

Surratt House Museum's

# CHRISTMAS OF YESTERYEAR

FEATURING:

A HOLIDAY GREETING CARD EXHIBIT



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## A HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

While Christmas is viewed today as a Christian celebration, its roots actually lie in primitive pagan ceremonies -- Roman festivals, Teutonic rites, Druid idolatry, and local worship customs -- that fell in the middle of winter. These early rituals were designed to assure the return of a green and productive spring; and the fertility of fields, animals, and women were of paramount concern.

In 320 A.D., Christians first celebrated the birth of Christ. The date of December 25 was an arbitrary choice, but it was closely aligned with the mid-winter festivals; and Christian and pagan customs were intertwined until the Middle Ages, when the Reformation and Puritan rules weakened the old heathen traditions. In America, the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law in 1659 making Christmas illegal. It was not repealed until 1681. Non-spiritual customs were repressed, and Christmas became a rather minor holiday until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Enlightenment encouraged a re-awakening of the early traditions.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the great revival of Christmas with a renewed interest in old traditions. Ancient customs had been brought to America by settlers from many different lands. The renewed interest brought a seeking out and cultivation of these customs. Decorations, gifts, celebrations, and customs became more elaborate than ever before. Christmas wasn't considered a legal holiday until 1836, when the state of Alabama declared it such; and it wasn't until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that all states in our nation officially celebrated Christmas. But everyone knew that the goodwill and joy of Christmas was here to stay.

## 'TIS THE SEASON



Despite the sectional differences which flared and erupted into the great Civil War, the people of America preserved their Christmas traditions. Because of the close proximity to Washington, Baltimore, and Annapolis, Southern Maryland was filled with the same social enthusiasm that filled the cities during the 1850s and 1860s. And, those cities had markets which could supply some of the Christmas necessities -- greeting cards, imported ornaments, fresh fruits, and the like.

President John Adams inaugurated the custom of holiday parties at the White House. The Oval Room was decorated with greens, and the tables were laden with cakes, punch, and other refreshments, while the children sang, danced, and played.

Under Thomas Jefferson, the parties became adult affairs where his guests feasted on imported cheeses, preserved fruits, and other delicacies and where vintage wines accompanied the meal.

When Andrew Jackson came to the White House in 1829, he was in mourning for his wife; but his family put up a stocking on a White House mantel and the morning found it stuffed with small presents -- including a corn-cob pipe. Because President Jackson had been raised as an orphan,

he threw a party for other orphans. In a similar vein, President Lincoln's young son, Tad, reportedly rounded up street waifs during his father's administration and brought them home for turkey dinners.

The first Christmas tree entered the White House in the 1850s during the administration of Franklin Pierce. This official presidential sanction helped to popularize the custom in America. By 1885, President Cleveland had added new-fangled electric lights to the White House tree.

On New Year's Day, our early Presidents generally held an open house. In the best democratic tradition, it was open to all, no matter the political and social differences. This tradition of Christmas season receptions spread throughout the area into homes not so grand as the White House.

Even the simplest of homes in Southern Maryland could be amply decorated with pine, cedar, crowsfoot, running cedar, laurel, bay, and holly from the nearby woods. Ivy and rosemary were, surprisingly, the most prized Christmas decorations of the Victorian era.

Fresh fruits from the Washington markets, abundant Osage oranges, and pine cones and pods could all be added to the arrangements. Some accounts of the period refer to cedar boughs being dusted with flour to achieve the "snow" effect that we spray on today. And mistletoe, shot from trees, abounded. Mistletoe only grows in warmer climates, and Marylanders found it abundant in neighboring woods. The proper Victorian was not too staid to enjoy a stolen kiss! And, there was a proper way to kiss under the mistletoe. As the man kissed the lady, he was obligated to pluck a berry from the branch and present it to the lady. This practice continued until the berries were gone. The mistletoe then lost its power of love and no more kisses could be had there.



## MISTLETOE



Kissing under the mistletoe has been a recognized holiday tradition for hundreds of years, but before all the kissing, mistletoe was used by many ancient cultures to cure a number of illnesses including spleen disorders, epilepsy, ulcers and poisons. Since mistletoe stays green all year long and produces its white berries during the dead of winter, mistletoe was seen as a plant that symbolized long life.

The Druids viewed it as a sacred symbol of life, and they administered it to humans and animals alike in the hope of restoring fertility. It is believed (some might debate) that it was the Celtic Druids that started the connection between mistletoe and love.



No matter who started the mistletoe/romance connection, it was definitely the 18<sup>th</sup> century English that took it to a whole-other level. The English took mistletoe, wove it into a ball, decorated it with ribbons and created...the “*kissing ball*.”

This newly fashioned tradition came with its own set of rules. During Christmas a young lady standing under a ball of mistletoe, cannot refuse to be kissed. Such a kiss could mean deep romance or lasting friendship and goodwill. If the girl remained un-kissed, she cannot expect to marry the following year. In some parts of England, the Christmas mistletoe is burned on the twelfth night lest all the boys and girls who have kissed under it never marry.





