

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

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Signs of the season from years past
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The practice of decorating buildings with evergreens at New Year's is a custom that was known in Roman times. In America, however, Christmas decorations on buildings date from the late 19th century. Preserved in the collection of the historical society and in private collections are images of decorations of Christmas past.

The collection's earliest photograph of a decorated residence is a c.1890 image of Dr. Jacob Shower's Manchester house. The Showers chose a variety of decorations including crossed American Flags and bunting between and below the second story windows, tiny flags attached to the roof line of Shower's attached office and stuck in the shutter louvers of the house, and evergreen wreaths and swags.

A parlor photography of the John Hanna House, 102 E. Main St., Westminster taken shortly after the turn-of-the-century documents interior decorations. The Hannas placed holly branches behind the landscape prints hung above the family piano and behind the portrait prints of President McKinley, General Grant and an unidentified man above the bookcase.

Church interiors were also highly decorated in preparation for Christmas services. A 1913 image of the Freedom Methodist Episcopal South Church shows evergreen roping suspended from the ceiling and across the chimney breast and wrapped around the altar rail. Commercially produced paper bells of various sizes hung from the kerosene lighting fixtures and from the evergreen ropes.

The widespread use of evergreens can also be seen in a mid-20th century photograph of the St. John's Roman Catholic Church sanctuary in Westminster. The parishioners made liberal use of freshly cut cedars, poinsettias, holly and wreaths. A large crèche scene flanked by cedars was placed to the right of the altar.

These images of Christmas past help us to document changing attitudes towards decorations. At the turn of the century, decorative schemes had a homemade quality of simple designs using natural materials.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

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Photo caption: Christmas decorations at Dr. Jacob Shower’s residence and office, in Manchester, c. 1890

Photo caption: The interior of the John Hanna residence at 102 E. Main St., Westminster, c.1900

Photo caption: St. John’s Roman Catholic Church, Westminster, (razed 1977) c.1950.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Mrs. Grayson Brandenburg Clarke

Photo caption: The Freedom Methodist Episcopal South Church, December 1913.