

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
13 December 1992

Christmas of yesteryear
By Jay Graybeal

The custom of decorating a Christmas tree is a legacy of the Victorian period. Americans copied the European tradition of placing the tree on a table. Popular magazines such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* disseminated illustrations and text that helped to shape uniquely American Christmas traditions.

A Christmas Garden was often placed underneath the tree. A typical garden consisted of a cast iron fence surrounding a miniature landscape made of evergreens, paper or wooden structures and stone fences. The Pennsylvania Germans referred to this as a "Putz."

Children were encouraged to make many of the decorations and tree-trimming was often a Christmas eve activity for older children and parents. Popular decorations included lithographed figures highlighted with tinsel. Also popular were cotton ornaments which featured printed paper heads, hands and feet glued to a flat cotton body. Both types are well presented in the Historical Society of Carroll County's collection of ornaments used by local families. These ornaments serve as reminders of Christmas traditions of a century ago.

Shown clockwise from bottom left are:

* Angels and cherubs were highly popular motifs; this example dates from the turn of the century.

* St. Nicholas carrying the Christmas tree and a bag of presents was a popular theme of late Victorian period paper ornaments.

* Ornaments with lithographed paper elements attached to flat white cotton material were popular at the same time as the all paper examples. The cotton fabric was an ideal material for clothing figures of babies, angels and cherubs.

* Natural motifs such as this butterfly were very popular in the Victorian period but are less commonly found on Christmas ornaments. The reverse bears a printed inscription "Complements of E.T. Burrowes, Portland, Maine, Main – Makers of Fine Curtains, Curtain Materials and Fixtures."

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

© Historical Society of Carroll County

www.hsccmd.com - (410) 848-6494 - 210 East Main Street, Westminster MD 21157

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles