Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”
The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

Series 2: “You have nothing to fear but fear itself:” FDR and the New Deal

File No. 1350

1940 December 24

Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremonies
At this Christmastide of 1940 it is well for all humanity to remind itself that while this is in its name a Christian celebration, it is participated in reverently and happily by hundreds of millions of people who are members of other religions, or belong actively to no church at all.

The reason is not far to seek. It is because the spirit of unselfish service personified by the life and the teachings of Christ makes appeal to the inner conscience and hope of every man and every woman in every part of the earth. It transcends in the ultimate all lines of race, of habitat, of nation. It lives in the midst of war, of slavery, of conquest. It survives prohibitions and decrees and force. It is an unquenchable Spring of Promise to humanity.
Sometimes we who have lived through the strifes and the hates of a quarter century wonder if this old world of ours has abandoned the ideals of the Brotherhood of Man. Sometimes we ask if contention and anger in our own midst in America is a portent of disunion and disaster. Sometimes we fear that the selfishness of the individual is more and more controlling in our lives.

When we are in those moods it is hard for us to keep from putting our tongues in our cheeks when we say "Merry Christmas" -- for we think in thoughts of futility and not of hope. A few people are cynics all of the time; some people are cynics part of the time; but most people keep their faith most of the time.

That is why we are willing to keep on striving for a better and a more happy world.
All is not black. Crisis may beget crisis but the
progress underneath does not wholly halt— it does go forward.

In a century we have gained much. Aside from great
areas stricken by actual warfare in the present moment,
the lives of human beings are safer than they were in the
olden days. Great and spreading plagues take smaller toll;
starvation of millions is less; the forces of nature are
better controlled. There is in the civilization we
recognize a greater security for the young, for the worker,
for the aged. Charity in the narrower sense of the word
helps the needy more usefully.

Compared with the days when Charles Dickens wrote
the Christmas Carol, we see a definite betterment. We do
not claim attainment, and we recognize that there is much --
Oh so much -- to do.

Most of all we ask a chance to do it -- yes, a
peaceful chance to do it.
We want to do it the voluntary way -- and most human beings in all the world want to do it the voluntary way. We do not want to have the way imposed on the world by the conquest of the world by the sword.

That would not follow in the footsteps of Christ. That would not make for happier Christmases in the future of any nation. Mankind is all one -- and what happens in distant lands tomorrow will leave its mark on the happiness of our Christmases to come.

Let us make this Christmas a merry one for the little children in our midst. For us of maturer years it cannot be merry.

But for most of us it can be a Happy Christmas if by happiness we mean that we have done with doubts, that we have set our hearts against fear, that we still believe in the Golden Rule for all mankind, that we intend to live more purely in the spirit of Christ, and that by our works, as well as our words, we will strive forward in Faith and in Hope and in Love.
In that spirit I wish a Happy Christmas to all,
and happier Christmases yet to come.

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Original
December 24, 1940

CAUTION: The following Christmas Greeting to the Nation to be delivered by the President MUST BE HELD IN CONFIDENTIALITY until released.

NOTE: Release is for editions of all newspapers appearing on the streets NOT EARLIER THAN 5:30 P.M., E.C.T. today.

PLEASE SAFEGUARD AGAINST PREMATURE PUBLICATION.

STEPHEN EARLY
Secretary to the President

At this Christmastide of 1940 it is well for all humanity to remind itself that while this is in its name a Christian celebration, it is participated in reverently and happily by hundreds of millions of people who are members of other religions, or belong actively to no church at all.

The reason is not far to seek. It is because the spirit of unselfish service personified by the life and the teachings of Christ makes appeal to the inner conscience and hope of every man and every woman in every part of the earth. It transcends in the ultimate all lines of race, of habitat, of nation. It lives in the midst of war, of slavery, of conquest. It survives prohibitions and decrees and force. It is an unquenchable Spring of Promise to humanity.

Sometimes we who have lived through the strife and the hates of a quarter century wonder if this old world of ours has abandoned the ideals of the Brotherhood of Man. Sometimes we ask if contention and anger in our own midst in America is a portent of division and disaster. Sometimes we fear that the selfishness of the individual is more and more controlling in our lives.

When we are in those moods it is hard for us to keep from putting our tongues in our cheeks when we say "Merry Christmas" — for we think in thoughts of futility and not of hope. A few people are cynics all of the time; some people are cynics part of the time; but most people keep their faith most of the time.

That is why we must keep on striving for a better and a more happy world.

It is unintelligent to be defeatist. Crisis may beget crisis but the progress underneath does not wholly halt — it does go forward.

