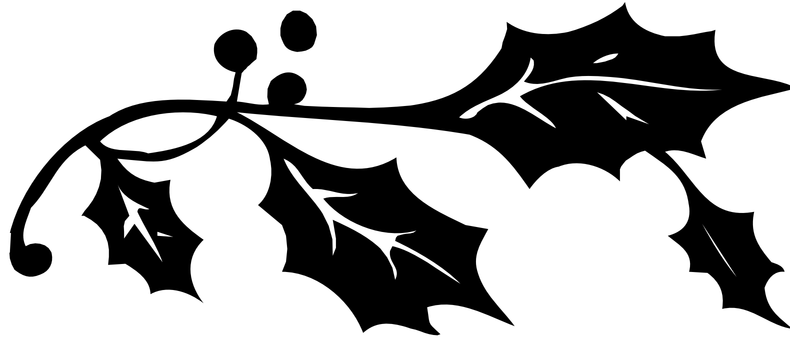
Holiday Traditions

PERIOD ROOMS
BELL FAMILY DECORATIVE ARTS COURT
MARY C. AND WALTER C. BRIGGS GALLERY



Docent Manual
2006

Foreword

Since its beginnings at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in 1951, *Holiday Traditions* has been a uniquely collaborative exhibition. Years ago, curators of the Decorative Arts Department were entirely responsible for the decorations. The Friends of the Institute funded the decorations and a Friends committee worked with the curators to plan and implement the exhibit. Docents provided tours of the resulting exhibition.

In more recent years, the boundaries of responsibility have blurred and it has become a team effort in the best sense of that term. In addition to leading tours, docents are also very helpful to have among the decorating volunteers, because they help maintain the balance between the MIA's traditions and keeping the exhibition fresh each year.

Docents who tour the exhibit in costume also share with Education staff the responsibility of training new docents and updating seasoned docents by providing sample walk-throughs of the decorated rooms each year. It is not at all unusual for a docent to finish decorating a room just in time to present a sample tour to his or her colleagues and do a tour for the public the next day!

This manual is also a collaborative effort. The information contained within is the result of many years of research and study by countless numbers of docents and museum staff. Special thanks are given to Angela Sangster, who took the time in 1989 to impose some order on the ungainly files of information in the docent study. Her efforts produced the first HTPR docent manual. This is the fifth revision, printed in 2006.

Holiday Traditions Partners:

- Curators of Holiday Traditions and the Department of Architecture, Design, Decorative Arts, Craft, and Sculpture
- Registrar for Holiday Traditions exhibition and installation
- Registrar for Holiday Traditions loans
- Holiday Traditions Decorating Volunteers and Art Crew
- Design and Label Production
- Docents and Docent Program Holiday Traditions Coordinators
- Friends of the Institute
- Security
- Interactive Media

Friends' Connections with the MIA Period Rooms

Connecticut Room The room was a gift of Mrs. Charles Bovey, a founding member of the Friends. It was first installed in 1929, and most recently redone in 1987 to more accurately represent the original house. This 1987 work was funded by Ruth Bovey Stevens, a past president of the Friends and daughter of the donor.

Providence Room The Friends donated $4,000 in 1924 toward furnishing the room. The looking glass and andirons were provided.

MacFarlane Room Objects in the room that are Friends' gifts are the pole screen, card table (by the window), and the candle stand.

History of Decoration The period rooms were first decorated for the holidays in 1951.

In 1953, the Friends sponsored a three-day Christmas Festival, raising $3,476.35 from the style show. The period rooms were decorated, there were special demonstrations of holiday cooking, gift wrapping, and a garden club display, as well as dance programs, a Santa Lucia procession, and carols and other music. This event was repeated in 1957.

Costumes In addition to funding the period rooms themselves and the decoration during the holidays, the Friends have also contributed generously for several years to the building of period costumes for the docents to wear while giving tours of the rooms. Since 1989, they have provided the means to produce the following costumes:

- Madame Aubry's dress from the MIA painting by Largillière.
- Mrs. Froud's blue silk from the portrait by Reynolds.
- American Puritan dress from the 1700s.
- Tudor costume from the painting by the follower of Holbein.
- Late 19th-century Victorian dress.
- 18th-century dress based on the portrait of Mrs. Nathaniel Allen.
- 18th-century American dress (Williamsburg).
- 1780-90 English gown.
- Two 1800-10 French evening dresses.
- 1908 American holiday dress.
- 1908-10 American tea gown.
- 18th c. French ball gown.

Tours of Holiday Traditions in the Period Rooms

Public Tours

Holiday Traditions public tours are offered several times each day from Thanksgiving weekend to early January. During the week between Christmas Day and New Year's Day, we offer additional tours in order to accommodate the large crowds. Tours of the Purcell-Cutts House take place on weekends throughout the run of the exhibition.

Docents

Docents conduct Holiday Traditions tours in period costumes or contemporary dress. On public tours, the docents guide visitors through all the period rooms. On other occasions, docents are stationed in some of the rooms. Additionally, we schedule private tours of the exhibition for individual groups. These are usually given without period costumes.

The Tour

A tour of Holiday Traditions is primarily an introduction to the development of Christmas traditions in England and America, with additional mention of German, French, and Swedish traditions. Hanukkah is represented in the Providence Room and additional related objects are installed in the Harold and Mickey Smith Gallery for Jewish Arts and Culture.

Use the decorations and objects as a springboard for discussions of the many traditions and festivities associated with the holiday season, highlighting the current year's theme for the exhibition. Discuss historical background for the rooms and objects in the exhibition, and keep commentary about current trends to a minimum. Given the constraints of time, you will not have much time to discuss interior design or furnishings in most rooms, but since many visitors may ask about them anyway, it is wise to be prepared with a general knowledge of each room. There is far more to relay than time allows, so focus on objects and traditions that relate to the exhibition's focus. **Even when in costume, tours should *not* be presented in first person, as if portraying historical figures.**

Themes

The thematic decoration of the period rooms remains basically the same each year, and is based on visual and written accounts from each period. If an object you remember from previous years' tours is no longer on view (temporarily or permanently), omit it from your commentary and move onto another object or theme.

The following outline, listing themes and objects for each room and the other exhibition spaces, serves as a guideline for docent tours:

Bell Decorative Arts Court, Mary C. and Walter C. Briggs Gallery and surrounding areas

Discuss:

Traditions of Nativity scenes and origin of the modern Christmas tree: Swedish traditions and German traditions that contributed to American traditions. For detailed information on the various trees and crèches, read labels and *Crèches* (MIA, 1995, docent study).

Objects:

- Krimmel tree and putz
- Feather tree and ornaments
- French santons by Paul Foque
- Josefina Aguilar nativity (Mexican)
- Italian *presepio*
- Bavarian Krippe
- Moravian tree
- Swedish tree

The Tudor Room

Theme:

Medieval feast around 1600

Discuss:

Life in an early manor house in rural England; holiday traditions and merriment

Focus:

The feast table

- table covered by carpet, cloth pressed into squares
- a bountiful board was a mark of status
- drinking vessels are located on the cupboard
- all varieties of food sat rim to rim (pewter)
    - boar’s head (ceramic tureen)
    - peacock
    - roast beef (Sir Loin)
    - vegetables (beets, peas, onions)
    - manger pie
    - eggs
    - bread
    - apples
- chairs reserved for head of household; others used benches
- one’s place at table indicated importance; preference was to sit “above the salt”

Festivities:

- Mumming: musical instruments from Concentus Musicus Minnesota, including the Krummhorn, sackbut, recorder, and virginal
- Mummer's mask
- Lord of Misrule

Herbs:

- Tussie mussie on table

Pre-Christian traditions:

- feasting
- greens
- Yule log

The Queen Anne Room

Theme:

Intimate dessert course around 1710

Discuss:

The conservative revival of English Christmas traditions following Cromwell and the Commonwealth period (1649-60)

Focus:

- Christmas rose
- plum pudding
- greens
- wassailing
- pomander balls

The Georgian Room

Theme:

Socializing in England around 1740

Discuss:

Holiday entertaining and the etiquette of tea; for detailed information on tea drinking in England (and America) in the 18th century, read Rodris Roth's "Tea-Drinking in 18th Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage" (docent study)

Focus:

Tea table and equipage

Objects:

- mistletoe
- holly and ivy
- kissing ball
- sweetmeats
- bent side piano/harpsichord
- whigs (dessert)
- tea wares: Chinese Export porcelain, English silver

Furniture arrangement:

The card table and chairs would be brought to the center of the room for tea service, then returned to the edges of the room when the activities were over.

The Connecticut Room

Theme:

Modest Thanksgiving celebration in a conservative New England home during the late 1700s (most furnishings in the room and on the table are from the early to mid-1700s but were still popular and used into the late 1700s)

Discuss:

Holiday tradition of Thanksgiving in America, history and significance; foods offered at the Thanksgiving table have changed and developed over time; Thanksgiving is the newest theme to "Holiday Traditions"

Objects:

- tin-glazed earthenware plates (popular Dutch and English import to America in the 1700s)
- traditional Thanksgiving turkey
- traditional Thanksgiving pumpkin pie
- celery (exotic, new, unusual vegetable in America during the late 1700s; grown in dirt cellars of homes)
- pigeon pasties (popular dish at the time, sometimes served with the pigeons' feet extended through the crust)

The Providence Room

Theme:

Celebration of Hanukkah, about 1770

Discuss:

History and traditions of Hanukkah, especially for Sephardic Jews in America; significance of Rhode Island, especially Newport (Touro Synagogue, oldest synagogue in continuous use in America)

Objects:

- Hanukkah lamp (19th c., in the 18th c. style)
- Buñuelos, fruits, sweet tea, latkes
- dreidel and gelt
- Chinese Export porcelain (plates)
- furnishings in room could have been used in Rhode Island in the 1770s

The Charleston Dining Room

Theme:
Dessert table, late 1700s - early 1800s

Discuss:
Together, the drawing and dining rooms represent an evening “rout.” In the dining room, focus on the dessert table.

