

IMAGES
of America

FREDERICK
& NELSON



Clark Pounds, Frederick & Nelson's original doorman, was the friendly face of the store for more than four decades. In this c. 1940 photograph, he greets a customer at the main entrance to the store. Dressed to the nines in her stylish hat and white gloves, she might very well be on her way to a fashion show in the Tea Room. (Courtesy Wendell family.)

ON THE COVER: This iconic image of Frederick & Nelson shows the store at the close of its 75th anniversary year in 1965. That year the store received more fan mail than it had any previous Christmas. One customer wrote, "Every year Frederick's is lovely to behold, and all Seattleites look forward eagerly wondering what spectacular decorations will greet . . . shoppers . . . Frederick's is my favorite store all year long every year, but even more so when it is decorated for Christmas." (Courtesy Frederick & Nelson Records, Museum of History and Industry, Seattle.)

IMAGES
of America

FREDERICK
& NELSON

Ann Wendell



Copyright © 2008 by Ann Wendell
ISBN 978-0-7385-5865-3

Published by Arcadia Publishing
Charleston SC, Chicago IL, Portsmouth NH, San Francisco CA

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2008934523

For all general information contact Arcadia Publishing at:

Telephone 843-853-2070

Fax 843-853-0044

E-mail sales@arcadiapublishing.com

For customer service and orders:

Toll-Free 1-888-313-2665

Visit us on the Internet at www.arcadiapublishing.com

*To Abiba, an angel from Frederick's in Nordstrom
cleaning crew disguise, who created a joyful sanctuary
in the Ladies' Lounge when I needed it most.*

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	6
Introduction	7
1. Outside, Inside, All around the Town	11
2. Movers and Shakers, Associates, and Guests	39
3. Events, Occasions, and Special Treats	69
4. Christmas and the One True Santa	97

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When Frederick & Nelson (F&N) closed its doors in 1992, Seattle's Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI) became the lucky recipient of more than 46 boxes of materials from the store, including photographs, original artwork, and in-store materials from over 100 years of the store's existence. I would especially like to thank Carolyn Marr, the librarian at MOHAI, for help in navigating this treasure trove. Another great inspiration to me was Robert Spector's wonderful book *More Than a Store: Frederick & Nelson, 1890 to 1990*, commissioned for the store's 100th anniversary. Several Web sites include both personal and public history of F&N, including HistoryLink.org and PDXHistory.com. Thanks to my network of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances that spread the word far and wide that I was seeking F&N pictures and memories to great response. In particular, I'd like to thank the members of RHS75 yahoo group, classmates in MOHAI's Nearby History class, Kimberly Carsberg, and the Dauenhauer, Murray, Allyn, and White families. I also wish to thank Julie Pheasant-Albright, good friend and editor, for suggesting this project and for skipping work with me to attend the final F&N auction. Most of all, I want to acknowledge my parents, Ted and Virginia Wendell, who met in Chicago at Marshall Field & Company and moved here in 1947 for my father's new job in the employment department at Frederick & Nelson, where he remained for 35 years. Their loving preservation of F&N memorabilia has been a legacy enjoyed by my sister, Robin Glover, and me, and has now stood as the basis for this book.

Unless otherwise noted, all images belong to the author's family's personal collection.

Unless otherwise noted, all customer/associate quotes are from memories submitted to Frederick & Nelson during the 1986 Christmas ad campaign; original letters are part of MOHAI's Frederick & Nelson collection.

INTRODUCTION

Frederick & Nelson was founded in Seattle in 1890 by two partners, D. E. Frederick and James Mecham. The two men had worked together in the mines of Colorado and connected again soon after Frederick arrived in Seattle via steamer. They pooled their resources to form a secondhand furniture store they called J. G. Mecham and Company. Soon after, another friend from their mining days arrived from Colorado, Nels Nelson, who purchased a third of the business with cash in hand. Several months later, in ill health, James Mecham sold his share of the business, and the two remaining partners renamed the store Frederick & Nelson. D. E. Frederick had a talent for merchandising and a dedication to providing exemplary service. Nels Nelson's outgoing personality was responsible for forging partnerships and building goodwill in the growing Seattle community. This proved a winning combination, and the partners went on to make good on their vow to create the largest and finest store west of the Mississippi and north of San Francisco.