In a century we have gained much. Aside from great areas stricken by actual warfare in the present moment, the lives of human beings are safer than they were in the olden days. Great and spreading plagues take smaller toll; starvation of millions is less; the forces of nature are better controlled. There is in the civilization we recognize a greater security for the young, for the worker, for the aged. Charity in the narrower sense of the word helps the needy more usefully.

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Christmas Carol, we see a definite betterment. We do not claim attainment, and we recognize that there is much — Oh so much — to do.

Most of all we ask a chance to do it — yes, a peaceful chance to do it.

We want to do it the voluntary way — and most human beings in all the world want to do it the voluntary way. We do not want to have the way imposed on the world by the conquest of the world by the sword.

That would not follow in the footsteps of Christ. That would not make for happier Christmases in the future of any nation. Mankind is all one — and what happens in distant lands tomorrow will leave its mark on the happiness of our Christmases to come.

Let us make this Christmas a merry one for the little children in our midst. For us of mature years it cannot be merry.

But for most of us it can be a Happy Christmas if by happiness we mean that we have done with doubts, that we have set our hearts against fear, that we still believe in the Golden Rule for all mankind, that we intend to live more purely in the spirit of Christ, and that by our works, as well as our words, we will strive forward in Faith and in Hope and in Love.

In that spirit I wish a Happy Christmas to all, and happier Christmases yet to come.
CAUTION: The following Christmas Greeting to the Nation to be delivered by the President MUST BE HELD IN CONFIDENCE until released.

NOTE: Release is for editions of all newspapers appearing on the streets NOT EARLIER THAN 5:11 P.M., E.S.T. today.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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WASHINGTON

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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Let us make this Christmas
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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Against fear that we still cherish in the Golden Rule for all mankind, that we intend to live more purely in the spirit of Christ, and that by our words as well as our works we will strive forward in faith and in hope and love.

In that spirit I wish a Happy Christmas to all, and happy Christmas yet to come.
January 6, 1941.

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. TSCHIDA:
Government Printing Office

Would you be good enough to
tie the President's speech and drafts
(as per usual) and stamp box as follows
and return to me:

F.D.R. - Lighting of Christmas Tree
December 24, 1940, Washington, D.C.

Dorothy Jones
Merry Christmas

THE LIGHTING

OF THE

National
Community Christmas Tree

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Christmas Eve

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1940

THE ELLIPSE

Four-Thirty
Christmas Eve Celebration at the National Community Christmas Tree, 1940

Concert
UNITED STATES MARINE BAND
Captain William F. Sauvel, Leader
Henry Weber, Second Leader

PROGRAM
1. Christmas Song: "THE BIRTHDAY OF A KING"  Nohl
2. Chorale: "GRANT US TO DO WITH ZEAL"  Bach
3. "NAZARETH"  Gounod
4. "JESU, JOY OF MAN'S DESiring"  Bach
5. Fantasy: "AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE"  Tchaikovsky
6. "Hallelujah Chorus" from "THE MESSIAH"  Handel

The President's Christmas Greeting to the Nation

Christmas Carols
By The
GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY GLEE CLUB
Dr. and Mrs. Robert Howe Harmon, Directors

"THE FIRST NOWELL"  Sir John Steiner
"O, LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM"  L. H. Redner
"SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT"  Franz Gruber

"CANTIQUE DE NOEL"—Comet Solo  Adam
Musician: Edward Masters
United States Marine Band

Arrival of the President and His Party
5:00 P. M.

INVOCATION  Rev. H. H. D. Sterrett
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS  Hon. John Russell Young
Commissioner of the District of Columbia

Greetings
OF THE PEOPLE OF WASHINGTON TO THE
PRESIDENT AND MRS. ROOSEVELT
Presented by
Helen Alms, Troop 29, Girl Scouts of the District of Columbia
Robert Willenberg, Eagle Scout, Troop 88, Boy Scouts of National Capital Area Council

Lighting of the Living Community Christmas Tree
By The
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

This celebration, sponsored by the Community Center and Playgrounds Department of the District of Columbia, The American Forestry Association, The Greater National Capital Committee of the Washington Board of Trade, and the Office of National Capital Parks of the Department of Interior, marks the Eighteenth Annual Lighting of the National Community Christmas Tree by the President of the United States.
Committees on the National Community Christmas Tree, 1940

