

## Santa Arrives at Mates

*Greg Ryan*

The image of Santa that we are familiar with originated during the 19th century – a portly, jolly, white-bearded man in a red coat, trousers and hat, all with white fur trimmings, a black leather belt and boots, carrying a bag full of gifts.

The arrival of Santa at Mate's store on the south-east corner of Dean and Kiewa streets was a joyful ritual for generations of local children.

From at least 1938, Santa arrived at the store on the back of a wooden horse 18 feet (over 5 metres) tall. The *Border Morning Mail* described the scene in December 1938: "There was a very large crowd ... to see Father Christmas arrive at Mate's on his huge white toy horse ... hundreds of children and parents crowded about the steed when Santa Claus came down the ladder from his giant saddle. A clown capered about the roadway as the procession moved along behind the Albury Town Band, led by bandmaster [Jack] Jarvie." The horse was pulled along from outside Mate's timber yard in Townsend street by "four pierrots," men in clown type costumes.



Santa leaving Townsend street atop the wooden horse, pulled by four Pierrots  
[Photo: Jan Hunter]

The BMM article went on "Toyland, laid out in Mate's very spacious lounge, was inadequate to hold the hundreds trying to procure tickets, and harassed mothers had a busy time before the first rush settled into order. Then Santa Claus began his distribution and the children were happy again."

The same horse delivered Santa in 1939 and 1940. Perhaps because celebrations were more subdued during World War II years, Santa's arrival on the wooden horse did not feature again until 1945. The end of the war giving more reason to celebrate, the BMM reported that it was the first year since 1940 that Santa had arrived on the wooden horse.

Until at least 1951, the size of crowds continued to swell. That year the BMM reported that "More than 2000 cheering children jammed city streets yesterday afternoon to welcome Father Christmas to Albury. Traffic was held up for 10 minutes as the excited children broke through a cordon of anxious parents and ran down Dean street to meet their hero ... on a huge white, wooden horse, drawn by a car and six boys rounded the corner of Townsend street into Dean street.

"Headed by a police motor cyclist, scores of children joined the red-coated celebrity as he made his way to Mate's, waving to the hundreds of awe-struck toddlers who lined the streets."