Mistletoe has been connected to many mythological and folk tales, but one of the most popular is the one associated with the Goddess Frigga. The story goes that mistletoe was the sacred plant of Frigga, goddess of love and the mother of Balder, the god of the summer sun. Balder had a dream of death which greatly alarmed his mother, for should he die, all life on earth would end. In an attempt to keep this from happening, Frigga went at once to air, fire, water, earth, and every animal and plant seeking a promise that no harm would come to her son. Balder now could not be hurt by anything on earth or under the earth. But Balder had one enemy, Loki, god of evil and he knew of one plant that Frigga had overlooked in her quest to keep her son safe. It grew neither on the earth nor under the earth, but on apple and oak trees. It was lowly mistletoe. So Loki made an arrow tip of the mistletoe, gave to the blind god of winter, Hoder, who shot it, striking Balder dead. The sky paled and all things in earth and heaven wept for the sun god. For three days each element tried to bring Balder back to life. He was finally restored by Frigga, the goddess and his mother. It is said the tears she shed for her son turned into the pearly white berries on the mistletoe plant and in her joy Frigga kissed everyone who passed beneath the tree on which it grew. The story ends with a decree that who should ever stand under the humble mistletoe, no harm should befall them, only a kiss, a token of love.



Many a Christmas romance started under the mistletoe and led to a Christmas wedding the next year. The season was a popular time for weddings because family and friends traditionally gathered at Christmas, and it was easier to get everyone together. The night before the wedding, a party was held at the bride's house. The next morning, the wedding procession began. The days following the wedding were filled with parties, for the bride and groom of the early- and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century did not take honeymoon trips.







Burning in the nearby hearth is the traditional Yule log -- or Christmas log as it was called in the South. This had been an English custom, and the Southerners stuck with their English ties. One practice on the plantations called for the master to allow a Christmas rest for the slaves. The holiday lasted as long as the Christmas log burned, so slaves were known to soak the log for several hours prior to burning, and some were even caught sprinkling water on it from time to time to keep it burning slowly.

A Victorian Christmas was bright and cheerful and the decorations and parties were as simple or as elaborate as the people cared to make them. And when Christmas Day passed, it was time to plan the elaborate New Year's receptions.

## CHRISTMAS ON THE PLANTATION

The first frost of the winter season was a transition time on the plantations during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The crops were harvested, sold, and new seeds were sown for the spring; but there were other things afoot during this time. The plantation owners were preparing for the “Big Times” or holiday season. The holiday season lasted from the Christmas holiday, through New Year’s Day. Before the festivities could begin, there were a lot of preparations to be made at both the “big house” and in the slaves’ own homes in the quarter.

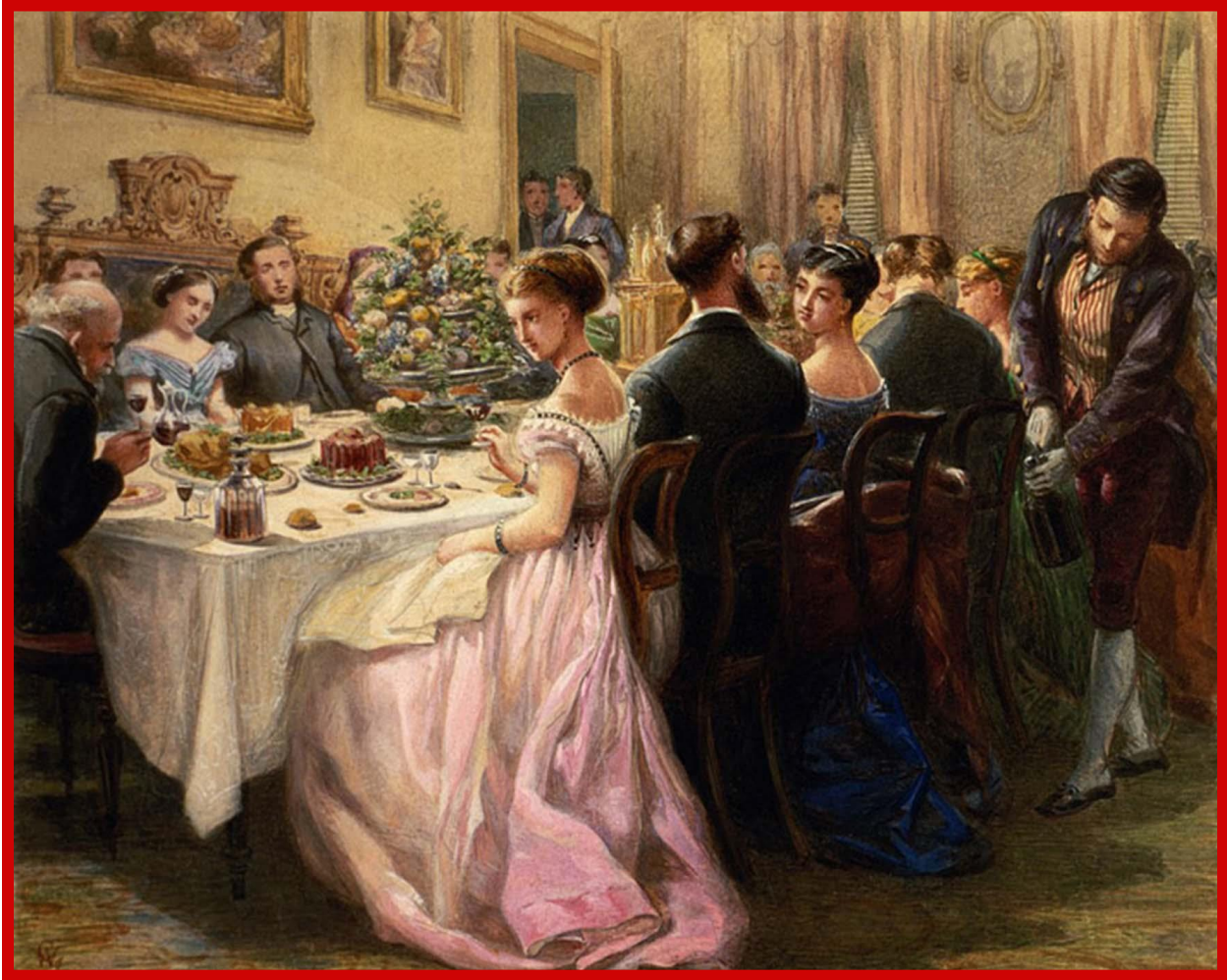
The “Big Times” was a busy time on the plantation. The plantation families had much to plan. There were visits from out-of-town guests and neighboring families, the selection of gifts for loved ones, arranging for delectable meals, and organizing for evenings filled with cheer and song. When the “Big Times” arrived all other activities took a back seat. The “big house” was cleaned from top to bottom. Slaves that normally worked in the fields were reassigned to help prepare the big house for the upcoming season. Slaves were washing floors, polishing silver, dusting mantles, and preparing bedsteads for the many guests that would be visiting the plantation. The days leading up to Christmas were long and most times did not end until after sundown.

