. It was hailed a success and declared an annual event.



In the early years of the parade, the floats were pulled by horses.



Santa's arrival is often a highlight of the parade.

In 1927, promoters promised that the Thanksgiving Day Parade would be “bigger and better than ever,” and it was. For the first time, giant balloons traveled along the streets of New York City.

Balloons were introduced to replace the live zoo animals that frightened some of the children. The crowds of that era had never seen anything like the new balloons. New Yorkers were awed as giant dinosaurs, elephants, and tigers “peered” through fifth-story apartment windows.

In 1929, the balloons were released with the promise of a \$50 reward for anyone who found them. The release program ended three years later when a man attempted to use a plane to retrieve a giant cat balloon. The balloon tangled around the wing and the plane almost crashed into Broadway.

The number of spectators increased each year and grew to one million by the Depression years. The parade was postponed during World War II to save materials vital to the war effort. In 1945, the soldiers came home and people lined the streets again to see the first postwar parade. The war took its toll on American soldiers, so college and high school bands marched instead, allowing the soldiers to rest. These new bands replaced traditional marches with songs inspired by all forms of popular music.



When the parade was postponed during WWII, more than 650 pounds of scrap balloon rubber went toward making vital tires and life rafts for the war effort.

The audience became national in 1948 when the parade was broadcast from coast to coast, so the entire country could watch the festivities. The Thanksgiving Day Parade has become an American tradition. Today, 3.5 million people line the streets of Manhattan and another 50 million watch the pageantry on television.

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