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The Origin of The Salvation Army Red Kettle

The Salvation Army's Captain Joseph McFee in San Francisco had resolved in December of 1891 to provide a free Christmas dinner to the area's poor. 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, where the boats came in, he saw a large pot into which charitable donations were thrown by passersby.

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 ferryboats. Thus, Captain 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 The Salvation Army kettles at Christmas help support the nearly 30 million people served by the Army through shelters, after-school programs, addiction-recovery programs, summer camps, disaster assistance and many other social services.

Kettles can now be found in many foreign countries such as Korea, Japan, Chile, many European countries and Australia. This year, The Salvation Army will continue to make Red Kettle donations a social experience by encouraging people to share their reasons for giving with #RedKettleReason. People can visit RedKettleReason.org to start their own fundraising page and donate directly to a need The Salvation Army addresses, such as hunger, shelter and holiday assistance. It's a chance for people to think about and share how their donations are making a difference.

Wherever people find The Salvation Army, 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 nearly 30 million people each year.

To share your own #RedKettleReason, visit <http://www.RedKettleReason.org/>