In the two weeks leading up to Christmas, the “big house” was decorated with ribbons, ornaments, greenery, and the latest in Christmas regalia -- the Christmas tree. On Christmas Eve, the field slaves were usually left in the quarters while the house slaves were busily preparing the “big house” for the guests that were arriving. Food was prepared and served all day. And, the final preparations were made to ready the house for the big day.



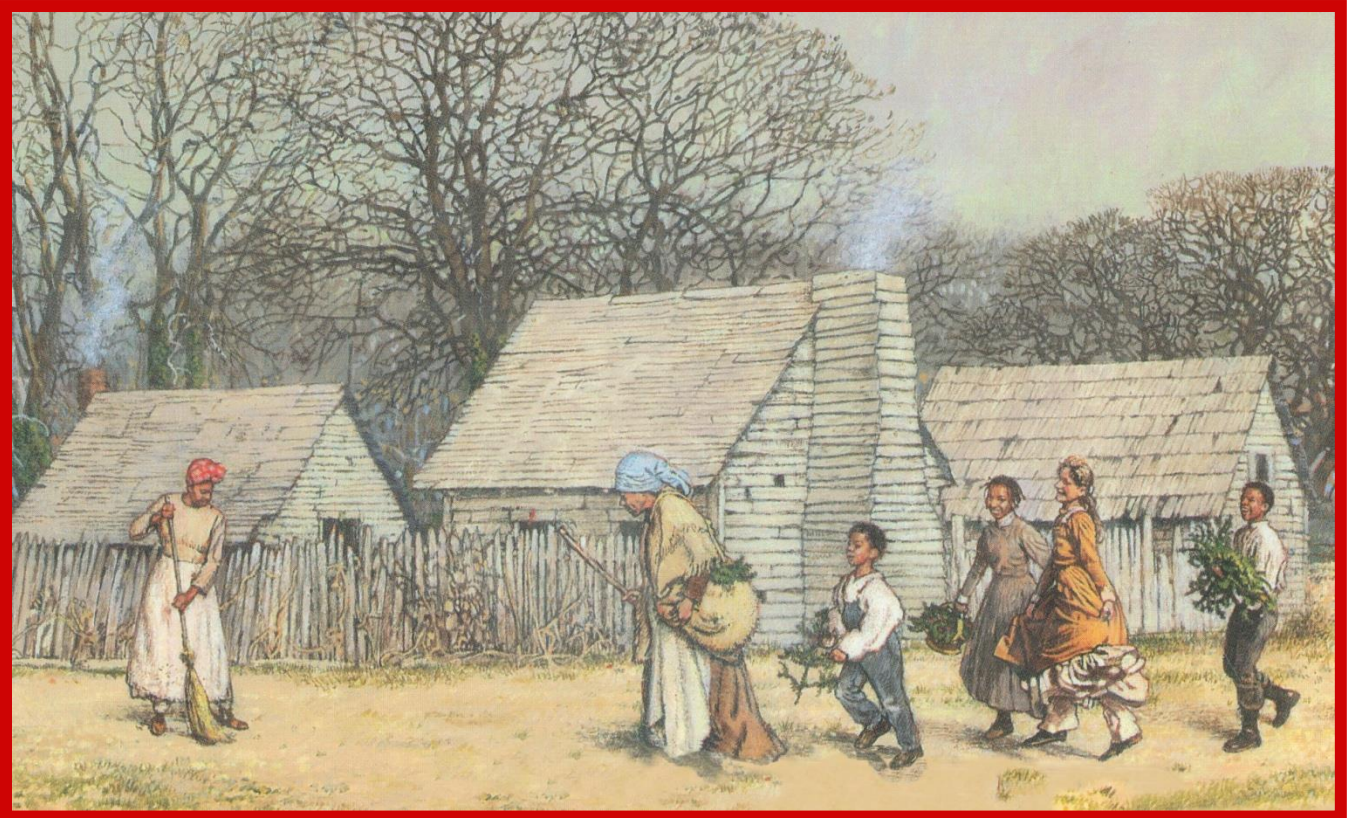


Christmas Day brought more work. Lavish meals were prepared, presents were opened and guests from near and far were welcomed to partake in this joyous holiday.