National Committee

HONORABLE JOHN RUSSELL YOUNG, Chairman
HONORABLE NEWTON B. DRURY, Vice-Chairman

DR. FRANK W. BALLOU, Public Schools of the District of Columbia
LEWIS R. BARRETT, Coordinator of Recreation, District of Columbia
JAMES B. BURNS, American Federation of Government Employees
OVID BUTLER, The American Forestry Association
HON. ARTHUR CAPPER, United States Senate
MOST REV. JOSEPH M. CORRIGAN, Catholic University of America
HON. FREDERICK A. DELANO, National Capital Park and Planning Commission
MRS. HENRY GRATTON DOYLE, Board of Education, District of Columbia
MRS. SADIE B. DUNBAR, General Federation of Women's Clubs
DR. EDWARD W. ENGLE, American University
COL. EDWIN A. HALSEY, Secretary, United States Senate
HON. MELVIN C. HAZEN, President, Board of Commissioners, District of Columbia
HON. HAROLD L. ICKES, Secretary of the Interior
DR. MORDECAI JOHNSON, Howard University
HON. WILLIAM H. KING, United States Senate
GENERAL GEORGE C. MARSHALL, Chief of Staff, War Department
DR. CLOYD HECK MARVIN, George Washington University
COL. DAVID MCCOACH, Jr., Commissioner, District of Columbia
EUGENE MEYER, The Washington Post
A. G. NEAL, Potomac Electric Power Company
THEODORE W. NOYES, The Evening Star
VERY REV. ARTHUR A. OLEARY, S.J., Georgetown University
DR. JOHN O'ROURKE, Washington Daily News
MRS. ELEANOR PATTISON, Washington Times-Herald
HON. JENNINGS RANDOLPH, House of Representatives
ADMIRAL H. R. STARK, Chief of Naval Operations
LUTHER C. STEWARD, SR., National Federation of Federal Employees

Executive Committee

MISS SYDYL BAKER, Community Center and Playgrounds Department, Chairman
OVID BUTLER, The American Forestry Association, Vice-Chairman
FRANCIS F. GILLON, National Capital Parks, Vice-Chairman

THOMAS J. ANDERSON, Community Center and Playgrounds Department

COL. H. G. ATWOOD, High School Cadets, Public Schools, District of Columbia, Div. 10-13
DR. FRANK W. BALLOU, Public Schools, District of Columbia
MRS. HARRY F. BERNTSON, Council of Social Agencies
COL. HARRISON BRAND, Jr., Board of Trade
MAJOR E. W. BROWN, Metropolitan Police
WASHINGTON C. CLAYTON, American Automobile Association
ALBERT CLYDE BURTON, National Capital Parks
JAMES E. COLESFLOWER, Board of Trade
JOHN B. COHEN, United States Naval
COL. WALLACE M. CRAIGIE, High School Cadets, Public Schools, District of Columbia, Div. 1-9
MRS. ERNEST H. DANIEL, District of Columbia Federation of Women's Clubs
LINN C. DRAKE, National Capital Area Council, Boy Scouts of America
MISS ELEANOR DURETTE, District of Columbia Girl Scouts
E. C. GRAHAM, Hamilton National Bank

FORD YOUNG, Merchants and Manufacturers Association

Committee on Lighting of the Tree

From the Electric Institute of Washington

JOHN S. BARTLETT, Chairman

N. H. BARNES, FRANK T. SHULL, L. T. SOUDER, From the Community Center and Playgrounds Department

Committee on Lighting of Alley Christmas Trees

Sponsored by Washington Council of Church Women

MRS. FRANK A. LINZEL, President
MRS. RICHARD A. SAEHR, Chairman, Juvenile Court Department
MISS ETTA MAI RUSSELL, Juvenile Court Worker

Committee on Broadcasting

JOHN A. REMON, Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, Chairman
CURTIS A. HODGES, Greater National Capital Committee, Vice-Chairman
G. L. WILHELM, Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, Vice-Chairman
HARRY C. BUTCHER, Columbia Broadcasting System
W. D. DOLPH, Mutual Broadcasting System
K. H. BERKELEY, National Broadcasting Company
MISS ANN GILLIS, Columbia Broadcasting System
MISS MADELINE HENSHAW, Mutual Broadcasting System
CARLTON SMITH, Mutual Broadcasting Company

A Guard of Honor for the President and Mrs. Roosevelt are Officers of Washington High School Cadet Corps, Cedar Colonels
DAVID A. RHODES and REID RECTOR, Commanding; Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

The Washington Council of Church Women is sponsoring Community Christmas Celebrations in many Communities on Christmas Eve. The Alley Trees are lighted as the President Lights the National Tree.
LIGHTING OF CHRISTMAS TREE

Washington 1940

President Roosevelt's draft in pencil and the typed reading copy of his speech on this occasion.