In 1891, they purchased the Queen City Furniture Company and added new furniture to their inventory. The partners proclaimed, "What our customers want, we will give them. Service is our motto." Early customers included the local Chinook Indians and a city excited by the news that Seattle would soon become the western terminus for the Great Northern Railroad. In 1897, the Klondike Gold Rush pulled Seattle out of the Panic of 1893, and Frederick & Nelson did a brisk business in fine furnishings, supplying both the hotels that catered to the Alaska trade and the homes of what would become the carriage trade.

After several moves, they settled into part of the Rialto Building at Second Avenue and Madison Street. By the early 1900s, Frederick & Nelson operated 28 shiny, horse-drawn delivery wagons. The delivery carriages soon became automobiles and, the oft-told story goes, would bring any purchase to your home from a room full of furniture to a single spool of thread. They instituted a mail-order system with the installation of a telephone switchboard, and if a desired item were not in their shop, they would buy it from some other store. Following on their customer-centric motto was their idea that, "if a customer asks for it, get it, and if enough people want the same thing, start a department." Soon there were departments for furniture, carpeting, housewares, china, and draperies—even a mattress factory.

In 1903, the pair hired Eva MacCallum to open a tearoom. It soon became one of the city's most popular attractions and employed 40 waitresses, a page boy, and a woman dressed as a French maid who sold pastries at each table. By 1906, F&N took up the entire block, including space in other buildings, which were connected by overhead walkways. This same year the store displayed ready-to-wear women's suits and gowns in a corner window, and this was an instant success.

Tragedy struck in 1907. In poor health, Nels Nelson ventured to a medical spa in Bohemia and died at sea upon his return trip. Frederick was left to run the business on his own. By 1914, D. E. Frederick was searching for a single location where he could consolidate all of his merchandising and services. He decided to move six blocks north of Seattle's retail core to Pine Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. There he built a six-story building, occupying almost the entire city block, which opened the day after Labor Day on September 3, 1918. More than 25,000 shoppers and guests crossed the threshold of the new store that day.

Businessmen and financiers branded the project “Frederick’s Folly” because it was so far away from the established retail area. But Frederick was forward thinking, making sure the foundation was strong enough to hold the 10 stories he felt the store would eventually need. Originally, the building included a beauty salon, post office, an auditorium for showing motion pictures, a fully equipped medical facility, and a nursery. A men-only entrance on the fifth floor spared gentlemen the embarrassment of having to walk through the women’s departments. There were reading and writing rooms, and the new, elaborately furnished Tea Room could seat 400. Here fashion shows were held for the enjoyment of the shoppers while they had lunch. Many finished their meal with a Frango, a frozen dessert with a flaky consistency that came in two flavors: maple and orange.

In 1921, the store opened a candy kitchen under the direction of candy maker Ray Alden. Around 1929 it was decided to add a chocolate mint truffle to the line of hard candies and dipped chocolates being produced. Alden’s secret recipe included chocolate from cocoa beans grown on the African coast and South America, triple-distilled oil of Oregon Peppermint, and 40 percent butter. The mints became a huge success, in part due to heavy promotion from Gil Ridean, head of F&N’s Food Division. They were packaged in a green-and-white eight-ounce tin and were priced at 50¢ a tin. Frango mints became the quintessential Seattle treat.

The store eventually grew to fill those 10 floors and became a center of cultural and civic activity in the Northwest. Besides being the preeminent department store with a rich and varied inventory of merchandise, the store garnered a reputation for hosting all manner of meetings, lectures, and classes, and showcasing local artists, and during World War II, it became the unofficial center for war bond drives.

At the age of 69, D. E. Frederick decided to retire. He had long been impressed with Marshall Field & Company and had patterned many of F&N’s policies after the venerable Chicago store. In 1929, he sold Frederick & Nelson to Marshall Field & Company for \$6 million. Marshall Field’s signed a 99-year lease on the property that would pay Frederick, and later his estate, \$100,000 a year. After the sale, Gil Ridean and the candy factory staff went to Chicago to introduce the mints to Marshall Field’s executives. Soon they began producing their own version, and the candies began selling all over the country. Frederick & Nelson was the distributor west of the Mississippi, and Marshall Field & Company covered the rest of the nation.

