



Traditional Christmas Trees  
Decorated by the Office of Horticulture  
Smithsonian Institution  
James R. Buckler, Horticulturist

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## THE TREES OF CHRISTMAS

*The Christmas tree is one of the world's most beautiful and expressive Christmas symbols. In it are captured the sacred and the secular, the rich varieties of national and regional traditions and festivals, fact and folklore, the simple and the sophisticated.*

*Just as the observance of Christmas itself has evolved out of many influences through the centuries, so has the decoration of the Christmas tree taken many distinctive forms as people have supplemented the traditional with their own original touches.\**

The ornaments that decorate these trees are not historic, but were made by Smithsonian volunteers. The decorations suggest that Christmas, especially through use of the tree, is now "visible" in many nations that are not predominantly Christian.

The exhibition has been coordinated by the National Museum of History and Technology and the Office of Horticulture, Smithsonian Institution.

\* From the publishers' preface, Metcalf, Edna, *The Trees of Christmas* (Abingdon Press: Nashville & New York, 1969).



Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, *The Christmas Decorations from Williamsburg Folk Art Collection* (The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation: Williamsburg, 1976).

Foley, Daniel J., *The Christmas Tree* (Chilton: Philadelphia, 1960).

Metcalf, Edna, *The Trees of Christmas* (Abingdon Press: Nashville & New York, 1969).

O'Neil, Sunny, *Sunny O'Neil's Favorite Christmas Decorations* (Washington, D.C., 1977).

Snyder, Phillip V., *The Christmas Tree Book* (Viking Press: New York, 1976).

## DENMARK

Woven paper hearts have been popular in Denmark for more than a century. Three-dimensional paper stars and 6-pointed straw ones are also often used, as are shiny printed paper baskets and drums.

Danish flags, displayed in homes throughout the year, are given special prominence at Christmas.

*From the Danish Club of  
Washington, D.C., Inc.*

## UKRAINE

Christmas was observed in the Ukraine as a religious occasion with the home decorated to reflect the manger scene (straw beneath the tablecloth represented straw surrounding the manger). Christmas Eve was celebrated with a 12-course meal representing the 12 Apostles.

*From Mrs. Helen Gunderson and volunteers,  
Office of Horticulture*

## TIDEWATER

Christmas traditions were more popular in the southern U.S. than in New England. The availability of materials in the Tidewater area and the leisure of plantation residents led to more complex decorations.

*From Evergreen Garden Club of Georgetown*

## WILLIAMSBURG

The Christmas tree was introduced at Williamsburg in 1842 by German immigrant Charles Minnegerode who renewed his native tradition with handcrafted ornaments. They included local straw, wood shavings, milkweed pods, pinecones, seashells, and peanuts.

*From Lawson Carr, Edna Pennell, and  
The Flower Cupboard*

## BRAZIL

The manger scene is set up in Brazilian homes early in December and the Christmas tree is first seen on Christmas eve. Formerly, deciduous trees were wrapped in green paper to resemble the evergreens of other countries. Today imitation pines are common, decorated with ornaments similar to those in the U.S.

*From volunteers, Visitor Information and  
Associates Reception Centers*

## AMERICAN VICTORIAN

As Americans achieved wealth and prominence during the Industrial Revolution, elaborate decorations became integral to their Christmas celebrations. Following instructions and illustrations in periodicals, paper, fabric, glitter, silver and gold decorations, and personal gifts were hung on the trees. Elaborate crocheted and paper doilies, lace and bows, and red-dyed popcorn strings were featured.

*From Sunny O'Neil*

## JAPAN

In Japan Christmas is observed by religious and nonreligious alike. Many of the wide variety of decorations have been influenced by Western culture; others are characteristic of other Japanese festivals.

*From volunteers, Office of Horticulture*

## ITALY

The significant Italian Christmas symbol, the manger scene, dates to St. Francis of Assisi (12th-13th centuries). Today it is displayed on the base of the Tree of Lights, which has evolved in other countries into the Christmas tree.

*From Mrs. Harry Harris and volunteers,  
Office of Horticulture*

## U.S. COMMUNITY TREE

Community trees began in the U.S. with a single tree in a small-town church or town hall. The tradition of a national tree dates to 1923 when President Calvin Coolidge directed the lighting of the first one in Washington, D.C. U.S. community trees have decorations from various periods in history and from the various countries from which Americans have emigrated.

*From volunteers, Resident Associate Program*

## PIONEER AMERICA

Although Christmas trees, deemed pagan, were forbidden in colonial New England, they appeared in Newport, R.I., during the American Revolution and throughout the country afterward. Decorations varied regionally but were of readily available materials.

*From Fairfax Co. Extension Homemakers*

## OLD RUSSIA

The ornaments, designed and handcrafted by Mrs. Harry Harris, 1964-69, were inspired by the Fabergé eggs at the State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad. The ornaments are decorated with miniatures of famous paintings and elaborate combinations of velvet, gold trim, ribbons, beads, and pearls.

*From Mrs. Harry Harris in memory of her  
mother Dorothy Conant Quinby*

## FRENCH TREE OF PARADISE

The story of Adam and Eve and their exile from Paradise is a favorite religious play which ends with the promise of the Messiah. The French Tree of Paradise is a remaining part of the story.

*From volunteers, Office of Horticulture*