

MERRY CHRISTMAS

SECTION B

The Warren Record

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THE CUSTOM OF SENDING CHRISTMAS CARDS originated in England in 1843, where the first known Christmas card was designed by John Calcott Horsley. Today, Americans exchange more than three billion cards during the holiday season. Pictured here is "Best Christmas Wishes," a European print (circa 1890). Courtesy of the Oakland, California Museum.

The historic origins of the modern Christmas card

Christmas cards originated with an English nobleman who yearly wrote Christmas letters to friends and family.

One year—1843—he didn't have the time, and so commissioned an artist to design a card to which he could just add a note. By the 1860's Christmas cards had caught on in England, and shortly afterward crossed the ocean to America.

Today Americans exchange some 3 billion Christmas cards each year. What with the rising prices of cards and postage, it's a custom that can be costly. No wonder so many people are now making their own.

Here are a few ideas, which are easy and fun to make:

First, find envelopes, then cut colored paper or card stock to fit. For a design, cookie cutters are one quick and sure trick, especially for the novice designer.

Trace a single tree or star, or

make a pattern of several. Fill in the outline with scraps of fabric, glitter, bits of pretty giftwrap, whatever. You could accent the outline by gluing on contrasting glitter or yarn.

Hint: to keep fabric from ravelling, glue tissue paper to the back and let dry before cutting.

Here is another idea: You can make shiny paint by mixing Elmer's Glue-All and food coloring. Mix in small applicator bottles of Elmer's—red in one, green in another, and so on. Then apply direct from the bottle in dots or lines. Or, mix in small paper cups and apply with toothpicks or paint brushes.

Once you've started card-making, you'll find yourself thinking of all sorts of ideas. You don't have to be an artist to make cut-and-glue Christmas cards—all you need is a sense of fun!

Spirit of Christmas reaches out to all cultures, religions

Another Christmas. For the millions of Christians throughout the world, this is a season of joyous celebration as they mark the birth of their redeemer, Jesus Christ. Yet it is a season which holds special significance for non-Christians, as well. For there is in the air at Christmastime an infectious sense of peace and brotherhood, a feeling which goes beyond the recognized boundaries of religion, culture and geography.

The Christmas celebration offers a glimmer of light in the bleakness of December, when the days are shortest and the worst of winter's onslaught lies ahead. The brightness of a blazing hearth fire, the twinkle of a Christmas tree's lights, the brilliance of the sun against a whitewashed landscape—these are some of the elements of Christmastime that bring light into the hearts of all men.

Other December festivals

It is no coincidence that the celebration of Christ's birth in Bethlehem some two thousand years ago falls at the same time of year as the many festivals of light which preceded Christianity. Late December, the moment of the sun's annual rebirth, has since primitive days been a time of great feasting and prayer. It was a time when ancient peoples, whose lives were so greatly affected by the elements, rested from their labors on the land and gave thanks for the previous season's harvest.

One such festival was the Roman Saturnalia. Beginning at the winter solstice, it was a period of great feasting and thanksgiving throughout the whole of the Roman Empire. With elaborate processions, decorations, gift-giving and other rituals, this highly civilized ancient people paid homage to their deity of agriculture, Saturnus, in hopes of gaining his favor during the following year's planting season.

Similar non-Christian rituals were practiced at the time of the winter solstice by the early Vikings, Goths, Saxons and Druids, and vestiges of these ancient solstitial festivals are apparent in our modern-day celebration of Christmas.

Christian celebration established

It was not until the middle of the fourth century that the Church of Rome established December 25 as the date commemorating the birth of Christ. And while the exact birthdate of the Christchild has never been known, the Church did not select this date arbitrarily. Since the winter solstice had always signified a time of celebration and prayer to pagan gods, it was an opportune season of celebration for Christians seeking to convert pagan peoples to their faith.

The Christian celebration gradually incorporated a number of traditions which had formerly been part of the early non-Christian festivals of

light. The decorating of churches with greenery, for example, did not take place until the year 601, when Pope Gregory instructed Augustine of Canterbury to follow the non-Christian custom of decorating temples with holly, laurel and other evergreens.

Romans introduced gift-giving

The tradition of gift-giving can be traced to the Roman Saturnalia, at which time the Romans made presentations of various foodstuffs and finery to their emperors. But, it is no less significant to the Christian celebration that the Three Wise Men, or Maji, brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christchild as he lay in a manger in Bethlehem.

Today's most popular gift-giver is, of course, Santa Claus. Known as St. Nicholas and Father Christmas until Thomas Nast popularized the name Santa Claus (possibly, from the Dutch *Sante Klaas*, or Saint Nicholas), Saint Nicholas was a bishop of Myra in Asia Minor in the fourth century.

Legend holds that Saint Nick saved three young daughters of an impoverished father from a questionable, "dowryless" fate by quietly leaving each girl a quantity of gold to use as a dowry. This he is said to have deposited through windows during the night, a harbinger of the present-day practice of Santa's clandestine nocturnal visit.

Christmas spirit survives

In these days of convincing marketing campaigns and gross commercialism, however, it becomes easy to lose sight of the special meaning of Christmas. Many of us become reluctantly swept up by the holiday rush, trying to wend our way through bustling crowds in an elaborately decorated department store, managing to schedule two Christmas parties and a stop at Aunt Alice's in one evening; addressing those last few season's greetings to friends before the post office closes for the day. "Never again!" is uttered by many a weary holiday shopper, party-goer or letter writer. "Next year will be different."

