

CUSTOMS

Christmas tree in this country arrived with German settlers in Pennsylvania as early as 1746. The star, often used on the tip of the tree, symbolizes the Star of Bethlehem, which guided the

shepherds and the Wise Men to the birthplace of Christ.

Still other historians have said the placement of ornaments upon Christmas trees had its origin with the Romans who hung little masks of Bacchus upon the pine trees and vines to induce fertility. Other people also decked trees and poles with foods and gifts during the winter solstice and corresponding occasions as offerings to the gods of fertility.

It is a Teutonic belief that the trees of the forest were inhabited by God-like spirits. In order to appease these "spirits," the Germans brought the tree into their homes to show them they were welcome at the winter solstice ceremonies.

Legend has it that Martin Luther, on a clear, cold Christmas Eve, was hurrying home to his family. On the way, he saw a pine tree against the sky, and through its branches, a myriad of stars that seemed to cling to the boughs. That evening, with a small pine tree and candles, he recaptured for his family the beauty of that

sight, thus giving the world its first lighted Christmas tree.

FIRST CHRISTMAS CARDS - The exchange of greeting cards at Christmas time is one of the youngest of Yuletide traditions -- probably not going back more than a century and a half. However, there is no certainty of its origin.

It has been ventured that the idea developed from the elaborate handwritten holiday scrolls which English youngsters sent home from boarding schools just before Christmas vacation to inform parents of their marks. Some enterprising stationers printed special sheets of paper with fancy borders for the benefit of less talented students.

There is also another account handed down through the ages. It is said that the first Christmas card was sent by W.C. Dobson, one of Queen Victoria's favorite painters, in 1845. The following year, Sir Henry Cole found himself too busy to write Christmas letters to his many friends

and so asked John Calcott Horsley to make a card for him to send instead.

Horsley's card was condemned by temperance advocates because it pictured a family celebrating the holiday with "brimming cheer." They contended that it was propaganda for drunkenness. The publicity the card received made it popular, as fame often does.

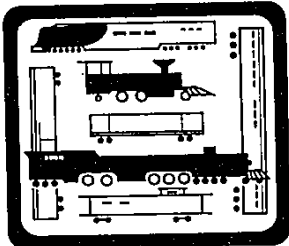
For years, most persons made their own greeting cards. A popular custom was to prepare original drawings with verse, or clip and color pictures from newspapers or magazines, paste them to fancy papers or fringed silk and send them to friends.

In this country in 1874, Louis Prang, a sensitive and art-loving lithographer, whose ideas were years ahead of his time, published his first Christmas Card. Prang reproduced the fine art of his day -- work by Elihu Vedder, Douglas Volk and J. Alden Weir among others, all long forgotten but capable artists. Today, his collection is among the most prized in the world.

TRAINS

Somehow a Christmas tree, no matter how gaily ornamented, seems incomplete on that magical morning without an electric train set chugging around the base amidst the glitter and presents. Electric trains have always seemed so much a part of the holiday.

When they first came on the market in 1900, each railroad car was equipped with a tiny battery-operated motor. Tracks were constructed of strips of thin metal inserted into slots in wooden rails.



Increased use of electricity in later years led to development of a transformer, thus eliminating the battery-operated cars. Year after year, new improvements were added. Accessories like railroad crossing gates and whistles became available.

In the early 1950s interest in electric trains took on epic proportions in this country, as families gathered around the train layout, taking turns operating the controls and fixing the derailments.

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Make this Christmas a "sock it to 'em" good time.

Yule time stockings and Christmas are practically synonymous. The tradition of filling stockings during this most festive time of year is really only three centuries younger than Christmas itself.

Over the 16 or so centuries which have passed since St. Nicholas began the practice for all the good little boys and girls who lived in Asia Minor, filling stockings -- hung by the chimney with care -- has evolved into a worldwide Christmas Eve ritual.

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