At the time of the sale, William H. St. Clair, who had been merchandise manager, was named president and general manager. He was known, and described in an issue of the staff newsletter, *Between Ourselves*, as a “kindly, quiet man, who manages the store with a firm, friendly hand like the father of an enormous family.” In January 1938, Marshall Field’s executive William S. Street arrived to fill the number two slot at Frederick & Nelson and was named president in December 1945. Street, and the staff he brought in, led the way in guiding the store through its recovery from the Great Depression, the challenges of World War II, the postwar economic boom, and the store’s expansion and changes during the 1950s. One of Street’s most influential hires was that of his long-time friend Hector Escobosa to be the person in charge of the fashion direction of the store. Escobosa was widely regarded as a fashion genius and was the first to bring European fashions to Frederick & Nelson. He was also responsible for the development of F&N’s specialty departments, such as the gift shop, old world shop, and the 18th-century furniture gallery.

During the 1940s, Frederick & Nelson supported the war efforts in a number of ways and then experienced growth in the expansive years following the war. In 1943, it opened a satellite store at Boeing Field at the Boeing Airplane Company’s No. 2 plant. This provided shift workers, many of whom were women, with a convenient place to shop and built loyalty among Boeing’s 47,000 employees. F&N also established a Victory Post on the main floor of the Seattle store, selling war bonds and stamps. After the war, Americans began moving to the suburbs, and on August 20, 1946, Bellevue Square opened in downtown Bellevue, becoming the first regional suburban shopping center in the Pacific Northwest. F&N opened its first major branch in Bellevue Square in 1946.

Although the store already had a reputation for its elaborate and stunning holiday displays, it was not until 1943 that Joe Sjursen, director of design, suggested putting Santa Claus himself on

display in the Sixth Avenue and Pine Street window. Local children flocked to have a chance to tell Santa what they wanted for Christmas. Art French, the chief photographer for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, is the one credited with coming up with the idea of having children photographed while sitting on Santa's knee. This quickly became a beloved Frederick & Nelson tradition.

In 1952, D. E. Frederick's dreams for expansion of the original store at Pine Street and Fifth Avenue were finally realized when the renovations, spurred by competition from the suburban shopping centers, were finished, and the grand opening was celebrated on August 4, 1952. There were 10 floors and 12 shopping levels (two below ground) built under the guidance of John Graham Jr., son of the original building's architect. On the 10th floor, the company built a modern candy kitchen that could turn out more than 500,000 pounds of Frango mints a year.

The expansion of Frederick & Nelson ignited growth among local retailers and in the core downtown area of Seattle. In a few years, William Street and other local downtown businessmen founded the Seattle Central Association (later named the Downtown Seattle Association) to encourage and maintain the vibrant area. Seattle's present-day exciting and beautiful downtown shopping area can be traced to the vision held by the founders and management of F&N and their decision to expand the store.

In 1955, F&N launched one of the largest retail events ever staged with the \$1 million "Sale of Sales." The event was held in what was the largest single room in Seattle—the Field Artillery Armory Drill Hall—where the store offered at least 25 percent off every regularly carried item in the store. Cornelius Byrne, vice president and general manager of the store, was quoted in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* as saying, "We set out to put on a warehouse sale . . . aimed directly at young married people who had a great need for household goods at prices they could afford—but who wanted quality as well." The sale garnered national attention with articles in national trade publications and general interest publications as well.

William Street believed, as had D. E. Frederick before him, that a beautiful store with all the amenities, as well as innovations in sales and merchandising, were ultimately not going to be the most important elements in winning the hearts and pocketbooks of their customers. The essential element would be exemplary customer service. When talking of the archetypal customer during a speech to staff he said, "She grades us for honesty—in our merchandise and our advertising. She grades us on our reliability and integrity. How we stand behind our goods. How she can depend on what we tell her. How we keep our promises. She grades us on our courtesy. How pleasant and accommodating we are. How friendly the store is. She grades us on our efficiency. How we do things right the first time . . . The customer . . . who can make or break this business, will continue to decide for us in the future as she has in the past. We stay in business only at the pleasure of the public that purchases our goods and services . . . Remember, We can't get unless we give."

