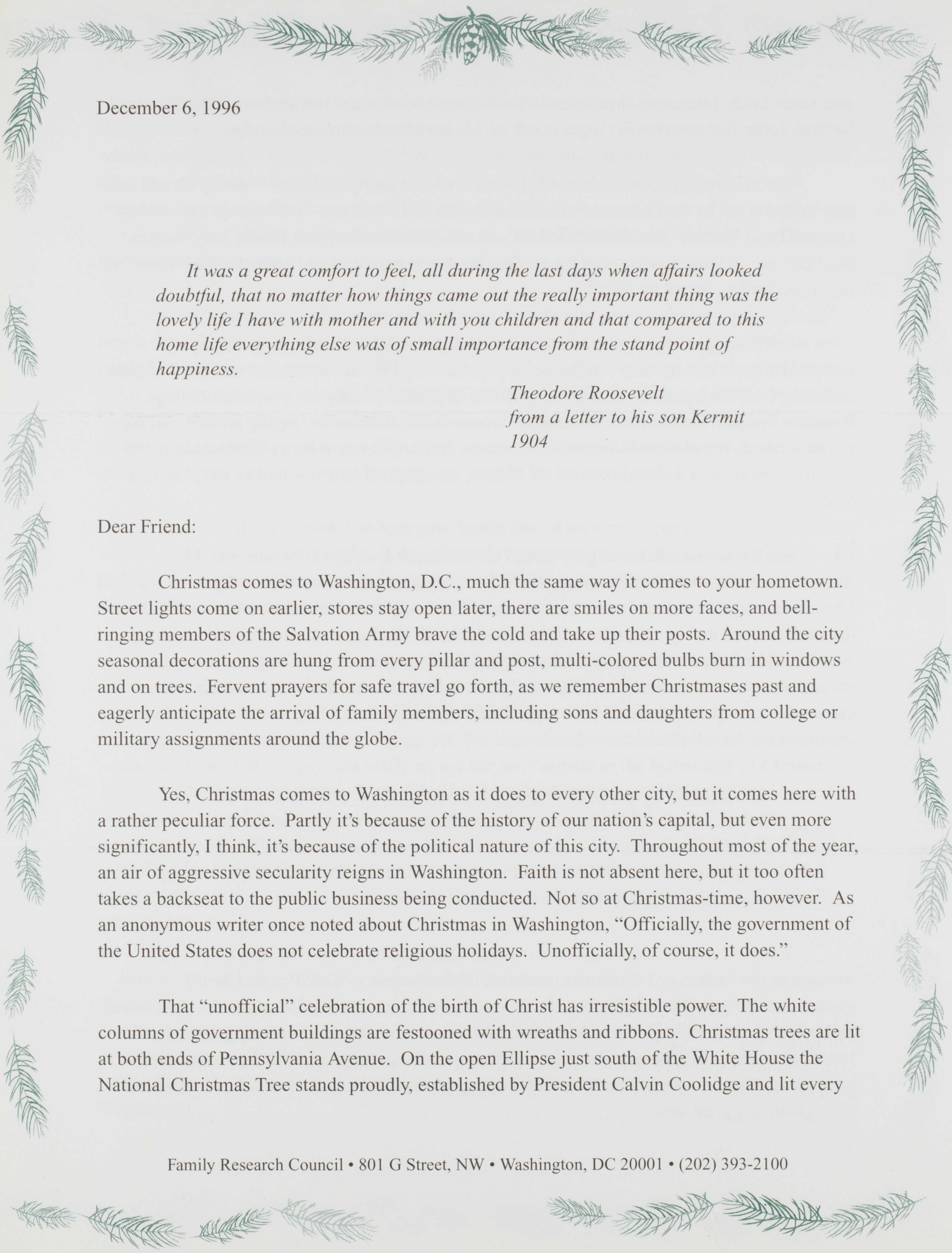




December 6, 1996

It was a great comfort to feel, all during the last days when affairs looked doubtful, that no matter how things came out the really important thing was the lovely life I have with mother and with you children and that compared to this home life everything else was of small importance from the stand point of happiness.

*Theodore Roosevelt
from a letter to his son Kermit
1904*

Dear Friend:

Christmas comes to Washington, D.C., much the same way it comes to your hometown. Street lights come on earlier, stores stay open later, there are smiles on more faces, and bell-ringing members of the Salvation Army brave the cold and take up their posts. Around the city seasonal decorations are hung from every pillar and post, multi-colored bulbs burn in windows and on trees. Fervent prayers for safe travel go forth, as we remember Christmases past and eagerly anticipate the arrival of family members, including sons and daughters from college or military assignments around the globe.

Yes, Christmas comes to Washington as it does to every other city, but it comes here with a rather peculiar force. Partly it's because of the history of our nation's capital, but even more significantly, I think, it's because of the political nature of this city. Throughout most of the year, an air of aggressive secularity reigns in Washington. Faith is not absent here, but it too often takes a backseat to the public business being conducted. Not so at Christmas-time, however. As an anonymous writer once noted about Christmas in Washington, "Officially, the government of the United States does not celebrate religious holidays. Unofficially, of course, it does."

That "unofficial" celebration of the birth of Christ has irresistible power. The white columns of government buildings are festooned with wreaths and ribbons. Christmas trees are lit at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. On the open Ellipse just south of the White House the National Christmas Tree stands proudly, established by President Calvin Coolidge and lit every