

Amalie Hannig, "Christmas at Hull-House," *The Ladies Home Journal* 28, no. 17 (December 1911): 31.

The activities at Hull-House cover a wide field at any time of the year. About nine thousand people come to us each week during the winter months. But when Christmas approaches Hull-House appears like a huge ant-hill where all the inhabitants are turning their efforts with great intensity into one channel—into making this particular Christmas better than any of its predecessors.

To begin with the small people: A Christmas play, performed by children for all the club children, is given in our theater and the same performance is presented three times before different audiences of at least two hundred and fifty wide-eyed and breathless children each time, and when the performance is again twice repeated for their parents there is no loss of interest. It is difficult to find a suitable children's play that brings in good old Santa Claus and a Christmas tree. But usually this is done by using a fairy tale that is elastic enough to admit a Christmas touch at the end.

If anybody happens to see our large drawing-room on the day before Christmas he will be inclined to believe that he has accidentally dropped into a grocery store. His nostrils, too, will be greeted by all the characteristic odors. Rows of market-baskets fill the middle of the large space. In one corner of the rooms stand barrels filled with chickens, sacks of potatoes and onions, boxes of various groceries—as coffee, tea, sugar—boxes of apples, oranges and candy; another corner is stacked with small Christmas trees; and all these things send forth and mingle with their particular odors. On large tables and on all available chairs packages containing warm, comfortable wearing apparel, dress goods or shoes and an endless variety of toys are awaiting

distribution. Soon many hands begin to sort and label, and by noon three hundred baskets are filled, varying according to the sizes of the families to whom they are addressed.

Christmas Concert	
of the	
Hull-House Music School	
On	
Sunday Afternoon, December ,	
PROGRAM	
1. Choral (from Christmas Cantata).....	J.S. Bach
2. Nowel.....	Old English
3. Christmas Chimes.....	J. Rheinberger
4. Entre le bœuf et l'âne gris.....	French Carol
5. Child Jesus.....	Niels Gade
6. Cradle Song of the Infant Jesus.....	Old German
7. Christ, the Friend of Children.....	P. Cornelius
8. O Come, Little Children.....	German Carol
9. Canon.....	K. Reinecke
10. Tryst Noël.....	Eleanor Smith
11. Come, All Ye Shepherds.....	Old Bohemian
12. Ye Shepherds, Arise.....	Karl Reinecke
13. Christmas Morn.....	Burgmein

By the evening all baskets have disappeared; the little Christmas trees alone are still waiting. But at about nine o'clock a most delightful and mysterious activity begins. Each little

tree, accompanied by candles, tinsel and all sorts of fascinating decorations, is brought forth and carried to some household in our neighborhood where an expectant, smiling mother is ready and waiting. The children are safely asleep; the small, and for the most part very poor, dwelling is clean and shiny and shows itself at its best; a table is ready to receive the tree and the presents. Quickly the tree is trimmed and the candles are put on the safe branches, and, after a friendly exchange of Christmas greetings, "Santa Claus" retires, leaving the rest to Mother. Back he goes to Hull-House to fetch another tree and place it in another home. Sometimes it happens that the last "Santa Claus" returns from his errand at about one or two o'clock in the morning. Twenty-eight trees were sent out last Christmas.

Some of us remember how on one Christmas Eve a tree and some presents were taken to an Irish mother who supported her six children and three of her dead sister's children by scrubbing day and night. Even on this evening she was not expected back in her three-roomed home until half-past twelve. When "Santa Claus" appeared at this late hour, loaded down with gifts for ten, he found six children sleeping peacefully in one bed—three at the foot and three at the top—in one room, and three others were in another room. Nine stockings were hanging up; and who would be surprised to learn that some of them showed holes so big that an orange was dropped in first so that other articles might not fall through? "Santa Claus" had to move on tiptoe, hardly daring to breathe, while he made his arrangements in the same room with the sleeping children.

Our Italian friends gladly receive the American "Santa Claus." Their homes are made to look festive and bright. The freshly scoured floor, still damp, is covered with newspapers, a little altar adorns the wall, the lamp of devotion is lighted, and when the little tree, gaily trimmed,

stands on the floor before the altar the Virgin and Child seem to crown it with their blessed presence.

One feast at Hull-House fills hosts and guests alike with deep satisfaction. The Friendly Club, consisting of whole families of our people, come to a Christmas dinner, a real turkey dinner where everything is “grand” and “delicious.” Here are parents and their children dining with a joy that might make the chief cook of a King envious. Such a precious fowl as a turkey is an event to all of the diners. Last year about two hundred and sixty guests were placed in our spacious coffee-house, and when thirty-five late comers found all seats occupied the children politely gave up their legitimate places to the older people and stood between the chairs.

An effort is made, however, to observe Christmas in such a way that it shall not consist solely of presents and dinners and parties, but that the spiritual side shall also be accentuated. Händel’s “Messiah,” rendered every year through the courtesy of a chorus from Evanston, has been a source of great pleasure to our neighbors, to those of the Christian faith and to many of our Jewish friends. Perhaps the most spontaneous celebration of the birth of Jesus finds expression in our own Christmas concert, which has been given for eighteen years on the Sunday before Christmas. On this page is printed a recent program.

This concert consists of folk songs, carols and canons through which the people of many lands have for generations striven to express their joy and devotion, and is rendered by young people of the many nationalities represented in the Hull-House neighborhood. Possibly it is the spirit of Christmas, possibly it is the influence of music which holds together the souls of these people, but certain it is that, although most of the songs are of a religious character, Russian and Polish Jewish children participate with the consent of their parents.

An eminent author who has made a study of immigrants, especially of the Jews, said after he had listened to one of those concerts: "It is wonderful to see people, who in Russia would have died rather than speak the name of Christ, here singing these songs, and their families in the audience enjoying this music." Nobody who knows the principles of Hull-House will accuse us of trying to influence the religious convictions of our friends; but the fact that all these people are united in the true spirit of Christmas may perhaps be a genuine expression of "Peace on Earth and Good Will to Men."

This Christmas Carol was composed by one of the older pupils in the Music School, and, given for the first time at one of these concerts, was sung by a group of his younger brothers and sisters. [View Document in Historical Context to see the sheet music for "Christmas Carol" by Harriett Monroe and Charles Cornish.]

After the concert the children, with their families, take supper together in a spacious room lighted only by the tapers of a large Christmas tree. This "Music-School Tree" is always the same and unlike any of the others which flourish at Hull-House. It is a large fir tree which reaches from floor to ceiling and is fastened to a secure stand. To the top is tied a star made of silver tinsel wound around a frame of strong wire. Many "icicles" of glass are attached to conspicuous branches, and a large number of candle-holders are made of unpainted tin. Then we carefully spread soft fluffy asbestos or a new German non-combustible cotton over all the thicker and finer branches to make them look as if they were snow-covered. Twelve packages of plain silver-tinsel thread are also put on, starting at the top so that the tinsel covers the tree like a silver veil. The threads are laid on the branches almost singly and must not be in the least tangled. White candles are placed in the holders and holly is laid on the floor around the tree. After the candles have been lighted—beginning at the top—all lights in the room are turned out. There it

stands in wonderful, mysterious, silent beauty, like the Spirit of Christmas, glittering softly in green, white and silver.

This perhaps is the climax of our Christmas celebration, although the holiday week is full of all sorts of jollifications, ending with the “Old Settlers” party on New Year’s Day.