Festivities:
Entertaining was a very important aspect of the holidays, which included parties and lavish meals concluding with grand dessert courses. For detailed information, read Louis Beldon’s *The Festive Tradition* (docent study).

Objects:

- pineapple
- pies, cakes, fruits, jellies, nuts, and sweetmeats
- épergne
- syllabub
- greens on windows, mantle
- fruit pyramids
- marzipan hedgehog
- croque-en-bouche (French immigrants in Charleston)

The Charleston Drawing Room

Theme:
Evening “rout,” late 1700s or early 1800s

Discuss:
Social activities of the time: card playing, chess, dancing, music.

Objects:

- punch
- holly in bucket by fireplace
- square piano, harp
- kaolin pipe

The MacFarlane Memorial Room

Theme:

American post-Christmas afternoon, 1870s and 1880s

Discuss:

Victorian Christmas, "everything and more"

Objects:

- Christmas table-top, candles, ornaments
- St. Nicholas/Santa Claus and stockings
- poinsettias
- toys: dolls, banks (Herberger Collection), china sets
- greeting cards
- scrap cookies and scrap ornaments
- garlands on ceiling and windows

The Duluth Living Room

Theme:

Decorating tree for a Victorian-style Christmas in an upper middle-class home around 1900

Discuss:

Asian, Art Nouveau, and Arts and Crafts motifs as manifested in the room's architecture, furnishings, and, in particular, the holiday decorations

Objects:

- ornaments on the tree (electric lights, blown glass, origami, popcorn, cranberries)

General History of Christmas Celebrations

Although the celebration of Christmas has become increasingly secularized over the centuries, Christmas was originally the sacred feast day of the birth of Christ. Modern-day American Christmas celebrations may have much in common with the English Victorian festival, but the origin of the feast goes back much further in time to ancient peoples, especially in northern Europe, who kept a festival about the time of the winter solstice to celebrate and ensure the return of the sun and the lengthening of the day. Saturnalia (the Roman feast of the god Saturn) extended from the 17th to the 24th of December, when work ceased and public places were decorated. Another Roman celebration, the Calends of January (the new year), was characterized by three days of feasting and gift-giving.

It was not until the 4th century that Bishop Julius I of Rome substituted the Christian festival for the pre-Christian festivities of Bacchanalia and Saturnalia by designating December 25th the feast day. Christianity's ability to incorporate these local traditions made it more palatable for non-Christian people to accept. The ancient spirit of celebration was transformed into the Christmas spirit, and many present-day customs—decorating with greens, mistletoe, candles, and bright flowers, lighting the Yule log, gift-giving, and feasting— are all remnants of ancient traditions.

American Christmas Traditions

As Europeans emigrated to North America, they brought with them traditions of their homelands, especially their observances of Christmas. People who cherished the holiday in their homelands did even more so in their adopted country. However, the Puritans in Colonial America condemned secular Christmas celebrations, as did their English counterparts. Puritans fought the Christmas observance on political grounds as well as religious ones. They had left England to establish religious freedom from the Church of England, and the traditional English celebration of Christmas symbolized the Church, its followers, and the Tories, whom they despised. In Massachusetts, the observance of Christmas was actually illegal until 1681. Anyone in the Massachusetts Bay Colony who feasted or stopped working on Christmas Day was fined five shillings.

Actually, the early colonists had little time for celebrations of any kind. In the 17th century, they were more concerned with survival than anything else. A Virginia clergyman reported to the Bishop of London that, "owing to the circumstances of this colony, no holy days except those of Christmas and Good Friday were observed because the Virginians were unwilling to lose their daily labor." However, by the mid-18th century, the holiday season in Virginia was considerably merrier. The season began a week in advance with a round of church services, feasting,

drinking, gaming, hunting, and parties. Although we have little documentation of the type of decorations they used, the plenitude of natural greenery in America must have provided abundant means. A written record from 1712 noted that a church aisle resembled a pretty, shady walk and that the pews looked like so many arbors on each side.

Christmas in 18th-century Charleston, South Carolina, was much like that of Virginia. Although the Carolina charter granted freedom of worship to everyone, a 1706 Act of Assembly appointed the Church of England (Anglican) as the official church of the state. The first Anglican church was built in Charleston in 1690. The Anglican congregation was primarily pro-British. Consequently, after the revolution, the church fell out of favor as the Tories lost power. Throughout the 18th century, Charleston received a steady influx of immigrants from Europe, such as the French Huguenots. The holiday traditions of these immigrants contributed to and influenced the culture of colonial Charleston.

As a general rule the Anglicans, French Huguenots, Dutch Reformed, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and numerous German sects, who had immigrated in the mid-18th century, celebrated Christmas, while the Puritans, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Quakers did not. The joyous manner in which Anglicans recognized the season was particularly infectious, exerting a profound influence over other colonists. Anglicans throughout the colonies observed the Feast of the Nativity as one of their most important religious festivals.

Rhode Island was an exception to the New England colonies, which were primarily Puritan. Rhode Island was open to numerous faiths and became a religious haven for Jews during the colonial period. The Church of England was established in Newport in 1700, and a church was built in Providence in 1724. The Touro Synagogue was built in Newport in 1763. Holidays were important and faithfully kept.

It was not until the 19th century that the popularity of Christmas gained tremendously to the point where it was established as a legal holiday in all states and territories between 1836 and 1890. Alabama was the first state to pass such a bill.

Boar’s Head

One of the most impressive dishes at the Medieval English feast was the boar’s head. It took more than a week to prepare once the animal had been hunted. The prepared boar’s head was ceremoniously carried into the banquet with great fanfare by a procession of cooks, huntsmen and servants, all dressed to provide a spectacle. As they marched, they sang the Boar’s Head Carol, which is one of the earliest extant English carols, having appeared in a book printed in 1521.

> The boar’s head in hand bear I,
> Bedecked with bays and rosemary;
> And I pray you, my masters, be merry.

The tradition had begun to die out in the 13th century when the wild boar became nearly extinct in the British Isles. However, there are still some places, such as Queen’s College, Oxford, that continue the tradition, substituting a suckling pig for the boar.

The tradition of serving a boar’s head probably dates to pre-Christian times, when the Nordic god Frey, who cared for the fertility of the herds, was symbolized by a boar. At mid-winter, to ensure new calves and lambs in the spring, a boar was sacrificed to the gods. But, a more contemporary explanation of the origin of this traditional dish concerns a student at Queen’s College, Oxford. According to legend, he was walking in the nearby forest of Shotover reading a volume of Aristotle when he was charged by a boar. Having found Aristotle’s philosophy “hard to swallow” himself, he cried out *Graecum est* (It’s Greek to me) and crammed the book down the boar’s throat, choking him to death. Because he was poor and couldn’t afford to lose his book, he cut off the boar’s head to get it back. He carried the head back to the college, where it was roasted and eaten with great festivity.

Boxing Day

The first weekday after Christmas, which is called Boxing Day, is observed in England and parts of the British Commonwealth as a legal holiday. Christmas gifts or boxes are traditionally given to service workers. The custom of boxing may derive from the tradition of priests opening the alms boxes in churches on December 26th (The feast of St. Stephen), and distributing the monies to the poor. The idea was adopted by apprentices and assistants who delivered Christmas boxes to their employer’s customers, asking for tips in return for their service during the year.

Candles

"The Palace or Governor's House has the ornamental addition of a good cupola or lanthorn, illuminated with most of the town, upon the birthnights and other nights of occasional rejoicings."
-Hugh Jones, 1724, from Libbey Hodges Oliver and Mary Miley Theobald, *Williamsburg Christmas*, 1999

The candle, with its brightness, sacredness, and warmth, is an indispensable part of the Christmas season. In pre-Christian times, when the days were short during the winter solstice, light was an important part of mid-winter festivities. Candles and bonfires helped to combat the forces of cold and darkness. Wax tapers were given as gifts at the Roman festival of Saturnalia. For Christians, the lighting of candles came to symbolize Jesus, the Light of the world.

The custom of displaying shining candles from a home window is still a custom practiced in Europe, particularly on Christmas Eve, because the stranger who is given light and comfort in the darkness symbolizes Mary seeking shelter from the night. In Ireland, during years of suppression, Catholics placed candles in the windows of certain homes so priests would know where to celebrate the Midnight Mass. In Victorian England, tradesmen gave gifts of candles to their customers. Three hundred thousand candles lend their glow to the Australian custom of Carols by Candlelight. In many parts of the world, candles reflect the dawning of the Advent season, reminding believers of the coming of Christ. The addition of lighted candles to the paradise tree marked the birth of one of the most beloved traditions, the Christmas tree.

In early Colonial days, animal fat was scarce, so children gathered berries for candle-making. Bayberry candles are made from the gray, wax-giving berries of the bayberry shrub that grows in sandy soil from Alaska to Florida. Bayberry candles are made by boiling the berries with water, which floats the oily wax to the top. When this oil becomes cold, it forms a cake near the surface of the water. This wax is reheated and candles are formed one of two ways. The wax can be poured into a mold, or several wicks may be fastened to a piece of wood, which can be dipped into the hot wax to make candle tapers. Each coat must cool and become hard before dipping again. This process continues until the desired size is achieved. Bayberry

candles are a translucent green. When the flame is extinguished, the odor is as sweet and pungent as incense.

Candlemas

Candlemas, which occurs on February 2nd, is the celebration of the ritual purification of Mary, which according to Jewish law, took place 40 days after the birth of her child. The purification was first celebrated by the church in the 7th or 8th century. The name Candlemas was given to the celebration because of the blessing of the candles that were carried in the procession.