## CHRISTMAS IN THE QUARTERS



The “Big Times” meant something a little different to the enslaved people of the plantations. Slaves looked forward to the time that they could tend to their own homes. They too anticipated visits from family and friends that were on neighboring plantations. The season also meant a few days of frivolity and rest from what was a very long year.

Slaves had very little time to prepare their own homes for the winter activities, but they managed. In the few hours they had in the evening, gifts were prepared by using throw-aways from the “big house.” The gifts that were created by slaves were many times for their children who lived on their plantations with their parents or on neighboring farms. Many of the items for little girls were made from scrap fabrics -- dresses for straw dolls, aprons, or even head dresses for a holiday wedding. Little boys would receive things like whistles or a gee-haw stick. But, the biggest gift of all



would be the opportunity to visit family that you might not have seen for months or even years.

In the quarters, slaves would decorate as well by collecting pine cones, greenery found in and around their houses, nuts, left-over ribbon from the “big house,” colorful leaves, gourds, shells, all displayed around windows, doors, and on tables. As Christmas approached, the excitement in the plantation house and in the slave quarters was overflowing.

In the quarters, Christmas Eve meant preparing for Christmas Day and the chance to see loved ones. The day would begin by fishing and hunting local game to prepare for the holiday meal. The rest of the day was used to prepare both the plantation house and their quarters for the big event. The evening kicked off the holiday celebrations with dancing and singing to celebrate the excitement for the holidays.

Christmas Day could not come soon enough. The morning was quite busy. The slaves went to the big house, where some masters gave passes so that the workers could go to see their loved ones on neighboring plantations. Gifts from master to slave were also given sometimes. Slaves might receive hand-me-down clothing and other goods that they could use for the rest of the year.

While the slaves that worked in the plantation house were preparing the Christmas meal, the remaining slave population was preparing their own meals of sweet potato pie, pickled pigs feet, gravied rabbit, smoked ham, mixed greens and ash cakes. The meals during the “Big Times” were much more lavish than the typical daily diet. So when it came to Christmas time, they cherished the big meals that they had.

By the evening, all of the plantation slaves were back in the quarters and were celebrating with family and friends. They gave thanks, and gifts were handed out. Mothers were known to tell stories with each gift to a child so that they would remember them if ever they were separated. The

celebrations went well into the late-hours of the evening with more singing and dancing, cherishing their time before family and friends were once again separated.

New Year's Day usually meant the end of the holiday season. However, there was one custom that could extend the celebratory season, the burning of the Yule log! Tradition had it that, as long as the Yule log burned, the slaves did not have to return to work. The slaves that were in charge of acquiring the Yule log would pick the biggest and most water-soaked log that they could find to extend the season. Some slaves were even known to sprinkle water onto the log to make it burn more slowly. No matter how long the holiday season lasted, however, it would eventually come to an end.





## O CHRISTMAS TREE

The Christmas tree was the last of the evergreens to be adopted as a traditional decoration. However, early Christians hung fruits from pine branches in medieval miracle plays; and tree branches adorned with apples were carried on Adam and Eve Day (December 24) in the early church. By the early 1600's, little green trees were recorded in homes. These were covered with roses (symbol of the Virgin Mary), host wafers (symbolizing Christ), fruit, and confections. On Twelfth Night, the tree was shaken, and the fallen goodies were shared by the family.

Germany was the birthplace of the Christmas tree as we know it today. England saw her first version in the 1830s, and "Kris Kringle" trees began to appear in America. The 1850 edition of *Godey's Lady Book* adapted the famous picture of Queen Victoria and her family's tree. In the December 1860 issue, the book published a detailed description of a typical period tree. While most of the early trees sat upon the parlor table, some examples of floor-to-ceiling "giants" in the wealthier homes were recorded by the time of the Civil War. While the New Englanders favored the fir tree, Southerners preferred the prolific cedar.

The earliest ornaments on American trees were edible -- cookies, candies, dried fruits, strings of popcorn, and nuts. Sometimes the cookies were cut in extravagant shapes such as horses, fish, stars, pitchers, tobacco pipes, and soldiers. These sugar cookies were often frosted with bright patterns. Paper flowers, folded paper stars, tiny fans, and gilded nuts and pine cones were also used; and by the Civil War, patriotic flags were added. In the 1870s, toys were added to the decorations -- tiny dolls, red balls, and tin horns. The father of the family was in charge of distributing these on Christmas morning.