But, beyond that hectic holiday rush is a genuine feeling of goodwill which differs little from year to year. For Christmas is a time to take stock of the good things in life, the simple pleasures such as watching a child's face light up with delight at the sight of gaily-wrapped packages spilling from beneath a tree. Or, the warmth of sharing holiday cheer with family and friends, and the comfort of their company.

Let's hope that next year won't be different, and that Christmas for many years to come will blanket the earth in a tranquil moment of peace and brotherhood.

Joyous strains of Christmas carols fill the December air

What could sound sweeter than a chorus of voices singing hymns in perfect harmony? That same chorus of voices singing Christmas carols from a church choir or a snow-covered street corner.

The heavenly strains of carols awaken ears to the simple beauty of the Christmas celebration and, in no time at all, invite all within earshot to join in and sing.

The word, carol, derives from the Greek and Latin words for "chorus." It was used in the middle ages to describe a ring dance or song, which was generally sung among a group of persons, either seated or standing in a circle. At some later time in history, the word became synonymous with Christmas and songs of wonder.

Different from hymns

The Christmas carol—quite different from the traditional church hymn, which was always sung in Latin—originated as the song of the Nativity, sung in the vernacular and understood by all.

While many of the present-day Christmas customs originated with ancient cultures' forms of worship, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that Christmas carols met with general acceptance in both Europe and North America.

When, in 1868, Bishop Philip Brooks was rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Philadelphia, he was asked by his Sunday school pupils to compose a Christmas hymn. It has since become the earliest popular carol composed by an American:

*O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark sky shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary;
And, gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondrous love;
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God, the King,
And peace to men on earth.*



"OH, COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL . . ." The joyous strains of Christmas carols can be heard in churches or on street corners during the holiday season. While it is said that St. Francis of Assisi was the first to sing Christmas carols in the 13th century, carolling did not become popular until the mid-19th century in England. Here, choir boys at Winchester Cathedral. Courtesy of the British Tourist Authority.

'Tis the season for decking the halls, trimming the tree

*O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum,
How lovely are thy branches!*
—Louis Schneider

There's hardly a Christmas tradition that's more universally popular than trimming the tree. Be it live, fresh-cut or artificial, a brightly decorated tree sets the stage for a spirited holiday celebration.

Tree-trimming is a custom that was exported from Germany to England in the late 18th century. But it was not popularized until the 1840s when Prince Albert introduced it into the royal family, thereby setting a precedent which has since been followed by royalty and the common man alike. It is said that Martin Luther

was so moved by the sight of stars twinkling in the sky above a grove of evergreen trees, that he sought to simulate their effect by setting candles on a small evergreen which he brought into his home.

In Victorian England, the Christmas tree was laden with sweets, fruits and nuts—as well as dancing candles. These edibles were not eaten until the dismantling of the tree on the Twelfth Night, adding an element of gaiety to the otherwise sobering activity of putting decorations away until the next year.

Eventually, ornaments made by glassblowers and wood carvers came to replace the edible decorations on Christmas trees. Today, tree-trimming has been elevated to a considerable

art form, a medium for the trimmer's expression.

For some, a simple garland made by stringing popcorn and cranberries is an eye-pleasing decoration, while for others, elaborate links of red and green balsam wood appear more festive. Red ribbons and candy canes may suit one trimmer's taste, while velvet-covered turtle doves and hand-painted wooden figures may suit another's.

The key to tree-trimming is to have fun at it, whether one opts for real candles or twinkling, multi-colored lights; for a strongly-scented Douglas fir or an artificial tree.

After all, the evergreen is but a symbol of the presence of life in the darkness of winter, the true meaning of the Christmas celebration.



THE SCENE OF THE NATIVITY, as with many of the events in the life of Christ, has long been a favorite image of artists working in various artistic media. The creche pictured here dates to 1738, and was executed by woodcarvers in the world-famous woodcarving district of Bavaria in Germany. Courtesy of the German National Tourist Office.

Sampling those delectable holiday foods—forget about the calories!

The very mention of the word "Christmas" brings to mind any number of images: rotund sidewalk Santas appealing to holiday shoppers; twinkling lights dancing upon the boughs of an evergreen; pleasant hearthside gatherings of family and friends.

Food figures in

Of all the associations that come to mind when thinking of Christmas, one of the most vivid is that of holiday foods. For Christmas, like no other time of

the year, seduces even the most disdainful of cooks into the kitchen.

Fruitcakes laden with raisins, currants and citron and laced with a good dose of sherry or brandy, are an old holiday tradition.

Buttery cookies, cut in the shape of candy canes, reindeer, stars and Santas are a favorite with children. An adventure-some baker might try his or her hand at a gingerbread house—when decorated with spice drops, icing and sugary confetti, it's a visual treat too good to eat.

Diet next year

Don't be afraid to indulge in the seasonal goodies. After all, those New Year's resolutions to diet are just around the corner!



Warm Wishes
Blazing wishes for a Happy Yuletide!
Warm thanks.

AAA Gas & Appliance Company
Warrenton, N.C.

Greetings

MAY THIS HOLIDAY BE FILLED WITH ADVENTURE AND EXCITEMENT FROM BEGINNING TO END!

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Merry Christmas

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