In many countries, Candlemas marked the end of the Christmas season. Decorations were stored, and Christmas greens were burned with the remnants of the Yule log and the ashes spread over fields to ensure a good harvest. A Yule log for the coming year was chosen at this time. Candlemas was also a customary day to forecast weather. If sunny, there would be 40 more days of cold and snow. This custom has carried over into the American tradition of Groundhog Day.

Christmas Cards

The immediate predecessors of Christmas cards were colored sheets of paper called Christmas pieces that had biblical scenes or pictures of nature around the borders. In the center, school children placed a sample of their penmanship, expressing a wish for a happy holiday or promises for good behavior.

The first Christmas card was probably designed in England by John Calcott Horsley in 1846. It showed a family enjoying wine and portrayed acts of charity on either side; beneath this scene was a holiday greeting. Although temperance adherents criticized the card for condoning alcohol consumption, a thousand copies were printed and sold for a shilling each.

Although it is impossible to say absolutely that the Horsley card was the first, it appears that Christmas cards had made their mark around the middle of the 19th century. The creation of the "penny post-card" by the British in 1840 made it possible to correspond relatively inexpensively with large numbers of friends. Likewise, a great increase in printing resulted from the invention of the steam press. Louis Prang, who was a German-born printer, printed his first American Christmas cards in 1875 in Roxbury, Massachusetts. He did more than anyone else to popularize them by instituting nationwide contests for the best designs, which were awarded cash prizes.

Christmas Rose See Rose

Costumes, Period

Tudor Dress

This dress in the MIA collection is based on a portrait of a woman by the follower of Holbein, sometimes located in the Northern Renaissance gallery. The Renaissance changed the shape of women's clothing. The skirt and bodice of a dress were made separately, allowing the skirt to become larger and the bodice tighter. In addition, women's clothing became more rigid and structured. A type of hoop known as a farthingale gave the skirt a cone shape. The bodice had a stiff internal structure. The neckline dropped, due to the boning inside, which made it difficult to make a high-necked bodice.

Dark fabrics were popular because they showed off the delicate gold embroidery and gems. Women showed more of their hair, wearing French hoods. The chatelaine or hanging chain at the waist was used to suspend keys, scissors, or books. A noblewoman was responsible for feeding and clothing all the people under her roof, so food and textiles were kept locked in storage. She was the only one to have keys to the storehouses, so the chatelaine and keys were symbols of her authority.

Puritan Dress

Social groups have always proclaimed their status through their clothing. The simplicity of our Puritan dress indicates that the wearer was of the working class or a member of a group like the Puritans, who held egalitarian beliefs and expressed their democratic ideals through simple clothing. They made laws that forbid women from putting lace and ribbons on their clothes. The apron was worn for dress as well as housework. The large puffy sleeves are a leftover from the Renaissance. Broad shoulders were a fashion

detail of the time, accomplished here by the "wings" that extend from the upper armholes. The skirt is cartridge pleated to the bodice, a common way of controlling the extreme fullness. Puritan women wore red petticoats. Cleanliness was defined by what you could see. If your neck and cuff linens were clean, you were clean!

18th-century blue silk

The MIA dress based on the portrait of Mrs. Froude by Sir Joshua Reynolds represents high fashion of the 1700s. The shape of the garment is formed by a corset, side hoops (over the hips) to hold the skirt out, and a larger hoop to extend the entire skirt. The skirt has slits so that a woman could put her hands through them into the side hoops that doubled as pockets. The ideal posture of the time was similar to that of a person on horseback. The back was straight, shoulders back, and chest thrust forward. Ideally, a woman's shoulderblades would meet in the back. This was only physically possible if girls wore corsets from infancy. A girl's first corset was a board up her back with shoulder straps that pulled the shoulders back. Short caplets with hoods were very common during this time, to protect the bare chest and neck from cold.

Crèche

See Nativity Scene

Croque-en-bouche

Croque-en-bouche is a French pastry made of cream puffs filled with custard (pastry cream), stuck together with caramel, and decorated with sugar-coated almonds. As exhibited in the Charleston Dining Room, it is constructed over a metal cone and stuck together with egg whites that have been colored to simulate caramel. It also has two coats of acrylic spray and one coat of shellac. Tasty!

Dancing

"After Breakfast, we all retired into the Dancing-Room. . . . There were several Minuets danced with great ease and propriety; after which the whole company Joined in country-dances, and it was indeed beautiful to admiration, to see such a number of young persons, set off by dress to the best Advantage, moving easily, to the sound of well performed Music, and with perfect regularity, tho' apparently in the utmost Disorder—The Dance continued til two, we dined at half after three—soon after Dinner we repaired to the Dancing-Room again . . . . [until] it grew too dark to dance." - Philip Vickers Fithian, December 1777 (in Virginia). Hunter Dickenson Farish, ed., *The Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian*, 1957

"The Feast of Christ's Nativity is spent in Reveling, Dicing, Carding, Masking, and in all Licentious Liberty . . by Mad Mirth, by long Eating, by hard Drinking, by Lewd Gaming, by rude Revling." – Cotton Mather, 1721, from Stephen Nisenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*. 1996

Even though it was frowned upon, dancing figured prominently in colonial life. American religious leaders continued to oppose dancing through the 18th century. Increase Mather spoke out against physical dancing such as the maypole, mixed dancing between men and women, and heaven forbid—jiggling! Despite a 1711 Massachusetts statute that prohibited dancing, country dances connected with folk traditions were brought to the New World by settlers. This type of dancing, which was characterized as domestic and informal, had an accepted place in colonial society.

By the early 18th century, formal dances that required skill became popular. Proper posture and constrained gestures reinforced by clothing of the day were marks of aspiration towards gentility and refinement. Decency and decorum were the key words. Formal dances included strict codes of behavior:

- A lady may not refuse to dance unless engaged, because it would be considered a breach of good manners. A proper lady did not ask a gentleman to dance.
- Gentlemen were obligated to see that ladies did not sit long waiting for partners. Nor should a gentleman dance too frequently with one lady.
- Married couples ought not to dance with each other, but rather distribute their favors amongst the rest.

Dining

At the end of the 17th century, the affluent were just beginning to add dining rooms to their houses. For the majority of people, either the main room or the parlor served the purpose (as with the Tudor, Queen Anne, Connecticut, and Rhode Island rooms). The table most often used for dinner was covered day and night by a heavy carpet. At mealtime, the carpet was protected with white linen. A careful housewife pressed her linen so that its folds stood up sharply. Napkins were made from linen and could be found in almost every American house.

The 18th-century dining room, which was a part of every upper-class home, was not used exclusively for dining. Desks for writing and chairs for reading made the room useful between meals as a second parlor. Turkish carpets were demoted to the floor and supplanted on the table by thinner materials. To protect linens, housewives in the mid-18th century placed mats under serving dishes (place mats).

A proper dinner party began with a course of as many as twenty-one dishes and proceeded to a similar second course, ending with a dessert of as many dishes as had been offered in the second course. Gentlemen and ladies were separated at the table, men at one end, women at the other. Whoever sat in front of the meat did the carving. It was customary to remove the tablecloth before serving the dessert. Desserts were of two types: creams, cakes, preserved fruit, candies, and jellies; and whole fresh fruits and nuts.

Two hundred years ago, arranging an elaborate dessert table was a creative pastime for a woman in an age when she seldom left the home, but found recreation in home entertaining. Dessert tables furnished a climax for parties, creating a spectacle to be talked about long after the fact. The table was laden and waiting for guests as they strolled through the door. Display was everything, and "the more the better" was the maxim. Fine linens and serving dishes of porcelain, glass and silver were essential. The status of a family was associated with the number of dishes served.

For more information, see Louis Belden, *The Festive Tradition,* chapter 1, "Setting the Gentleman's Table" (docent study).

English Christmas Traditions

Ever since Charles Dickens sparked a revival of interest in the old-fashioned Christmas, England has been second to none in the enthusiasm and variety of its celebrations. Many customs are its own, but others from around the world have also found their place.

England's Father Christmas is hard to distinguish from his American cousin, Santa Claus. Letters are sent to him by throwing them into the fireplace. If they fly up the chimney, the wish will be granted. Stockings are hung by the chimney or the foot of the bed to receive small presents that are opened on Christmas morning.

The Christmas tree has occupied a central position in English festivities ever since Prince Albert introduced it from his native Germany in the mid-19th century. The kissing bough, made of a combination of greenery and mistletoe, continues to be another popular decoration.

The venerable Yule log and the boar's head still survive in some institutions such as the universities, but they are not commonplace. In the English countryside, some mummers continue to perform the plays of St. George and Waits still carol through the village streets. In Yorkshire, the Tolling of the Devil's Knell takes place every Christmas Eve, with the church bell ringing once for every year since the birth of Christ with the last stroke timed at midnight.

At one time, old English roast beef (Sir Loin) held the place of honor on the table. Dessert consisted of mince pies and flaming plum pudding. Mince pies may no longer contain minced meat and plum puddings may have no plums, but the English would never let mere fact stand in the way of tradition!

Evergreens

"Against the Feast of Christmas, every mans house, as also their parish Churches, were decked with Holm (live oak), Ivy, Bayes, and whatsoever the season if the yeere could be aforded to be greene. The Conduits and Standards in the streets were, likewise, garnished."
- John Stow, *The Survey of London*, 1618

"With holly and ivy so green and so gay, we deck up our houses as fresh as the day."
- *Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1695

"The damsel donn'ed her kirtle sheen;
The hall was dress'd with holly green,
Fourth to the wood did merry-men go,
To gather the mistletoe."
- Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion*, 1808

Since ancient times, evergreens have been regarded as a symbol of eternal life, and have always held symbolic value for both secular and religious reasons.

In ancient times, evergreen was burned or the sap spread above doors to fend off evil spirits, and evergreens were placed around doorways or planted at the door as a protection against witches. Witches, according to legend,

were bound by the devil's law to count the needles before they entered a house. When they found the task too onerous, they left to search for unprotected entrances.