One of the most fascinating, and most dangerous, decorations was the use of tiny candles on tin holders to symbolize the light of the Christ Child. Early prints show small dishes catching dripping wax. In parlors where

trees held candles, a bucket of water was also stashed, complete with a sponge tied on the end of a stick to extinguish any sparks. Early glass factories in the U.S. made safer “Christmas lights.” These were tumbler-like glasses in various colors and patterns, filled with water, topped with oil, and a wick added to float on top attached to a cork or piece of wood. The lights and patterns made the appearance of hundreds of twinkling lights.

By the 1840s, the large markets in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and Washington were selling fresh-cut trees. The American Christmas tree was here to stay -- an enduring symbol of the holiday spirit.





## IN SEARCH OF SANTA

Our “jolly old Saint Nick” has not always been so jolly! In fact, the Santa that we know has evolved from centuries of characterizations throughout many cultures.

The first personification of “Santa” began about 300 AD in the early Christian church with stories of Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, Lycia, in Asia Minor (now the area we know as Turkey). Legend has it that he made nocturnal visits to needy families, leaving presents in his wake. During the Middle Ages in Europe, Nicholas was made the patron saint of schoolboys with his feast day falling on December 6, the anniversary of his death. It was a solemn occasion, but one filled with much feasting. And, as his present-giving was remembered, the solemnity was forgotten.

The original Saint Nicholas was a thin, stately figure in bishops’ robes. In Germany, he became known as “Weihnachtsmann” - “Christmas Man,” or “Father Christmas,” as now translated. He was portrayed as a gaunt, sad-faced figure, somberly dressed in a blue, black, or green knee-length coat. Bundles of switches and lumps of coal went to bad children and sugar plums to the good.

Santa’s image began to change when he came to America. The Dutch brought their traditions -- St. Nicholas among them. When England took over the original Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, they readily accepted the custom of gift-giving and borrowed the legends and festivities surrounding St. Nicholas. The English children, however, had difficulty in pronouncing his name in Dutch (SanctHerr Nicholas or “Sinterklaus”); and so it became SANTA CLAUS.

His name was not all that changed. In his *Knickerbocker’s History of New York* (1809), Washington Irving decided that the gentleman should look like his Dutch background. So, Santa developed a weight problem, smoked a pipe, and donned a wide-brimmed hat and huge breeches. In

the pockets of his breeches, he carried gifts, which he dropped into chimneys as he rode over rooftops in his wagon.

But, this image was not a popular one. Neither was Clement Moore's jolly old elf, as portrayed in the famous 1822 poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," better known to us as "The Night Before Christmas," nor Robert Weir's personification of a rotund spirit in an 1837 painting. The U.S. still clung to the gaunt, solemn Weihnachtsmann of German origin.

But the seed had been planted, and the idea of a jolly Santa germinated in the minds of the famous American cartoonist, Thomas Nast. In 1862, he published his first rendition of Santa Claus, followed in 1866 by a cartoon in *Harper's Weekly*. Both showed a rotund, jolly figure; and the idea gradually took hold. Perhaps, after the long Civil War, America was ready for a happy face instead of a stern one. And, Nast is the one who gave Santa a permanent home. No one had ever thought of where the gift-giver lived. Nast decided on the North Pole, which belonged to no country. Santa could visit children around the world, no matter what their government, because he was a man of the universe!





# Santa Claus



## The Early Years









# Thomas Nast's Santa Claus





## THE SEASON OF GIVING



Since the Wise Men brought gifts to the newborn Savior, the spirit of Christmas has been one of giving. It has been interpreted on many scales, large and small, over the years; but the Victorian era saw the tradition of gift-giving firmly established.

In the December 1852 issue of *Peterson's Magazine*, the heroine writes home to her mother in the country of the thrill of being in the city on Christmas Eve afternoon. As she walked along looking into windows, she wrote, she felt as if she had been transported back into *The Arabian Nights*, as she was so dazzled by the array of toys, workboxes, books, and jewelry gleaming brightly in store after store. She told of fathers hurrying home with baskets full of turkeys, cranberries, celery, and apples, and



mothers carrying dolls and toys of all kinds home for the children. She described laughing school girls, carrying muffs filled with small toys and candies for younger brothers and sisters, their faces aglow with the pleasure of anticipated giving, and left the reader envisioning the Victorian Christmas as a carnival of mirth and happiness for children, parents, and even playful dogs.

At first, early settlers made their gifts by hand - scarves, mittens, blocks, sleds. But as towns and villages grew into even larger cities, more and more gifts were bought rather than made. Country folk could place an order at the general store. In towns and cities, many gifts were available in the larger stores. Christmas became commercial soon after Santa became well-known.

Presents of plants were welcomed by the Victorians -- no group loved flowers more than they. Writers of the day made suggested gift lists for everyone. Presents such as doilies, silver tea balls, and tea strainers for the hostess' table were popular; and for the parlor, there were photograph frames in silver, fabric, or leather. For the bedroom, dressing-table mirrors were suggested, and boxes, fans, vases, and jewelry were said to be welcome additions. Gifts for men included cigars and scarves and mufflers. Umbrellas were on the lists, because men seemed to have an unlimited capacity for umbrellas. A good whip or a carriage robe was also recommended. For grandmothers who enjoyed knitting, a "wonder ball" headed the list. This was a ball of yarn that carefully unraveled to dispense tiny gifts such as thimbles as the yarn gradually was used up in knitting. Add to the "wonder ball" a footstool, a pot of primroses, a folding fruit knife, and a screen against draughts, and the Victorian grand-mother would indeed have a merry Christmas.





