



A Glimpse of American Christmas History

The 1700s-Colonial Times-a few interesting tidbits:

After the American Revolution, English customs fell out of favor, including Christmas. In fact, it was banned in Massachusetts and Congress was in session on December 25, 1789, the first Christmas under America's new Constitution. Christmas wasn't declared a federal holiday until June 26, 1870.

1773: Santa first appeared in the media as St. A Claus.

In 1759, George Washington had a shopping list for his new step-children having married a rich widow named Martha. He wanted to get them "A bird on Bellows, A Cuckoo, A turnabout parrot, A Grocers Shop, An Aviary, A Prussian Dragoon, A Man Smoakg, 6 Small Books for Children, 1 Baby & other toys." This was not a normal shopping list of the day.

In communities and homes where Christmas was celebrated, children were usually given one gift. It was typically handmade clothing (such as scarves, mittens, etc.), sweets, and sometimes a handmade toy.

The 1800s -a few interesting tidbits:

Early in the 1800s, there was class conflict and turmoil. Best-selling author Washington Irving wrote *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*, stories about the celebration of Christmas in an English manor house. The sketches feature a squire who invited the peasants into his home for the holiday. In contrast to the problems in American society at the time, the two groups mingled effortlessly. In Irving's mind, Christmas should be a peaceful, warm-hearted holiday bringing everyone together regardless of status.

Children's books played an important role in spreading the customs of celebrating Christmas, especially the tradition of trimmed trees and gifts delivered by Santa Claus.

Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in 1834. Dickens was one of the first to show his readers a new way of celebrating the holiday. He changed the 12-day Yule feast to a one-day family gathering in their own home instead of gathering together an entire village, as was the tradition. Dickens introduced the "nuclear family" into a rewarding Christmas environment. *A Christmas Carol* is filled with magic, morals, and song.

The first Christmas tree in the White House was in 1889, during the presidency of Benjamin Harrison. The Harrison family, including his young grandchildren, decorated the tree with toy soldiers and glass ornaments for their small family gathering.

The 1900s -a few interesting tidbits:

By 1901, so many Christmas trees were being harvested that President Theodore Roosevelt feared that the North American forests were being destroyed. One account says that Roosevelt refused to have a Christmas tree in the White House, but his children smuggled one in anyway and hid it in a closet.

The first national Christmas Tree was lighted in the year 1923 on the White House lawn by President Calvin Coolidge.

Mass accessibility of electricity brings the electric Christmas lights for trees and homes.

The mid-1960's saw another change. Plastic was everywhere. Silver aluminum trees became popular.

Consumerism booms-many children begin to receive store bought gifts and more than one.



Sequoia's Secret Pal Gift Exchange

To honor and follow a small bit of American History, please bring your secret pal the following gifts on the following days. It is very important that you commit to bringing the assigned gifts on the assigned day. It does not feel good to be left out or forgotten. If you are not going to be in school the day of a gift giving please make arrangements to get your gift to your secret pal. Further procedures and expectations of how and where to place your gifts will assure the "secret" will be forthcoming.

If you want to and are able to participate in the secret gift exchange please have your parent sign the permission slip below and return it by Friday, December 2nd.

1. Friday, December 9th - *Christmas in the 1700s*

Homemade treat or sweet

Please bring your secret pal a homemade treat or a sweet that would have been around in the 1700s. Store bought sweets are acceptable, however, homemade is preferred. For example, cookies, brownies, cake, hot chocolate, muffins, etc.



2. Monday, December 12th - *Christmas in the 1800s*

Homemade gift or toy

Please bring your secret pal a homemade gift or toy. Store bought is acceptable if it reflects the 1800s. For example, a painting or drawing, a poem, a game, a doll, a hat, jacob's ladder, jacks, etc.



3. Friday, December 16th - *Christmas in the 1900s*

Store bought gift - (Please spend approximately \$5.00)

Please bring your secret pal a store bought gift. You will reveal who you are today.



Please bring the signed Permission Slip in by Friday, December 2nd

Student Name: _____ Homeroom: _____

Secret Pal: _____ Homeroom: _____
(Remember this is a secret)

_____ Yes, my child will participate in the Sequoia Secret Pal Exchange and understands the expectations.

Guardian/Parent Signature