As far back as the 1500s in England, people were encouraged to decorate their homes with greenery, which increasingly took on religious significance. Some referred to evergreens as "trees of sanctuary," and believed them to have sheltered the holy family in their flight from Egypt. It wasn't until the Victorian era that "fancy greens" shaped into wreaths, crosses, etc. were used to decorate (and not until the 1920s that wreaths began sprouting fruit).

Father Christmas

Father Christmas is the English equivalent of Santa Claus. The origin of Father Christmas can probably be traced to the ancient world and the god Saturn. The Roman Saturnalia celebrated the brief return each year of the Golden Age in which Saturn returned to rule over Italy. Saturn was a giant who came bearing food and wine, joy and revelry, and equality to all the people. When introduced to Northern Europe, Saturn probably blended with the wild figure of Odin and his raging host of spirits who would sweep across the land in the winter.

Father Christmas was never a Christian figure, but rather, symbolized the secular pleasures. He was portrayed as a giant, wearing a scarlet or green robe lined with fur, crowned with holly, ivy, or mistletoe, and carrying the Yule log and a bowl of punch. The Ghost of Christmas Present in Dickens' *Christmas Carol* was probably intended to be Father Christmas.

Feather Tree

Artificial Christmas trees were first developed in Germany over a hundred years ago (1860-1940) at a time when there was concern that the forests were being depleted. Goose (or turkey) feathers were wrapped around stiff wire to form the branches, which were attached to a wood rod that served as the trunk. The trees, which measured from a few inches to six feet tall, were inserted into a base for support. They resembled white pines, having wide spaces between their branches that were suitable for showing off ornaments. Red berries or candleholders were placed at the end of the branches. The trees folded like an umbrella for storage.

The MIA's feather tree is five feet tall, with nine tiers of branches. It was handmade by the Carlson family in Defiance, Ohio. The long wing or tail feathers of the goose

are attached to the quill by a delicate membrane. They are separated by literally pulling them off the quill, bottom to top, and then dyed. The feather is then wrapped around the wire to form the branches. The individual strands of the feather fan out to resemble the needles of an evergreen.

French Christmas Traditions

It is traditional in France to have a *crèche* (manger scene) in the home as well as in churches and public squares. Nativity settings feature the tiny painted clay figurines called *santons*, meaning "little saints." These brightly colored images are made by local craftsmen throughout the year and sold at Christmas fairs in Marseilles and Aix-en-Provence, where the tradition is the strongest. Here you can purchase figurines that have been made in the same molds for almost 300 years.

The nativity scene, which was created by St. Francis of Assisi in Italy in the 13th century, was introduced to France by Pope John XXII in 1316 when the papacy moved to Avignon. Around 1800, Italians introduced to France some of the *santi belli* which were popular in Italy. Soon thereafter, contemporary French characters began to appear at the sides of the manger scene along with Mary, Joseph, and the Christ Child. It was not unusual to see the town mayor between the ox and the ass, a knife grinder arriving with the Magi, or a gypsy, hunter, or gardener being serenaded by angels' song, all meticulously detailed in clay.

Christmas trees never gained much popularity in France. The Yule log was once important, and lent its shape to the cake, the *bûche de Noël,* which is traditionally baked at Christmas.

In France, mistletoe is much more popular than holly. A branch of mistletoe is hung above the door to bring good luck to a household. Sometimes amulets of mistletoe were worn around the neck to prevent illness.

Following Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve is *le reveillon,* meaning "great supper," which is the culinary high point of the season. It is a banquet consisting of 13 different foods, many of them rich desserts. The number 13 is symbolic of Christ and his 12 apostles. The menu varies widely in different parts of France. In Alsace goose is served, and in Brittany, buckwheat cakes with sour cream. Burgundy feasts on turkey and chestnuts, while Paris revels in oysters

and *pâté de fois gras*. In earlier times, the Christmas bird was served surrounded by 12 partridges to represent the 12 months of the year, 30 truffles to symbolize the nights of the months, and 30 white eggs to symbolize the days.

Children see to it that their shoes are set out by the fireside for presents from *Père Noël* (Father Christmas) or *le Petit Noël (Little Christmas, the Christ Child).* Originally, the shoes were sabots (wooden peasant shoes). The children leave a glass of water with the shoes to refresh Father Christmas on his travels.

Puppet shows and nativity plays are popular forms of entertainment on Christmas Day. The adults exchange gifts called *étrennes,* a custom that derives from the Roman *strenae* gifts given on New Year's Day.

The French Christmas season lasts 12 days through January 6th. The final celebration is the *Fête des Rois,* the "Feast of the Kings," or Twelfth Night. On this night, the ivy and the mistletoe are removed and a great party is held to commemorate the visit of the three kings to the Christ Child. The party features a cake inside of which is hidden a tiny doll or bean, a custom that dates back to the feast of Saturnalia. Whoever receives the slice with the hidden "prize" becomes king for the evening. If it is a woman, she becomes queen and is allowed to pick her king. Together they order the dancing, feasting, and general merriment, and are responsible for giving the next year's party.

On the final night, children sing the last carol of the season:

> Noël is leaving us, sad it is to tell
> But he will come again
> Adieu Noël.

German Christmas Traditions

Many "American" Christmas traditions originated in Germany. Christmas is the highlight of the German year. Preparations are made for weeks in advance. Advent wreaths and candles are brought out. St. Nicholas' Day (December 6), although not celebrated by most people, marks the beginning of the season. Nativity scenes are common in German homes, but it is the tree that is the center of attention. It was in Germany that the custom of the Christmas tree originated.

The mother trims the tree on Christmas Eve. No one is allowed to enter until it is finished. Church services are held on Christmas Eve and many carols dating back as far as Martin Luther's time are sung. It is the *Christkind* (see Kris Kringle) who brings the presents, accompanied by one of his many devilish companions. There are dozens of cookies, shaped like figures of Christmas or stamped with designs. Edible trees and tiny baked gnomes fill the kitchens for a week before the festivities begin.

Gift-Giving

Early church leaders frowned on gift-giving because they felt it was a pre-Christian practice and it detracted from the spiritual significance of Christmas. It is true that the giving of gifts at the time of the winter solstice can be traced to the Roman Saturnalia. At first the gifts were good luck emblems, simple twigs from a sacred grove. Later, food, candles, statues of gods, and small pieces of jewelry became gifts. These presents were galled *strenae*. In France, these gifts are called *étrennes,* and are still exchanged in January.

Despite the opposition of the Church, gift-giving was such a popular practice that people refused to stop. The gifts of the Magi were used as a religious justification for gift-giving and later, the examples set by later saints such as St. Nicholas were used as reason for giving gifts to friends and family at Christmastime. By the Middle Ages, gifts were quite acceptable, especially in the royal courts.

In England, since the times of Henry VIII, Christmas boxes and New Year's gifts were a common exactment by royalty from their subjects. A graduated scale of giving was established according to the rank of the individuals. Queen Elizabeth relied on gifts to replenish her wardrobe. Loyal subjects presented her with rich clothing and jewels. One of the ladies reportedly gave her the first pair of silk stockings made in Europe.

Hanukkah

Hanukkah is the Jewish Feast of Dedication, sometimes called the Festival of Lights. The festival begins on the eve of the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev and lasts eight days. Hanukkah (Chanukah) was first celebrated over 2000 years ago. At that time, the Jewish people were living in the land of Israel in an area called Judea. At that time, they were ruled by the nearby kingdom of Syria. When King Antiochus came into power, he tried to impose Greek culture on everyone. Jews were forced to change their

names and to adopt all aspects of Greek culture, including the Greek religion. Jews who refused to accept these orders were persecuted. A Jewish man named Mattathias rebelled against the Syrian forces. He and his five sons and other Jews fought off the Syrians and fled to the mountains. When Mattathias died, he appointed his son Judah as the new leader. Judah was called Maccabee, which means "hammer," and his army became known as the Maccabees.

In 165 B.C.E., the Maccabees led a small army of Jews against their Syrian rulers in a struggle to gain independence and religious freedom. The Jews were not trained soldiers, but were farmers, shepherds, and teachers. However, they knew the Judean countryside so well, they were able to surprise the Syrian army. After three years of fighting, they reached Jerusalem, where they found their temple in disarray. They rebuilt the walls, cleaned, repaired the doors, planted flowers, and gathered stones to build a new altar.

The **menorah,** or sacred lamp, which stood for the light of knowledge and truth shed by the Torah, had been destroyed, so they fashioned a new one. Finally the temple was prepared for rededication. There is a legend that tells that when the Jews searched for the pure oil needed to light the menorah, they were able only to find enough to burn for one day. But miraculously, the oil burned for eight days. Judah the Maccabee proclaimed that every year the Jews should celebrate a Festival of Lights that would last for eight days, one for every day the light burned. This is the festival of Hanukkah.

To commemorate the miracle of the burning oil today, Jews often use candles in place of oil in their Hanukkah lamps. They light one candle the first night and then one additional candle on each successive evening, until on the eighth day eight lights are burning, exclusive of the **Shamash,** the special candle used to kindle the others. The candles are lit in the order of the newest candle first (left to right).

The custom of giving Hanukkah gifts is popular. Small presents are given to children each of the eight days to commemorate the coins struck by the Maccabees to show that they were free people. Gifts of coins are called **gelt.**

Because no work was permitted while the Hanukkah lights were burning, it became customary to tell riddles and play

games. A favorite game of **dreidel** was played. A dreidel is a four-sided top on which is written "A great miracle happened there." When playing dreidel, each participant starts out with an equal number of tokens (pennies, nuts, or raisins). Everyone puts one token in the middle. The player spins the dreidel and acts according to the directions stamped into the side on which it lands. These directions are symbolized by Hebrew characters: "nun," "gimmel," "hey," and "shin." If the dreidel lands on "nun," the player does nothing; on "gimmel," the player takes everything; on "hey," the player takes half; and if on "shin," the player puts one in. The dreidel reminds us of the Jews, forbidden by Antiochus to study the Torah, would nevertheless gather to study. When officials approached, the students would hide their scrolls, bring out their dreidels and pretend to be only playing a game.