Boys of Victorian times were said to enjoy receiving tool boxes, boxing gloves, sleds, and skates, stamps and stamp albums, lanterns, jackknives, books of adventure, circus sets, soldiers, wagons, marbles, and of course, trains.

Little girls preferred gifts that imitated their older sisters, such as a party fan, a bit of jewelry, a sachet, note paper, books, perhaps a canary, and always a doll. And dolls must have tea, so another popular present was a miniature china set. Boys and girls

alike both wanted Noah's Ark. This was a wooden ark with two each of many different animals. In many areas, children were not allowed to play with toys on Sundays. However, Noah's Ark, with its Biblical background, was an exception.

Everyone expected, and usually got, an orange in the toe of the stocking. In the South, many boys and girls looked forward to a package of Chinese firecrackers, which they exploded all day long, for Christmas down South was a noisy time.





## SPIDER'S WEB RIBBON



To add an extra air of excitement to Christmas morning, some Victorians made finding your Christmas presents into a game. *St. Nicholas Magazine*, founded by Scribner's in 1873, tells its readers of one of the most novel methods created for distributing Christmas presents. In the December 1876 issue of this popular American children's magazine, a letter to the editor described how one might fashion a "spider's web" out of string or ribbon. Beginning at the chandelier, one would array the ribbons about the room, hiding presents along each strand. When the partygoers arrived, each took up a ribbon and followed it all the way to the end, collecting the gifts he found along the way.



"This method of distributing gifts was offered by the writer as an alternative to the "old-fashioned" stockings and Christmas trees:

*Procure as many balls of string as there are members in the family. They should be different colors, so that each one may follow his string with ease, and of the same length, so that they may all finish winding together.*

*The presents intended for each person are to be tied to one particular string, the heaviest or largest to be fastened to one end and placed at the back of the room, set apart from the maze. Then carry the string across the room, tie something else to it, and secure the string to a chair, the window fastener, the curtain rod, or anything else.*

*Pass the string back and forth, up and down, through, behind, under, over and across the furniture of the room in every conceivable manner . . . .*

*The hiding of small and valuable things, such as rings, pins, and other pieces of jewelry, thimbles, money, etc., under the sofa cushions, behind a book, or well concealed in any other way, gives additional interest to the maze . . . .*

*When all is ready, let the mistress of ceremonies precede the family, singing or saying the old song:*

*"Will you come into my parlor?"*

*Said the spider to the fly.*

*"'Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy;*

*The way into my parlor is up a winding stair,*

*And I have many pretty things to show you when you're there.*

*Will you, will you, walk in, Mister Fly?"*

*The door of the room should be opened just as the leader finishes the song."*





When it came to distributing gifts, everyone was remembered. A good example of Victorian largesse was Mrs. Samuel Clemens, wife of “Mark Twain.” Mrs. Clemens turned their guest room into Santa’s workshop. There, presents were wrapped, and many baskets were filled for the sick and the needy. In addition to preparing gifts for all her family, far and near, and her neighbors, Mrs. Clemens remembered her servants and their families. Her gift list included fruit, candy, paintings, books, coin banks, beads, cobs, ice skates, and handkerchiefs. Her daughters helped her, and they started months ahead of the holiday. Sound familiar?





# Christmas In the Kitchen

## Seasonal Culinary Traditions & Recipes







A very special Christmas dinner was the culmination of the Victorian holiday. In her book, *The Gift of Christmas Past*, Sunny O'Neill quotes from an unidentified source:

*Dinner in the North was usually served at one o'clock, but dinner was at three in the afternoon in the South, the climax of long planning. Every available chair was crowded about a long table, whose leaves extended as far as possible. Nevertheless, the children were often put at a second, smaller table in the next room. Seldom was there a first*

*course; everything was placed on the table, to be eaten at will -- main dishes, side dishes, seasonings, and preserves.*

*On this day, grace had a particular solemnity. "Father in heaven, we thank Thee for the bounty that we are about to receive-." At once an attendant or attendants materialized with the turkeys, done to a smooth-skinned, almost polished, brown, surrounded by potatoes and stuffed vegetables and filled with a highly caloric dressing- of oysters, chestnuts, or cornmeal mixture, with all the dignity of his rank, the master lifted a sharpened knife and got to work.*

*With the brown meat or the light (preceded by the usual question about preference) went a dark gravy, pickled mangoes, brandied peaches, and other savory accompaniments. At the end of the table stood one or two hams, dark and inviting; a large roast, cold or warm, and a heaping platter of oysters for those who had not had them at breakfast.*

*Potatoes in two or three styles, vegetables in butter, and vegetables with eggs, with a flavoring of ham or bacon or meat – the meal continued for two hours or so, with second helpings or third ones, and heads turned discreetly if a fourth were taken. Toward the end, the hostess slipped away and from the kitchen marched a helper, picked for his strength of arm, who beamed as he presented the piece de resistance, the plum pudding. It had been ignited so that the blue flame played around the heavy ball of promised delight.*

