



The Origin of The Salvation Army Red Kettle

The Salvation Army Captain in San Francisco had resolved, in December of 1891, to provide a free Christmas dinner to the area's poor persons. But how would he pay for the food?

As he went about his daily tasks, the question stayed in his mind. Suddenly, his thoughts went back to his days as a sailor in Liverpool, England. On the Stage Landing he saw a large pot, called "Simpson's pot" into which charitable donations were thrown by passers-by.

On the next morning, he secured permission from the authorities to place a similar pot at the Oakland ferry landing, at the foot of Market Street. No time was lost in securing the pot and placing it in a conspicuous position, so that it could be seen by all those going to and from the ferry boats. In addition, a brass urn was placed on a stand in the waiting room for the same purpose.

Thus, Captain Joseph McFee launched a tradition that has spread not only throughout the United States, but throughout the world.

By Christmas, 1895, the kettle was used in 30 Salvation Army locations in various sections of the West Coast area. *The Sacramento Bee* of that year carried a description of the Army's Christmas activities and mentioned the contributions to street corner kettles. Shortly afterward, two young Salvation Army officers who had been instrumental in the original use of the kettle, William A. McIntyre and N.J. Lewis, were transferred to the East. They took with them the idea of the Christmas kettle.

In 1897, McIntyre prepared his Christmas plans for Boston around the kettle, but his fellow officers refused to cooperate for fear of "making spectacles of themselves." So McIntyre, his wife and sister set up three kettles at the Washington Street thoroughfare in the heart of the city. That year the kettle effort in Boston and other locations nationwide resulted in 150,000 Christmas dinners for the needy.

In 1898, the *New York World* hailed The Salvation Army kettles as "the newest and most novel device for collecting money." The newspaper also observed, "There is a man in charge to see that contributions are not stolen."

In 1901, kettle contributions in New York City provided funds for the first mammoth sit-down dinner in Madison Square Garden, a custom that continued for many years. Today, donations to Salvation Army kettles at Christmas time support holiday meals for homeless

and needy families, but also help The Salvation Army serve 30 million people through a myriad of other services all year long. These include:

- **Disaster Response Services**, which include assisting survivors of natural and man-made disasters to recover and rebuild their lives;
- **Social Service** programs providing food, shelter, clothing and financial assistance;
- **Casework and Counseling**, with programs for health care and residential assistance and abuse counseling;
- **Youth Services**, with programs for music, athletics, arts and crafts, camping and family counseling;
- **Senior Centers**, focused on assisting the needs of older adults -- including eight Silvercrest centers where seniors' assistance is partially subsidized by federal government dollars;
- **Christmas Programs**, in which the famous Red Kettles are a centerpiece, to help families and individuals financially at year-end with toys, meals and other assistance;
- **Human and Sexual Trafficking Advocacy**, where Army officers and staff are focused on public policy in Washington, D.C., and providing services and advocacy for victims of this international crime.

Kettles now are used in such distant lands as Korea, Japan, and Chile, and in many European countries. Everywhere, public contributions to the kettles enable The Salvation Army to bring the spirit of Christmas to those who would otherwise be forgotten all year long – to the aged and lonely, the ill, the inmates of jails and other institutions, the poor and unfortunate. In the United States, kettles at Thanksgiving and Christmas, although changed since the first utilitarian cauldron set up in San Francisco, help make it possible for The Salvation Army to do the most good possible for 30 million people each year.