During Hanukkah, the **Sabbath** is celebrated as it would be during any week of the year. The family dresses up for dinner, spreads their best cloth on the table, and just before sundown, the mother lights two candles with a prayer welcoming the Sabbath and thanking God for light. The father raises the Kiddush cup (silver goblet), gives a thanksgiving prayer for the fruits of the vine, and then everyone around the table drinks from his or her own glass. Challah, a special braided bread, is uncovered and passed around the table. Each person breaks off and eats a small piece of it with another prayer of thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth. On Saturday (the day of rest), people go to their synagogues for prayer. The Sabbath closes Saturday evening with the Havdalah ceremony, which separates the Sabbath from the rest of the week.

Rhode Island was a religious haven for Jews during the colonial period, which is the reason for interpreting Hanukkah in the Providence Room. Located a short distance from Providence is the Touro Synagogue, built in 1763 in Newport, Rhode Island. It is the oldest synagogue in continuous use in the United States. The congregation was organized in 1658 by Sephardic Jews, whose ancestors were forced to flee Spain and Portugal during the Spanish Inquisition of 1492. Sephard is the Hebrew word for the Iberian Peninsula, which consists of Spain and Portugal. Many of the Hanukkah items here—the Buñuelos, or deep fried doughnuts (known as Sufganiyot in Hebrew), fruits, the sweet tea with mint (which would have been served in the glasses) and the hanging brass menorah—are Spanish

or Mediterranean in character. Potato latkes are Eastern European.

Holly

Being eternally green and bearing fruit in the winter, holly was a symbol of life to ancient peoples. According to Pliny the Elder, holly was a plant of many virtues. When grown near a house, it was believed to give protection from lightning, repel poison, and its berries were believed to cause water to freeze. Holly also protected against evil spirits. It repelled witches if hung over the door, window, or fireplace.

Holly is said to have been the tree that provided the wood for Christ's cross. According to legend, all the trees had agreed not to allow their wood to be used. When the ax touched them, they splintered into pieces. Only the holly remained whole and permitted itself to be used for the cross. It is therefore considered a symbol of the Passion. Because of its thorny leaves, holly is also symbolic of Christ's crown of thorns. The red berries signify the blood of Christ.

Ivy

In ancient Greece, ivy took its name from the lovely girl who danced with such abandon and joy before the god Dionysus that she fell dead at his feet. He was so moved by her adoration that he turned the young girl into ivy, so that she might entwine and embrace whatever was near. Ivy is believed to protect against drunkenness. In early English carols, holly stood for the man and ivy for the woman in a ritual battle of the sexes.

Kissing Bough or Ball

Until the introduction of the Christmas tree to England in the middle of the 19th century, the kissing bough was the primary decorative greenery. It was made in the shape of a double hoop with evergreen boughs, holly and ivy, and hung with apples, pears, ribbons, and other ornaments. Often, it was lighted with candles and mistletoe was hung from the center. As the name implies, the woman who "accidentally" wandered under the kissing bough had to pay the "penalty" and allow herself to be kissed. The shape of the decoration varied from one house to another, but the customary kiss received beneath it was the same.

Krimmel Tree

A tree of holly or laurel was decorated with cookies and fruit and placed on a tabletop. Beneath the tree is a fenced garden with figures. It is a traditional German tree introduced to America by Germans settling in the

Philadelphia area of Pennsylvania. The tree has become famous from John Lewis Krimmel's drawing (1816-1820) of a Christmas tree surrounded by a Germantown, Pennsylvania family. The drawing is part of a sketchbook in the collection of the Winterthur Museum library.

Kris Kringle

Kris Kringle is a popular adaptation of the German word, *Christkind,* which originally meant "the Christ Child," and later denoted the gift-bringing figure of northern Europe. When the Germanic people brought this character with them to Pennsylvania, it gradually blended with the "gift-givers" of other immigrants. By the mid-19th century, Kris Kringle had become a figure nearly synonymous with Santa Claus.

Lights, Electric

1882 ad for electric lights

While candles on trees were lovely, they were also a fire hazard. Often, buckets of water or sand were kept standing around the room to douse a blaze that could begin

suddenly. In 1879, Edward Johnson, Vice President of the Edison Electric Company, had the first tree with electric lights—a string of 80 little colored bulbs. The manufacture of tree lights came about in 1895 with Ralph E. Morris, an employee of New England Telephone. Strings of lights had already been manufactured for use in telephone switchboards. Morris thought that they could be used on a tree. However, the lights were very expensive and even by 1903, ready-made strings of 28 lights cost $12; the average man's weekly wages.

Lord of Misrule

In medieval England, the Lord of Misrule was the leader of Christmas revelry. He was appointed by the king or other nobility, and was charged with arrangements for all festivities that took place during the 12 days of Christmas. During this time, even the king had to submit to his whims. The Lord of Misrule and his mummers probably derive from ancient Roman times, when costumes and masks were donned for the festival of Saturnalia. It was also a time when servants were made equal to their masters for a short period of time. The equivalent of the Lord of Misrule in Roman times was the Master of Games.

The appointment of the Lord of Misrule died out after the restoration of the British kings to power in 1660. The commonwealth had temporarily abolished the monarchy, but when back in power, the king was not willing to give up any of his authority, not even to the Lord of Misrule.

Mince Pie (Manger Pie)

Meat pies became popular in England following the Crusades, when spices were introduced into England for the first time by returning knights. The pies were made of minced bits of venison, pheasant, partridge, peacock, rabbit, apples, sugar, suet, molasses, raisins, currants, and spices. At Christmastime, a special mince pie was baked. The pie was baked in the shape of a manger and an image of the Christ Child was placed on top. The spices and sweetmeats symbolized the Magi's gift to the Christ Child.

While it is difficult to imagine that religious controversy could rage over a pie, it did. The Puritans viewed the image of the Christ Child on top of the pie as idolatry. In early New England settlements, mince pies were actually outlawed along with other Christmas observances under the strict Puritan Commonwealth. To camouflage the pies, the settlers would make them in a circular shape and replace the Christ figure with a sprig of greenery.

Mince pie was also called Christmas pie in medieval England. This became the subject of a well-known nursery rhyme:

Little Jack Horner
Sat in a corner
Eating his Christmas pie;
He put in his thumb
And pulled out a plum
And said, "What a good boy am I!"

Jack Horner was actually a person by the name of Thomas Horner, a servant to Richard Whiting, a church official of Glastonbury during the reign of King Henry VIII. Because the king was confiscating as much of the church's land as he could get away with, Whiting sent him a gift in hopes of appeasing him. The king was to receive a mince pie with the deeds to a dozen estates hidden inside, in hopes that he would be satisfied and not ask for more. Horner was charged with the task of delivering the gift. On the way, he opened the pie and stole one of the deeds. With this "plum" he made his fortune. Little did he know that he would be immortalized in a verse hundreds of years later!

Mistletoe

Mistletoe and evergreens detail of *Settling Affairs of the Nation*, English engraving, 1794-1800, from Winterthur, *Recreating Yuletides Past*, 1987

Mistletoe is a parasitic plant that grows by attaching itself to the limbs of various non-evergreen trees. It has leathery evergreen leaves, yellow-green flowers, and waxy white berries. Mistletoe was a sacred plant to the ancient Celtic priests, who were called Druids. Around the New Year, a priest would cut the mistletoe from the sacred oak tree on which it hung. He would use a golden sickle and catch the sprig in a white cloth so that it would not touch the ground and therefore be defiled. The mistletoe was then offered in sacrifice to the gods along with two white bulls. Because the mistletoe was so linked to the Druid ceremonies, it wasn't displayed as a decoration in churches.

The display of mistletoe during Christmas and the New Year's holiday is one of the many pre-Christian customs that has carried over into the Christian era as a secular tradition. In certain ceremonies, kisses beneath the mistletoe signified the end of old grievances, so it was considered a plant of peace. One English custom required

the plucking of one berry for each girl kissed until the sprig was bare or the man ran out of girls, whichever came first. Kissing under mistletoe may also have derived from a belief that it could promote fertility. It was believed to have other medicinal attributes and was hung over doorways to avert a variety of maladies.

In Norse mythology, mistletoe plays a crucial role in the story of Balder. Balder, the best loved of the gods, was warned of danger in a dream. His mother Frigg resolved to protect him, so she went throughout the world asking everything—trees, animals, people, plants—not to harm him. As a result, it became a sport to throw deadly objects at Balder, because they knew that he would not be harmed. Loki, half-brother to Odin, was a mischievous god and jealous of Balder. He discovered that there was one plant that Frigg had overlooked when she was asking for promises of protection, the mistletoe. Taking a sprig, he fashioned an arrow and went to Balder's brother Hoder. Hoder was blind, but Loki coaxed him into the game of throwing deadly objects at Balder. Loki guided Hoder's hand as he aimed the mistletoe arrow at Balder and shot it. The arrow went straight into Balder's heart and he died. All of creation wept and Loki was punished. Frigg blessed the plant that through no fault of its own had caused Balder's death. She made it a symbol of love and promised to bestow a kiss on all who passed beneath it.

Moravian Tree

The first documented Christmas tree in America was recorded in 1747 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. In this Moravian community, founded by German immigrants in 1740, Christmas was celebrated with a "love feast," a religious song service that stressed Christian fellowship. Considered a religious symbol rather than a household decoration, a Moravian tree held apples, lighted candles, and religious verses written on slips of paper.

Mumming

Mumming includes activities ranging from morris dancing, wassailing, caroling, court reveling, and ritualistic plays. Central to mumming are the ideas of miming (playing a part) and guising or geese dancing (wearing a mask). Mummers are normally male. Although common to Christmas celebrations, it is not restricted to mid-winter activities.