*Applause, cries from the children, calls of approval – as the fire burned down, sections or spoonfuls went to all the adults and some of the older children. By now, all were surfeited and the women left the table, taking their young with them. On came decanters of wine and plates of nuts and raisins. For another hour, perhaps, the men would talk, and then heads would begin to nod and one after another would drop out of the conversation. Those who stayed regaled one another with recollections of former years, news of neighbors, crops, and conditions, plans for the year ahead, tales about eccentric relatives who collected old silver or young wives.*





# SOME VICTORIAN "FLAVOR" FOR YOUR CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES





## EGGNOG

Eggnog is a particularly Southern holiday specialty, but it is likely that it has been derived from the German egg punch, made with milk and wine, and still popular in Germany today. Recipes for eggnog are many and varied, from the very rich Kentucky bourbon version to those requiring a variety of liquors. When making a quantity of eggnog to serve over a period of time, divide the egg whites and use only as needed, beating them up at the time of serving.



### Ingredients

- 6 eggs separated
- 1/2 cup sugar (to taste)
- 1 ½ cups bourbon
- ½ cup rum
- ½ cup brandy or Cointreau
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 3 cups heavy cream
- 1 pint milk
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- Nutmeg (scant)

### Directions:

Beat egg yolks well, adding sugar gradually. While still beating, add liquor gradually. Add vanilla and put mixture into refrigerator to chill at least one hour. Then add cream and milk from time to time, preferably over a period of twenty-four hours. Stir well with each addition. Garnish with nutmeg.

**SOURCE:** *The Gift of Christmas Past* -- Sunny O'Neill



## SWEET POTATO SOUFFLE



### Ingredients

- 1 qt. mashed sweet potatoes, cooked
- ½ cup sherry
- 2 eggs, beaten
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup chopped black walnuts
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup melted butter

### Directions:

Combine all ingredients and whip until light. Place in greased pan and bake at 350 degrees until golden brown.

**SOURCE:** *A Taste of the Past* -- Surratt House Cookbook



## Maryland Stuffed Ham

Stuffed ham is a very old concoction in Southern Maryland. It is tedious to fix, but well-worth the effort.



### Ingredients

- 10-12 lb. uncooked whole ham
- 2 lbs. mustard greens
- 3 lb. kale
- 2 lbs. watercress
- 1 large head of cabbage
- 1 tablespoon black pepper
- 3 tablespoons salt
- 3 tablespoons mustard seed
- 1 tablespoon red pepper
- 3 tablespoons celery seed
- 4 bunches green onion

### Directions:

Coarsely chop the greens and season with the various spices. The amount of spices may be varied according to taste.

Using a large butcher knife, make a number of slits from butt end to hock end and stuff the seasoned greens into the slits. If there are any greens left over, pile them on top of the ham and then sew the ham into a piece of cheesecloth.

The ham is then boiled approximately 20 minutes for each pound. After removing the ham from the water, let cool thoroughly before removing the cheesecloth.

*NOTE: If unable to locate an uncooked ham, use the fully cooked one, but it is not necessary to boil quite as long.*

**SOURCE:** *A Taste of the Past* -- Surratt House Cookbook



## Marzipan

“...While visions of sugar plums danced in their heads.” Make your own sugar plums with this easy recipe for marzipan, a Victorian favorite.



### Ingredients

- 2 egg whites
- 2 cups almond paste
- 3 cups confectioner's sugar
- cocoa
- food coloring of your choice

### Directions for Marzipan:

Whip egg whites until stiff. Add almond paste and enough confectioner's sugar to make mixture easy to shape. Form into small pears, apples, cherries, and other fruits. Brush some very lightly with food coloring. Roll some in cocoa. Brush with glaze (see below) to achieve a shinier surface. Allow to dry overnight on waxed paper, then refrigerate or freeze in airtight containers. Makes about two pounds or 30-50 pieces. Serve as a party dessert or tuck fruits into decorative paper cups and wrap as gifts.

### Directions for Marzipan Glaze:

Blend 2 tablespoons light corn syrup with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water.

Additional hints: To simulate stems, insert cloves in ends of pears, bananas, and apples, and push  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch piece of licorice into each cherry. For grape clusters, shape 2 teaspoons purple dough into small balls. Brush balls with slightly beaten egg white and shape balls into cluster. For each cluster, brush egg white on stem of two leaves. Attach to back of each cluster, pressing gently to make grapes and leaves adhere. Allow to dry, then brush with glaze.

**SOURCE:** *Colonial Homes*



## Coconut Snowball Cake

Coconuts are not native to the South, but they have always been plentiful and inexpensive. And, as they began to appear for sale in December, they became synonymous with Christmas holidays in the South. The great Coconut Snowball Cake which is traditional in many Southern homes is one of the most impressive of creations.

### Ingredients

- 2/3 cup butter, softened
- 2 cup sugar
- 1 cup warm water
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoons orange extract
- 3 cups flour, sifted
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 8 egg whites, room temperature, beaten stiff

### Directions:

Grease two 9-inch or 10-inch round cake pans and line with paper on the bottom. Then grease again and dust with flour.

