

What Philadelphia department store began sponsoring a Thanksgiving Day parade in 1920?

Answer: Gimbels

Gimbels department store began sponsoring a Thanksgiving Day parade in Philadelphia in 1920 and continued the tradition for over 65 years. It is considered the nation's oldest Thanksgiving Day parade; Macy's first sponsored a parade in New York City in 1924. This photograph shows Santa Claus receiving the key to the city during the annual Gimbels Thanksgiving Day parade in Philadelphia in 1943.

Adam Gimbel, a Bavarian by birth who immigrated to the United States in 1840, opened his first retail store in Indiana in 1842. At a time when bartering and negotiating sales were still common, Gimbel introduced fixed pricing in his store; that is, everything had a set, non-negotiable price. This "one profit system" became one of the hallmarks of modern retailing. Gimbel was also one of the first retailers to accept returns and give refunds.

With the expansion of the railroad system and changing economics in the late 1800s, some of Gimbels original stores were closed, while new branches opened. In 1894, a Gimbels store opened in Philadelphia at 9th and Market Streets, joining the ranks of Wanamaker's and Strawbridge and Clothier in the city's shopping district. At the time, several of Adam Gimbel's sons and grandsons managed the company and the family continued the tradition of offering reliable goods and services at fixed prices.

After Gimbels closed in 1986, television station WPVI, an ABC affiliate that has broadcasted the event since 1966, assumed the production costs for the parade. Department store chain Boscov's sponsored the parade for several years before going bankrupt in 2008. Swedish furniture maker IKEA is currently the parade's chief corporate sponsor.

Images of past Thanksgiving Day parades can be found in HSP's Digital Library (digitallibrary.hsp.org) and many more are in HSP's Philadelphia Record photograph morgue (#V7). Photographs of members of the Gimbel family are also in this collection.