There is little doubt that these festivities have a history going back to ancient winter rites designed to purify the

houses, fields and the New Year, and to confound the spirits by means of disguise, mocking the sacred, switching sex roles, noise, and unusual behavior. The God Comus oversaw such things in ancient Greece and the Roman Empire knew them too. Rowdy bands roamed pre-Christian Rome at the time of Saturnalia. These were often men dressed as animals or women, carousing in the streets.

During the Middle Ages, these activities remained popular, sometimes for the entertainment of homeowners who would then be expected to provide a treat. On occasion, mummers would disrupt church services with their “geese dancing” (a corruption of the word disguise, or guise dancing). There were stories about such revelers who were cursed by a priest and compelled to dance non-stop for a year. In the courts, a **Lord of Misrule** was elected to oversee the excitement. He was also called the Abbott of Unreason and the Christmas Prince. Frequently court personages would disguise themselves and join in. Henry VIII was known to mask and join a band of revelers who crashed a party given by Cardinal Wolsey. Gradually the court mummers and rowdy masqueraders of the street disappeared, but mumming took on a new form as figures devoted themselves to acting out plays. One of the most widespread of the Christmas plays was the Story of St. George, centered on a fight between the saint and a dragon or a villainous Turkish knight. Although the story has nothing to do with Christmas, St. George was the patron saint of England and thus his exploits against the Turks were considered patriotic and suitable for Christmas or any other time.

In America, mumming continues in the annual Philadelphia Mummer’s Parade held each New Year’s Day. Over one hundred years old, this event still offers an opportunity for dressing up, music-making, and satirical reminders of the past year’s events. Likewise, the annual Christmas pageant is an American form of mumming.

Musical Instruments

Krummhorn: a cylindrical double-reed woodwind. The reed is enclosed in a cap with a blow-hold and is therefore not controlled by the lips. The name means “curved horn.”

Lute: second cousin to the guitar, with 15 strings, typical pear-shaped body, and a “broken” neck. The lute was introduced to Europe through Arabic influence in the mid-13th century, becoming an indispensable part of any

respectable European music establishment by the mid-16th century. Its attractive shape made it a frequent subject for Renaissance painters.

Recorder: wooden flute of "whistle" type with eight fine holes. The name comes from the verb "to record" meaning to sing like a bird. Illustrations of recorders appear in 12th-century manuscripts. Popularity in the 14th century is well documented and Henry VIII's inventory itemized 70. Used in European music from the Middle Ages to the mid-18th century.

Sackbut: predecessor of the modern trombone, but a softer tone. The name comes from the French *sacqueboute,* meaning "pull-push." The instrument originated about 1400 as a development of the slide trumpet.

Spinets, Bentside: popular home instruments in the mid-1700s, though displaced by the pianoforte. Spinets, harpsichords, and pianofortes were the keyboards played by ladies during the colonial and federal periods and could be found in most upper-class homes.

Square pianos: Gabriel Buntebart brought the piano-making tradition to England from Germany. The English square piano was an affordable instrument for home use and did much to popularize the piano. The compact shape and low price of squares made them attractive to the middle class.

Viol: precursor of the violin family, but fatter with sloping shoulders, and the strings, being less tense, had a mellower tone.

Virginal: keyboard instrument in which strings are plucked by sprung jacks. It differs from a harpsichord in that it is contained in a rectangular box and the strings are more or less parallel to the keyboard, which is recessed. The name may derive from the Latin word for rod or branch, *virga,* or from the fact that young ladies (presumed virgins) tended to play the instrument.

Nativity Scene

The nativity scene has long been of particular importance to the people of southern Europe. St. Francis of Assisi, a gentle man known for his love of animals, was responsible for the popularization of the nativity scene. The 13th-century church was a rigid institution, emphasizing that life

was a place of sin and sorrow. St. Francis wanted to add the hope and joy of God's love to this message. In about 1223, he constructed a life-size manger scene with live animals in Greccio, Italy. They sang the gospel around the scene, which may be the origin of caroling. The people were charmed and embraced the nativity scene as a means of making the Christmas message more human. Magnificent Neapolitan nativity scenes (*presepi)* from the 18th and 19th centuries were objects of devotion and remain today exquisite miniature examples of Baroque sculpture. These miniature scenes were set up at Christmastime in the homes of the royalty and wealthy bourgeoisie. Sometimes, the manger scene was set amid elaborate architectural ruins. The ensembles ranged from the simplest cutout figures to whole roomfuls or even village squares of elaborate scenery. The *presepio* belonging to the King of Spain in the 18th century had 5,950 figurines. The scenes represented both the sacred and the profane along with the procession of the Magi. Alongside the traditional scenes were genre scenes. It was fashionable at the court for the nobility to emulate the king, so they began to compete with one another for spectacular effects.

The nativity or manger scene has many names in different countries:

Italy - *presepio*
France - *crèche* (also used in America)
Germany (Bavaria) - *krippe*
Czechoslovakia - *jeslicky*
Costa Rica - *portal*

North Pole

The North Pole as Santa's home first appeared in the cartoons of Thomas Nast. In 1882, he drew a cartoon showing Santa sitting in a box addressed "Christmas Box, 1882, St. Nicholas, North Pole." In 1885, another cartoon traced Santa's route on the map, showing his home at the North Pole. Nast never explained his reasons for this choice; presumably he felt that a cold climate was appropriate for the figure and costume of Santa.

Ornaments, Tree

The first Christmas trees were decorated with fruit and flowers. Cookies, nuts, and other kinds of foods were added later. Lighted candles also adorned the trees. All of this adornment required a very sturdy tree to support the weight. Perhaps as a solution, German glassblowers

produced featherweight glass balls to replace the heavier ornaments.

The pickle ornament was considered one of the most special tree decorations by many families in Germany. For good luck, this ornament was the last to be hung, with Mother and Father hiding it among the boughs. When the children came down on Christmas morning, they would search for the pickle, knowing that whoever found it first would receive an extra gift left by St. Nicholas.

Cotton ornaments were produced as a cottage industry during the last quarter of the 19th century. Workers and their families cut figures from thin layers of cotton batting and folded and glued them over wire or cardboard. They then glued printed images of faces in place and decorated the "clothing" with gold stars and trims. Figures were often dressed with crepe paper clothing covering the cotton wool figure inside. Ornament makers also twisted the cotton wool into the shapes of fruit and vegetables.

Dresden ornaments are flat, one-dimensional or three-dimensional ornaments made primarily from cardboard. They are called "Dresden" because the majority of them were manufactured in Dresden, Germany between 1880-1910. Multiple subjects were produced including stars, bells, cats, dogs, camels, elephants, vases, and urns. The flat shapes are often deeply embossed. Some of the three-dimensional ornaments were candy containers. They were more popular in Europe than in America.

Kugel is a German word meaning "ball." Collectors of ornaments use this term to describe any early thick-glass ornament regardless of its shape. Kugels were made in Germany first around the 1860s. Later they were produced in France, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Kugel ornaments were made in several shapes, the most common of which is a ball, but there are also pear, egg, turnip, and bell shapes. Bunches of grapes were also made. The colors ranged from silver to green to amethyst.

Paganism

The word "pagan" is from the Latin "paganus," meaning country-dweller, a term that is comparable to the English term "heathen," meaning those who lived on the heaths. During the Roman Empire, Christianity was primarily a religion of the cities, while the "pagani" observed the old religion linked to agricultural cycles. The religion centered

on reverence for the Goddess (earth or nature), although it did include a male divinity who died and was born again following the movement of the sun and cultivation.

Paradise Trees

Paradise trees are firs hung with apples, originally used as props in a popular medieval play about Adam and Eve. First used in churches, the Germans later set up paradise trees in their homes on December 24th to celebrate the feast day of Adam and Eve. Pieces of paper were attached to them with admonitions for children. The following translations are for the papers on our tree:

> *Lust und Lib Zu einem Ding. . .*
> Joy and love for something
> Makes all effort and work seem small
>
> *Mer Luven uft Hoffning*
> We trust in hope
>
> *Die Ern is zeidich. . .*
> The harvest is ready, but the farmhands are scarce
>
> *Lerne wie due kannst. . .*
> Learn how you yourself can be
> Singer, book and temple

Pineapples

When travelers told of the fruit they enjoyed in America in the 18th century, they often mentioned pineapples. People of that earlier generation coveted pineapples because they were rare and expensive. The fruits had been known to Europeans since the 15th century when Spanish and Portuguese sailors found them growing in the West Indies, Central America and South America. They caused a sensation in 16th-century courts.

European Americans admired the pineapples throughout the 17th century as much as their ancestors. Sometime during the last four centuries, the pineapple began to serve as a sign of hospitality. It was reported that a pineapple fastened to dwellings in certain Central and South American Indian villages was a sign of friendship, but the place of its first use as a symbol by Europeans is elusive.

Plum Pudding

Plum pudding is one of the most traditional English Christmas dishes, although it does not contain any plums. To a batch of *frumenti*, which was made of wheat slowly stewed in milk, was added lumps of meat, dried fruits such

as raisins and currants, rum and brandy, butter, sugar, eggs, and many spices. "Plum" probably referred to the raisins and the fact that they swelled during baking.

The first plum puddings were made around 1670. Several weeks before Christmas, the pudding was started in huge copper kettles. Much ceremony attended the making of the pudding. The entire household took turns stirring the stew, and everyone made a wish. It was customary to mix a coin, a thimble, a button, and a ring into the pudding. When one of the items was discovered while eating the pudding, it had special significance. The coin meant wealth in the New Year, the button meant bachelorhood, while the thimble stood for spinsterhood. The ring foretold of marriage in the near future.

