

WHY WE DECORATE THE CHRISTMAS TREE

For many, many years people have been trying to solve the mystery of where the custom of decorating the tree at Christmas began. These exploitations have gone back into the history of religion, mythology and folklore—into legend and myth—and into superstition and paganism. Yet there is no definite proof of the origin of the custom.

Somewhere in the archives of time is the story of the origin of the custom. Many facts have been presented, but none are authentic. Here are a few of them—take your pick:

In England there is evidence that in 1444 the houses of London were bedecked with evergreens, and that a decorated tree was set up in the street.

It is believed by some that the custom began in 1604 in Strassburg, Germany, afterwards emigrating into other countries of Europe and to America in 1847.

There is evidence of a Christmas tree at Philadelphia in 1834, and that evergreens were used on Christmas Day at Fort Dearborn in 1804. The records do not give any evidence of any Christmas tree decoration at either of these places.

Others believe that Saint Boniface of England started the custom at the time when he was a missionary to Germany. Some credit a Saint Wilfrid of England with its origin, while others claim that Saint Boniface and Saint Wilfrid were one and the same.

From the Vikings comes the legend that the Lord, in the ninth century, dispatched Faith, Hope and Charity to select the first Christmas tree. According to the myth, the balsam fir was chosen because it had many crosses on each twig, was high as hope and wide as love.

There are many other legends, giving credit for the origin to Bonchevalier of France, Martin Luther, the Scandinavians, and many other people of the world.

Whatever the origin, it is a beautiful and inspiring sight to see dark evergreens, decorated with lights and ornaments, aglow in the homes of God-fearing and peace-loving people, bringing the spirit of Christmas to one and all.

To the young ones the tree is the trademark of Christmas—to older ones it is a tribute to the Christ Child, a symbol of faith, and a reminder of our belief of peace on earth, good will to men.