If using electric oven, turn to 350 degrees to preheat; if using gas oven, turn to lowest heat.

Cream butter and sugar well together, about ten minutes. Begin to add warm water, ¼ cup at a time, alternating with flour to which baking powder and salt have been added. When all water has been added, alternate remaining flour with stiffly beaten egg whites. Add flavoring last.

Divide batter equally between two prepared pans and put in oven to bake. If baking in a gas range, increase heat 25 degrees when they are just well done, not brown or crusted. Turn out on rack.

When cake layers cool, place one upside down on a large, flat platter to be iced.



## Coconut Snowball Cake (Cont.)



### Icing and Filling Ingredients

- 4 cups sugar
- 2 cups hot water or juice
- 1 tablespoon orange extract
- 4 egg whites, beaten stiff
- 2 large coconuts, grated

### Directions:

Place sugar in a sauce pan and pour hot water over it. Boil together very rapidly until the mixture forms a soft ball in cold water. Pour a half-cup of hot syrup over stiffly beaten egg whites. Let remaining syrup cook until it spins a long thread or reaches the hard-crack stage when dropped into water. Pour slowly over egg whites, beating constantly. Add flavoring and beat until icing begins to be thick and smooth.

Spread layer of icing one-inch thick on cake. Then spread one-inch layer of grated coconut on top of the icing. (Do not mix coconut with icing; it would change completely the character of the cake.) Top coconut with second one-inch layer of icing. Place second layer on top and cover with a layer of icing one-inch thick. Spread icing down the sides of the cake until cake is white and icing is thick. Sprinkle grated coconut on top, at least one-inch thick. Dab coconut around the sides, also, as it will stick.

If icing will not stand up one-inch thick, it is too soft and needs more cooking. In that case, steam it in a double boiler until icing will hold its shape when dropped from a spoon.

Store cake in refrigerator.

**SOURCE:** *America's Christmas Heritage*



# A HOLIDAY GREETING







The first cards sent at Christmas were actually termed “Christmas pieces” and were made by schoolboys and presented to their parents to tell of their progress in school. The first cards widely sent were New Year’s greetings instead of Christmas greetings.

Christmas cards in pictorial form were first done in 1843 by John C. Horsley in England. Mr. Horsley was hired by a wealthy Englishman, Henry Cole, to solve a problem. Mr. Cole was so busy that he had no time to write letters to friends at Christmas. Horsley designed a greeting card instead. Mr. Cole had one thousand cards printed from Horsley’s design, and Joseph Cundall colored each card by hand. Mr. Cundall was a shop owner and sold the cards which Mr. Cole did not send. In 1844, a Reverend Bradley sent a card telling friends and relatives of his year’s activities.

By the American Civil War period, Christmas cards were available on a limited, commercial basis; but the real spread of cards came in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century after Louis Prang immigrated to America in 1874 and established his famous chromolithography processes. He advertised that he was capable of printing over twenty different colors – an unheard of amount for that day and age.





The custom of sending holiday greetings caught on quickly and by the time the Victorian era was in full swing, cards were varied in size, shape and material. Sentiments on the cards included simple seasonal greetings, religious thoughts, sentimental verses, and bad jokes that were totally unrelated to the season.



Many cards were extremely elaborate with gilded, embossed, shaped, pop-up and pierced forms. Victorian cards sported fancy silk fringe, lace, satin, sachets, tinsel, feathers, fold-outs, pop-outs, and pull tabs for animation. Like Victorian valentines, Christmas cards featured cherubs, flowers, animals, and images of spring. Biblical figures were also common images on holiday cards. Small children were sentimentalized on Victorian Christmas cards, with children of the poor and orphans as well, being extensively portrayed. Indeed, a large number of such cards were published at the time; it was the era of sailor suits and pretty bonnets in particular.





Children were always portrayed as pretty, with round faces, wide eyes, and red Cupid's-bow lips. Novelty cards were a big hit in Victorian times, especially those that played a trick or worked mechanically.

The variety of 19<sup>th</sup> century cards was enormous. In his *A Book of Christmas*, William Sansome describes them thusly:

*“Not only were they printed on paper, but dressed with satin, fringed silk, and Plush; they were gilded and frosted; they were made in the form of fans, stars, crescents, and many other shapes, they were embossed and they were jeweled; They were made to stand up, they were made to squeak; and they illustrated anything seasonal from a fireside scene to a giant snowball, a skating session to a frosted church, from comic animals to the well-known stagecoach. Holly and robins and snowflakes, mistletoe and trees and puddings, bicycles and balloons railway engines and pretty girls all got mixed up in every conceivable manner to celebrate the seasonable compliments.”*





The Victorians illustrated nature in all its form on their cards since they were passionately fond of the countryside, and so they gloried in colorful cards which depicted delightful pictures of spring and summer in particular. Very early Christmas cards hence have attractive birds on them together with their nests and eggs. Flowers of the countryside were also immensely popular as illustrations, and flying butterflies amongst stalks of wheat and even insects landing on ripening blackberries were included by the early artists of Christmas cards.