During the Christmas feast, the pudding was the grand finale of the dinner. What was not consumed was saved and eaten throughout the winter. American recipes for plum pudding, particularly in the later 1800s, tended to use less suet than English ones. Pre-packaged plum puddings were available for purchase in America by the late 1800s.

Poinsettia

The poinsettia was named for Dr. Joel Poinsett, the first American ambassador to Mexico (1825-29), who brought the poinsettia plant back to his home in South Carolina where it became very popular. The actual flowers of the poinsettia are not the red portions, but rather the small yellow buds in the center of the red clusters.

In Mexican legend, a small boy knelt at the altar of his village church on Christmas Eve. He had nothing to offer the Christ Child but his prayers. A poinsettia or "Flower of the Holy Night," sprang up at his feet in homage to the holy birth. This lovely legend bears some similarity to the legend of Madelon and the **Christmas Rose.**

Pomander Balls

Pomander balls, with their sweet fragrance of orange and cloves, celebrate the southern world of wintertime oranges and the spices that were brought to Bethlehem by the Magi. Hung from chandeliers in England in the cold of winter, they promised a return of the sun so sorely missed. They were also placed into chests of clothes and carried to the theaters to sweeten the smells of the crowded playhouses.

Punch

The word punch is derived from the Hindustani word *panch,* meaning "five" and connotes the five main

ingredients— liquor, water, spices, fruit, and sugar. British merchants and sailors returned from India with the recipe in the 17th century. Punch became a popular mixed drink for all social affairs in the 18th century, equal to tea. It was often, but not always, made in front of one's guests. It is rumored that 80 Bostonians consumed 136 bowls of punch, 21 bottles of sherry, and an unspecified amount of cider and brandy at a party given by John Hancock in 1792.

Putz

Along with the tradition of the Christmas tree, the Pennsylvania Germans also brought with them to America the custom of the Christmas tree yard, or *putz,* a term derived from the verb *putzen,* which means "to decorate." Around the base of the tree they constructed a stable scene complete with Mary, Joseph, and Christ Child (see also **Krimmel Tree**).

A great deal of time and effort was devoted to the production, especially among the German-speaking Moravians who settled in the vicinity of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Each September, the families made a trip to the woods to gather moss, which was replanted in their cellars. A few days before Christmas, the moss was placed in the *putz* to serve as grass. Tree stumps were turned upside down and draped with moss to simulate a grotto for tiny figures.

In addition to a stable scene, there was frequently a road, which accommodated many small animals proceeding two by two to a promontory on which perched Noah's Ark. The ark and its carved animals were 19th-century children's "Sunday toys." Although some were made in America, most were products of German wood-carvers.

Only the most zealous purist could maintain a strictly religious theme in what became a children's playtime world. By 1870, tin soldiers and other secular toys had entered the scene. Spreading outward from the nativity scene at the base of the tree were farm and village scenes which had a way of growing larger and more elaborate every year.

Chalkware figurines were made of plaster of paris in an imitation of porcelain. Originally imported from Europe, they were later made in America from molds. They were advertised for sale as early as 1768. The name derives from the chalk-like smudge they leave on your hand if rubbed.

They are never glazed. Our chalkware reproductions were cast from antique chocolate molds by Fairfield Folk Art in La Habra, California. Original molds are rare and few examples are known.

Red and Green

As with many aspects of Christmas, no one can say with certainty why red and green are traditional colors. However, some of their associations may explain this in part. Red can be associated with fire, blood, and charity, while green has associations with nature, youth and the hope for eternal life. Other colors associated with Christmas are white—purity, light, and joy, and gold—sunlight and radiance.

Rose, Christmas

The blossom called the Christmas Rose is actually an herb, the Black Hellebore (*helleborus niger)*, which blooms in England from December to March. Its pure white flower is a sharp contrast to the black root. Although it is poisonous, it was used by the ancients to prepare medicines.

Several legends surround the Christmas Rose. Joseph of Arimathea is said to have brought the gospel to England in the 1st Century C.E. He built the first Christian church out of twigs at Glastonbury. When he placed his staff into the ground, it grew into a tree, blossoming into a Christmas rose, and has every year since on January 6th. When the British changed to the Gregorian calendar in 1752, Christmas Day was moved to December 25th instead of the traditional January 6th. The people were troubled by this and decided to let the Christmas rose tell them when to celebrate the holy day. The tree did not bloom on the "New Christmas," but as always, burst into bloom on January 6th.

The other legend concerns a country girl named Madelon, who had followed the shepherds to Bethlehem. She was sad, for she had no gift for the Christ Child. She wanted to pick a flower, but it was winter. She fell to her knees and cried. An angel, seeing her plight, helped her to rise. The angel touched the ground where Madelon's tears had fallen and there appeared the first Christmas rose.

St. Nicholas to Santa Claus

To many today, St. Nicholas is just another name for jolly, rotund Santa Claus. To Europeans, however, St. Nicholas is a thin figure dressed in bishop's robes who comes riding on a white horse on December 6th, which is St. Nicholas' Day. St. Nicholas is believed to have been born around 280 C.E. in Asia Minor and died in 343. He became the bishop of

Myra, now Demre, in Turkey. Historic evidence of his life exists in the records of the First Council of Nicaea that occurred in 325, but St. Nicholas is better known by the countless legends that arose about him following his death. In 1003, Vladimir of Russia, who came to Constantinople to be baptized, brought back relics and stories of St. Nicholas, who became the patron saint of Russia. Sailors later introduced the legends to western Europe. By the Middle Ages, St. Nicholas was invoked in prayer more than any other figure except the Virgin Mary and Christ. In 1088, ostensibly to protect St. Nicholas' remains from infidels, Italian sailors broke into his tomb and carried the body from Myra to Italy. A basilica was built to house the saint's remains, giving focus and impetus to the growing interest in St. Nicholas.

One of the oldest and most enduring St. Nicholas stories concerns his role as the benefactor of children. It seems that the people of Myra, where he served as bishop, were celebrating St. Nicholas Day after his death when pirates from Crete attacked. They seized booty and kidnapped a young boy, Basilios, to serve as a slave. On the eve of the next St. Nicholas Day, the boy's parents were sad. Suddenly, dogs began to bark in the courtyard and they ran to see what was happening. There they discovered their son. Basilios explained that St. Nicholas had appeared to him and brought him home. St. Nicholas is also the patron saint of sailors, students, vagabonds, and pawnbrokers.

The most famous legend of St. Nicholas took place during his lifetime. There was a poor man in the bishop's hometown who had three daughters. Because he could not afford a dowry for the girls, there was no possibility of marriage, and yet, if they remained at home, they would starve. Regretfully, he had to face the necessity of selling the girls into slavery or prostitution. Nicholas, knowing of their plight, stole to the house in the dead of night and threw a bag of gold down the chimney. The gold saved the eldest girl by providing a dowry. As the other girls reached the age of marriage, Nicholas again provided the means. For this he would accept no gratitude and asked that the story not be told until after his death. This story was so popular that St. Nicholas began to be depicted with three bags of gold. The three bags eventually became three gold balls, which were adapted to the coat of arms of the Medici family.

St. Nicholas was well-established by the time of the Reformation as a gift-bearer and opener of Christmas season on his name day, December 6th. However, it became improper to celebrate Catholic saint's days. Some countries changed his name and continued the tradition, as Father Christmas in England, *Weihnachtsmann* in Germany, and *Père Noël,* in France. Germany also established the figure of the Christ Child, whose name, when transferred to Pennsylvania, eventually became Kris Kringle. All these figures were jolly gift-givers, dressed in clothes appropriate to the season, except for the Christ Child, and even he changed with time to look like the rest. Holland retained the name St. Nicholas, but changed the religious emphasis into a secular one. When the Dutch settled in New Amsterdam, they brought the tradition of St. Nicholas with them. In time the figure acquired a shortened, more familiar appellation, *Sinta Claes.*

Santa Claus, as many know him, was not "born" until the 19th century in America. After the American Revolution, the Christmas customs of the Pennsylvania Germans began to filter into the general population. The first interest in St. Nicholas was stirred by the writings of Washington Irving in a book published in 1809 about the history and development of New Amsterdam (New York), called *Humorous History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty.* Irving's book was popular and still in circulation 20 years later when Dr. Clement Moore wrote the poem, *A Visit from St. Nicholas.* He described St. Nick as a jolly old elf. Another children's book of the time depicted St. Nicholas for the first time with a sleigh drawn by a reindeer. Moore expanded upon the idea by increasing the team to eight with fanciful names. This image was frozen in time until a popular song brought Rudolph and his red nose to life.

Moore's poem was the inspiration for the political cartoonist, Thomas Nast, who was the first known artist to draw a picture of Santa. Nast popularized an image of the jolly old elf by doing a series of drawings for *Harper's Weekly* that aided the invention of Santa. If the image was not solidified by this point, the Coca Cola Company helped complete it. They published a series of full-color ads, beginning in the 1920s, depicting Santa as we know him, with plump rosy cheeks and a nose like a cherry.

Santons See **French Christmas Traditions**

Stockings

The custom of hanging a stocking to receive the gifts from Santa Claus probably originates from the legend of **St. Nicholas** and the three dowryless girls. In the story, St. Nicholas threw a bag of gold down the chimney that landed in a stocking hung there to dry. In 1810, the St. Nicholas Society used an image of a stocking to illustrate their Christmas dinner invitation, perhaps a sign that this use was already widely known. Stockings were, of course, mentioned in "A Visit from St. Nicholas" by Clement Moore in 1822.

Sugarplums

Sugarplums are round or oval candies made of rich fruit preserves, cream fillings, and other sweet concoctions, often covered with chocolate. This term for candies was immortalized in Moore's "Visit from St. Nicholas," where "visions of sugarplums danced in their heads. . .", and were also associated with the Sugarplum Fairy of Tschaikovsky's famous ballet, *The Nutcracker.*

Swedish Christmas Traditions

The earliest recorded Christmas tree in Sweden was seen in a castle in 1741. The Christmas tree symbolized the Tree of Life that stood in the Garden of Eden. And so, in that tradition, there was a tree on every farm, and it was believed that the growth of the tree influenced the growth of the fields.