The stories of Frederick & Nelson's customer service became legend throughout the Northwest, and even around the world, for going well beyond the call of duty. A couple of stories in particular have come to embody the qualities for which F&N was known. On December 11, 1927, the "Christmas Ship," bound for Alaska out of Seattle with 107 passengers and a cargo of gifts, was swept onto the rocks during a blinding snowstorm. The passengers were saved, but the entire cargo was ruined. When word reached the store, extra help was hired immediately. All Alaska orders were looked up through thousands of sales slips, and every order was duplicated. Crews worked day and night to get the gifts to the relief ship. Upon docking in Alaska, F&N ensured that, by any means possible, including specially hired airplanes and dog sleds, the gifts were delivered by Christmas.

Katheryn Kavanaugh took a trip to her birthplace in Ireland, a place she had not seen in 20 years. While there, she shot several rolls of color photographs memorializing her trip, and upon her return, she took the film to Frederick & Nelson for processing. The film processor was on the East Coast, and somehow, in the rush of the holiday season, the film was lost in the mail. William Street became involved, meeting with Kavanaugh and asking her to describe the photographs in detail. He then cabled the list to the London office of Marshall Field's, who hired a local photographer, Joseph Hollander, to retrace Katheryn Kavanaugh's route through Ireland

and recreate all the photographs she had taken. Street's proud explanation was, "That is what it takes to create character in a department store."

William Street announced his early retirement in 1961 but continued on as a civic leader. He became chairman of the Century 21 Corporation, the organizing group for the 1962 World's Fair. Frederick's display department put together a series of rotating exhibitions throughout the fairgrounds. Many of the guides wore uniforms chosen by F&N buyers. During the entire run of the fair, the exterior of the store was lit by floodlights, and all the window displays remained lit at night. Inside new carpets were laid, and departments featured products from around the world.

During the 1960s, the world experienced considerable turmoil, and the retail industry and the Northwest itself were not immune. Frederick & Nelson continued on its stately pace, slowed in part by its parent store, Marshall Field & Company. In 1963, F&N opened a \$6 million store in Aurora Village Shopping Center, but many felt it was not the size it could have been. In 1968, F&N was included in the Southcenter Mall, but it was felt other retailers gained better location placement. Frederick's survived the depressed economy of Seattle in the 1970s due in large part to their loyal, but aging, customer base. Then in 1978, huge changes came to Marshall Field & Company, and Frederick & Nelson was seen as their best opportunity for growth in a battle waged with their competition, Carter Hawley Hale. By 1980, F&N had become one of the fastest growing stores in the nation, quadrupling from 4 stores to 15. Marshall Field had acquired three Liberty House Stores in Portland and two in Tacoma, as well as six Lipmans stores in Oregon.

The new management, led by G. Arthur Henkens, made changes to the store to try and appeal to the generation of 18–35 year olds, a group who were coming into consumer prominence and with which the store had lost favor. Henkens replaced the bargain basement with the Arcade, a public marketplace-styled collection of food, candy, coffee, and trendy new housewares like espresso machines and pasta makers, and added a junior apparel boutique called "Pzaz." But these changes, undertaken within a poor business climate, spelled the beginning of the end for Frederick's. Throughout the 1980s, F&N was passed around to various investors like the unwanted fruitcake at Christmas, losing money at every turn. There was a moment of hope in 1986 when the store came under local ownership again. That Christmas the store ran a campaign with the tag line: "It was Frederick & Nelson then. Now it's Frederick & Nelson again." They asked customers to send in letters about their own F&N memories and received more than 2,500 responses. Clearly, the people of Seattle, and beyond, still cherished the memory of what the store had been. But the memories and goodwill were not enough to keep the store afloat, and after one last valiant effort in 1989 by local businessman David Sabey to turn things around, the magnificent old store slipped away in 1992. Gone but not forgotten, these images celebrate the glory days of a great American department store: Frederick & Nelson.