

## JOHN WANAMAKER STATUE

### THANKSGIVING DAY CELEBRATION – 1923

The most important event in the Philadelphia area on Thanksgiving Day 1923 was not a football game nor a parade, but the public dedication of the John Wanamaker Statue on City Hall Plaza.

When the founder of the department stores died in 1922 at the age of 84, Mayor J. Hampton Moore immediately proposed that contributions be collected from the people of Philadelphia for the erection of a statue to honor its most prominent citizen.

So many people contributed that the money received exceeded the cost of the statue, and the surplus was given to the Presbyterian Hospital, of which Wanamaker was one of the founders and a benefactor.

At noon Thursday, Nov. 23, 1923, several thousand people gathered on the east side of City Hall as Mayor Moore and other city dignitaries listened to Sen. George Wharton Pepper deliver his address honoring John Wanamaker. Music was provided by the Police Band of Philadelphia, led by Leopold Stokowski, conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Several hundred cadets of the John Wanamaker Commercial Institute, dressed in their colorful uniforms, stood by in awe and reverence for the man who had given them a free education and a good job.

John Wanamaker, born in Philadelphia in 1838, had created a new era in retail merchandising with his one-price system, guaranteed merchandise and the return of goods for any reason. His name had become a household word and he a friend to multitudes.

He put the YMCA on its feet in the early days: he was the founder of Bethany Sunday School which became the largest Sunday School in America with almost 5,000 pupils attending each week: he was president of the board of trustees of the Pennsylvania Military College (now Widener University), a member of the Philadelphia Board of Education, and as postmaster general of the United States from 1889-1893, he initiated rural free delivery, post offices at sea and several other services taken for granted today. Having proposed the parcel post system, he was given the honor of mailing the first parcel post package in 1913.

Though it seems that heroes are so soon forgotten, John Wanamaker, a man of honor, integrity and once Philadelphia's No. 1 citizen, is a person worthy to be remembered on this and every Thanksgiving Day in Philadelphia.

William Zulker