That magical tree was the home of the farm's brownie, called a *tomten.* The word *tomte* comes from "the ground under the house and the surrounding yard." The *tomte* was the equivalent of the old household gods of Rome. *Tomten* is the guardian of small things, a friend of household pets, and a friend of the cattle in the stable. He is a little slow-witted, but clever in his own way. *Tomten* is quick on the uptake and fickle. He is not always pleasant and is open to flattery and bribes. While everyone is sleeping, the *tomte* is awake. He checks all the locks to see if they are secure. He checks the sheep and the lambs. Then he checks the children, who are his greatest treasure. All he asks is a bowl of rice pudding on Christmas Eve.

Superstition ruled the Swedish farmer's way of life. The magic power of good was exemplified by *Tomten,* and the power of evil was seen in a figure in a black shaggy coat, led by a chain, representing the devil. The evil creature was transformed into the straw goat called *julabak,* or *julbok*.

Perhaps straw was used because it was carried in to cover the floor before rugs were used.

There was magic around the last sheaf of straw that was gathered up after the threshing was done. This last sheaf was braided, leaving a bushy topknot, and placed outside for the birds. The significance of straw is seen in the many straw ornaments on the Swedish tree. Other popular ornaments include apples, candles, ginger cookies, and the national flag. Numerous traditions surrounded the Swedish families at Christmas time.

Syllabub

Philip Mercier*, Sense of Taste,* c. 1745 from Fairfax House, *Come Drink the Bowl Dry*, 1996

Syllabub is a centuries-old fermented drink that can be made with alcohol, citrus, milk, and sugar, in nearly any combination. Milking a cow into a bowl of cider, beer, or ale was a quick way of making a frothy syllabub. If a cow were unavailable (or uncooperative), a teakettle of warm milk or cream could be used. Poured from a height above the bowl, it raised a fine foam.

Syllabub evolved over time from a beverage into what more appropriately might be called a decorative dessert, which was in part to drink and partly to be eaten with a spoon. The newer syllabub was produced by beating cream to a froth, adding wine, lemon juice, and sugar. As the froth rose, it was skimmed off and laid on a hair sieve over a bowl to catch the drips. The unwhippable liquid was

poured into cups or glasses and heaped with the cream as high as possible. The pale lemon or rose color (depending on the wine) below and rich cream above showed well through the serving glasses as well as the glass syllabub stand.

Thanksgiving

The first American Thanksgiving occurred in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1621. It was a three-day secular harvest feast. Fifty-five Pilgrims (members of a sect of Puritans known as Separatists), who had survived their first winter after arriving via the Mayflower, joined about 90 members of the Wampanoag tribe. Native Americans often had harvest celebrations, including feasts and ceremonial dances, in honor of the Spirit of Corn. The Native Americans contributed the bulk of the feast, five venison, and the Puritan women prepared fowl (turkey or goose), cod, and corn. The first day declared as "Thanksgiving" occurred in 1623 after a rain shower saved the crops in the Massachusetts Bay colony. Thereafter, a day of thanksgiving and praise was declared to acknowledge God's almighty providence. The resulting feasts were held on weekdays, which meant one more day of church services in addition to the Sabbath.

Thanksgiving had become a ritual in New England homes by the American Revolution. The first national Thanksgiving was announced by the Continental Congress of the new United States of America and held on December 8, 1777. By this time, New England governors traditionally proclaimed a Thursday in late November as Thanksgiving Day; and shops and businesses were closed. Families made it a point to celebrate together, and those without families often benefited from the charity of friends and neighbors. By the 1830s, many New Englanders adopted the practice of putting together a basket of food for the poor and giving additional money at church services.

The Thanksgiving display in the Connecticut Room is taken largely from a letter written in 1779 by Juliana Smith of Dorchester, Massachusetts. Juliana describes in great detail the Thanksgiving feast enjoyed by her family during the Revolutionary War. A typical Thanksgiving dinner in the late 1700s could include the following foods mentioned in Juliana's letter: roast beef, venison, roast pork, roast turkey, goose, mince pie, pumpkin pie, apple tart, "Indian" pudding, plumb pudding, wine, cider, pigeon pasties, and celery. Pigeon pasties, served with the pigeon feet

extended from the crust, was a favored dish. Celery was a new and unusual vegetable being grown in America during the late 1700s. It was dug up and then buried in the dirt floor of the cellar through the winter (which contributed to its white appearance). For more information, read Juliana Smith's letter, published in *We Gather Together: The Story of Thanksgiving*, by Ralph and Adelin Linton.

Tree, Christmas

Precedents for the use of evergreens in various ceremonies are found in many pre-Christian customs. Popular legend often credits Martin Luther as the creator of the first decorated Christmas tree. While walking, he viewed a starry sky through the trees and was inspired to place candles on the branches of a tree.

The immediate ancestor of the Christmas tree was the **paradise tree**. This tree was the focus of activity during the Middle Ages on December 24th, which was Adam and Eve Day. Plays dramatized the fall of the first man and woman in order to emphasize the significance of the birth of Christ (the second Adam). The paradise tree, which was a fir tree hung with apples, stood for the tree from which Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit.

The practice became so popular that many German households began to set up paradise trees in their homes on Christmas Eve. Because of a legend that trees bloom at midnight on Christmas Eve, paper flowers and fruit were hung on the trees. Wafers were added, symbolizing the body of Christ, but were gradually replaced by cookies.

The first written reference to a Christmas tree is contained in a forest ordinance from Germany dated 1561. The ordinance stated "no burgher shall have for Christmas more than one bush of more that eight shoes length." It was instituted as too many trees were being taken from the forest because of the popularity of the custom. The first description of a decorated tree came from Strasbourg around 1605: "At Christmas day they set up fir trees in the parlours and hung thereon roses cut out of many colored paper, apples, wafers, gold foil, sweets, etc." The first known reference to a tree decorated with candles (other than the legends regarding Martin Luther), is from 1737.

In England, the Christmas tree was known as early as 1789, although it was not in general use until the 1840s. Prince Albert, who had come from Germany, set up a tree in 1844,

beginning the tradition in England. He cut a tree for his own children, as well as others for schools and army barracks. The first trees in America were probably introduced by German immigrants. By 1900, only one American family in five had their own tree. Christmas trees were more commonly found in schools or other public places. By 1930, however, trees were a part of nearly every American Christmas celebration.

See also: **Krimmel Tree**, **Moravian Tree**, **Swedish Tree**

Tussie Mussies

People carried and sniffed these small nosegays of aromatic herbs and flowers to drown out the stench of London streets. Some bouquets included herbs thought to be disinfectants, like lavender, rosemary, and rue.

Waits

Waits are old English Christmas carolers. Originally they were the medieval watchmen who patrolled the streets. Later the term was applied to the official town musicians. By the end of the 18th century, the name was applied to any carolers at Christmas time.

Wassail

The word *wassail* evolved from the Anglo-Saxon term *waes hael*, which meant “be well” or “hale.” The custom originated as a pre-Christian agricultural festival, which insured an abundant yield from the apple orchards. The trees were honored during the twelve days of Christmas by a noisy procession of people that would visit selected trees and either sprinkle the wassail mixture on the roots or break a bottle of it against the trunk accompanied by the verse:

> Here’s to thee old apple tree;
> Hats full, sacks full;
> Great bushel bags full;
> Hurrah!

The mixture used on the trees was not specific. It could be mulled ale or cider or wine mixed with apples or eggs. The contents of a wassail bowl was left to the creativity of the mixer. When the wassail procession left the orchard, they continued to carol, strolling about the towns hoping to be invited in for warmth and punch. This punch became a Christmas tradition that lives on in eggnog and other punches made and consumed during Christmas festivities. It is described in this carol from the 17th century:

Here we come a'wassailing
Among the leaves so green,
Here we come a'wandering,
So fair to be seen:
Love and joy, come to you,
And to you your wassail too,
And God Bless you, and send you
A happy New Year,
And God send you
A happy New Year.

Yule Log

It is possible that the burning of the Yule log may be connected to the practices of ancient Mesopotamians, even through it appeared in Europe many hundreds of years later. They made wooden images of the monsters who struggled with the great Mesopotamian god Marduk. The images were burned to help the god conquer evil forces and prevent destruction of the world.

The ancient Celtic people were concerned with the sun and its power. They believed the sun to be a wheel, which was known as *hwel*, the possible source of the term "yule." The Celts held festivals around the time of the winter solstice, when light and warmth would be natural sources of comfort in the face of the cold and darkness of winter. They believed that the sun lost its power at this time of year, so one of their practices consisted of setting huge fires and keeping them burning to revive the energy of the sun.

The Yule log became associated with the practice of Christmas. During the Middle Ages, the Yule log for the coming year was selected on Candlemas Day, February 2nd, and set outdoors in the late spring or summer to dry. The log was usually ash or oak, depending on the area. If a tenant gave his lord a log, he was allowed to eat at his lord's expense for as long as the log kept burning.

During the height of its popularity, strict rules governed the ritual:

1. The log had to be obtained by the family, rather than purchased.

2. It was necessary to light or touch it only with clean hands.

3. It was a sign of bad luck for the fire to go out during the night.

4. The head of the house prayed and poured wine over the log to insure peace, safety, and good fortune.

5. A portion of last year's log was saved to ignite this year's.

6. If a shadow cast by firelight appeared headless, that person would die within the year.

7. The ashes cured ailments and averted lightning. Ashes were buried at the base of fruit trees to act as fertilizer because they contain potash.

8. It was considered bad luck to have someone near the log with bare feet, and especially unlucky to have a flat-footed woman nearby.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!