

Collection #
P 0584

**SANTA CLAUS, INDIANA, COLLECTION
1931, CA. 1960S–1970S**

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 folder of black-and-white photographs, 1 folder printed items and ephemera, 1 folder color photographs

COLLECTION DATES: 1931; ca. 1960s–1970s

PROVENANCE: Multiple

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBERS: 2000.0064, 2008.0134

NOTES:

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Santa Claus is a small town in Spencer County in southern Indiana. The town was platted in 1846 and originally called Santa Fe. The town sought to establish a post office, but the application was denied by the United States Postal Service because there was already a Santa Fe post office in the state, in Miami County. The townspeople then agreed to change the name to Santa Claus, and so it was granted a post office, which opened in 1856.

Santa Claus, Indiana, has the only post office in the world with the Santa Claus name. Each year this post office receives thousands of letters to Santa from children. In 1914, Santa Claus's fourteenth postmaster, James Martin, took it upon himself to help Santa by answering the children's letters. Today this endeavor is handled by volunteers organized by the Santa Claus Museum and a non-profit group called Santa's Elves, Inc. In 2015, these volunteers helped Santa answer 22,000 letters from children.

In addition, thousands of people mail their Christmas cards each year through the Santa Claus post office in order to get a special picture postmark on their envelopes. Requests for the postmark come from other states and even other countries. Each year there is a new design for the postmark, which is the winning entry in an annual contest among local high school art students. A different picture postmark has been offered by this post office each Christmas season since 1983. Each year the Santa Claus post office handles about 500,000 pieces of mail during the holiday season. The rest of the year, this tiny post office processes about 13,000 pieces of mail per month.

It wasn't until the 1930s that Santa-themed tourist attractions became a part of the town. In 1933 Milton Harris gave up his law practice in Vincennes, Indiana, and moved to Santa Claus to manufacture decorative sleighs. He constructed a souvenir shop and other buildings with medieval-like architecture. In 1935–36 toy manufacturers moved into some of these buildings and the Curtiss Candy Co. of Chicago built a candy castle in the town. Around this time, Carl A. Barrett dedicated a roadside park on a scenic Santa Claus overlook, unveiling a giant 40-ton granite statue of Santa Claus.

Industrialist Louis J. Koch of Evansville, Indiana, created Santa Claus Land, one of the first theme parks in the country, as a retirement project. As a father of nine children, he was troubled by the disappointment felt by children who visited the town of Santa Claus, only to find that Santa was not there. The theme park opened on 3 August 1946 with a toy shop, toy displays, children's rides, a restaurant, and Santa Claus himself.

Koch's son Bill soon became head of Santa Claus Land, and he remained with the family business until his death in 2001. In 1960 he married "Santa's daughter," Patricia Yellig, with whom he had five children. The eldest, Will, was the park's president for more than twenty years until his unexpected death in 2010. Will's brother Dan became president for the next few years until that position was filled by a longtime park employee, Matt Eckert.

Santa Claus Land flourished, and as the park grew, the Koch family realized that Christmas was not the only possible theme for the park. In 1984 the park expanded to include sections for Halloween and the Fourth of July, and was renamed Holiday World. In 1993 Splashin' Safari Water Park was added, which now covers nearly forty acres. A Thanksgiving section was added to the park in 2006. Now known as Holiday World & Splashin' Safari, the park is still owned and operated by the Koch family.

Sources:

Items in the collection.

Baker, Ronald L. *From Needmore to Prosperity: Hoosier Place Names in Folklore and History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. Reference Room: F524 .B33 1995

Holiday World & Splashin' Safari. "Park History: From Santa Claus Land to Holiday World" <<https://www.holidayworld.com/holiblog/2016/07/06/park-history-santa-claus-land-holiday-world>>. Accessed 11 July 2017.

Santa Claus, Indiana. "Santa Claus Post Office" <<http://santaclausind.org/listings/santa-claus-post-office>>. Accessed 11 July 2017.

SouthernIN.com. "Santa Claus, Indiana Prepares for the Christmas Season" <http://www.southernin.com/Pages/archives/november_00/postmark.html>. Accessed 11 July 2017.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of photographs, press releases, a brochure, and a souvenir envelope pertaining to the post office and theme park in Santa Claus, Indiana.

Series 1, Photographs: This series contains seven black-and-white photographs and two color transparencies. The black-and-white photos include three of the post office in 1931 and show postmaster James F. Martin. A later photo shows a newer post office with a castle-like facade. Three photos show visitors to the Santa Claus Land theme park, and two show Santa Claus seated at a desk with a pile of letters.

Series 2, Printed Items and Ephemera: This series includes five press releases, a brochure for Santa Claus Land, and a souvenir envelope.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Photographs

CONTENTS

Three photographs of the Santa Claus, Indiana, post office in 1931: two are of the same image (one 8x10; one 3x4) showing postmaster James F. Martin standing outside the post office. The other also shows the exterior of the post office with a man who appears to be Martin seated on a bench. There is a Red Crown gasoline pump in front of the post office.

Santa Claus Post Office with castle-like facade, n.d.

Two photographs of Santa Claus Land: one shows cars lined up at the entrance of the park; one shows people in the park by the carousel and a miniature railway. [ca. 1960s].

Color slide of car at the entrance to Santa Claus Land [ca. 1970s].

Santa Claus seated at a desk with pile of letters, n.d.

Small color transparency of Santa Claus seated at desk with pile of letters, n.d. Similar image to black-and-white photograph listed immediately above.

CONTAINER

Photographs, Folder 1 of 2

Photographs, Folder 1 of 2

Photographs, Folder 1 of 2

Color Photographs, Folder 1 of 1

Photographs, Folder 1 of 2

Color Photographs, Folder 1 of 1

Series 2: Printed Items and Ephemera

CONTENTS

Four press releases from the Santa Claus News Service: (1) "Biography of Santa Claus" gives information and timeline about Raymond Joseph "Jim" Yellig (1894–1984) who portrayed Santa Claus at Santa Claus Land beginning in 1946 (4 pages); (2) "Postal Service Won't Forget Santa Claus" (2 pages); (3) "History of Santa Claus Land" (7 pages); and (4) "Santa Claus Makes an Impression on Christmas Mail" about the Santa Claus postmark (3 pages). [Two of these indicate that Douglas L. Baskett is news director; all are ca. 1970s.]

CONTAINER

Photographs, Folder 2 of 2

Press release from R. Malcolm and Associates in
Evansville, Indiana, about place names near Santa
Claus, Indiana, n.d.

Photographs, Folder 2 of 2

Brochure for Santa Claus Land [ca. 1960s].

Photographs, Folder 2 of 2

Souvenir envelope from Santa Claus Land, addressed
to Mr. Douglas L. Baskett in Evansville, Indiana, n.d.

Photographs, Folder 2 of 2