

Macy's Encyclopedia Article

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Macy's

If New York City is the capitol of American consumerism, then the Macy's department store is its White House. The self-proclaimed largest store in the world, Macy's has been located on Herald Square at 34th St. in Manhattan since 1902. Though Macy's now has retail outlets in shopping centers throughout the nation, the New York City store is a national landmark, its windows spectacularly decorated for the holidays. The Herald Square store, much more than the retailer's other stores, represents the permanence that has made Macy's an American tradition.

Macy's role in American culture has evolved remarkably since Zaccheus Macy and his family operated their first store on Nantucket Island. Throughout the late 1700s, Macy's store filled the general needs of the American whalemens. While the clothing selection has most likely changed a bit, the retail structure that made Macy's work was already in place.

Macy's obtained an unusual position of prominence among American retailers in 1926 when it began hosting New York City's Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The huge balloons which parade around Manhattan and by the Herald Square store have provided an annual reminder of the store's influence. Late in the century, each phase of the parade came under the scrutiny of a media intent on glorifying the holiday tradition, from the filling of the mammoth balloons to the holders who keep the five-story-high Big Bird under control. The television comedy *Seinfeld* even shaped an episode around the characters' interest in serving as holders in the Macy's Parade.

Macy's in Herald Square decorated for the Christmas holidays.

While some of Macy's efforts look to establish the store as an American tradition, expansion into new areas fueled the store's future. After years of hanging back, Macy's and other well-known American retailers embraced a new marketplace: the World Wide Web. With 1.33 million visitors in 1998, Macys.com continues the retailer's long history of serving the American consumer.

Further Reading:

Barmash, Isadore. *Macy's for Sale*. New York, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1989.

Trachtenberg, Jeffrey A. *The Rain on Macy's Parade: How Greed, Ambition, and Folly Ruined America's Greatest Store*. New York, Times Business, 1996.