



RHS Annual Open House Gala

“Home for the Holidays”

Saturday, Dec. 2nd
and
Sunday, Dec. 3rd
1 to 4 pm

We the Officers and Directors of the Rowley Historical Society extend a heartfelt invitation to each of you to join us as we start the holiday season with our Annual Holiday Open House Gala.

Start the Holiday Season with us at the Platts-Bradstreet House and Barn decked out in all its Christmas finery. As always, we offer a disclaimer in that it is always amusing to see our lovely old house decorated in all its Christmas finery when, in fact, we are well aware that Christmas was actually illegal in Puritan times when our old house was built. We operate under the theory that our lovely old house was used as a residence well as the mid 1800's when Christmas and Christmas traditions came back into vogue for the descendants of our Puritan forbearers.

So that being said, join us, please, for a relaxing time of fellowship, perhaps a tour of the house and barn while enjoying a lovely variety of light refreshments, hot mulled cider or punch and, on

Saturday afternoon, entertainment by the always delightful LOCA flute quartet from Beverly.

We look forward each year to decorating our old house and inviting you all to join us as we hope many of you look forward to coming to see us every year.

We have once again, invited the Second Grade classes from Pine Grove School to come and visit on Monday, Nov. 27th and look forward to sharing our historic home with them.

This year we plan our theme to be Christmas Trees and hope to be able to display a wide variety of tree and tree styles from the various collections of our Board of Directors.

It should be fun – it should be festive! And it's a great way to get into the holiday spirit. So mark your calendars – we look forward to seeing you again.

The Puritan View of Christmas

“Puritans heaped contempt on Christmas”, writes Bruce Colin Daniels of *Puritans at Play* (1995), calling it ‘Fools-tide’ and suppressing any attempts to celebrate it for several reasons. First, no holy days except the Sabbath were sanctioned in the Scripture, second, the most egregious behaviors were exercised in its celebration and third, Dec. 25th was ahistorical. & had no basis in fact.



The Puritan argued that the selection of the date was an ‘early Christian hijacking’ of a Roman festival and to celebrate a December Christmas was to pay homage to a pagan custom! This Puritan view prevailed in New England for almost two centuries!

In *Creating the Commonwealth* (1995), Stephen Innes writes that ‘the Puritan calendar was one of the most leisure-less ever adopted by mankind, comprised of approximately 300 working days a year.’ Days of rest were few and far between in the early New England

Calendar, Innes notes, and restricted to Sabbath, Election Day, Harvard Commencement and periodic days of thanksgiving and humiliation.

When the Puritans came to power in England following the execution of King Charles I, Parliament enacted a law abolishing the observance of Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide and the New England Puritans followed suit by banning any form of Christmas celebration. A Massachusetts law of 1659 punished offenders with a hefty fine of five shillings!

Laws suppressing the celebration of Christmas were repealed in 1681 but staunch Puritan New Englanders continued to regard the day as an abomination. As late as 1870, classes were scheduled in Boston Schools on Christmas Day and punishments were doled out to children who chose to stay home to observe Christmas!



Christmas didn't become a federal holiday until after the Civil War when in 1870, Presidents Ulysses S. Grant made it so in an attempt to unite the North and

the South. The Puritan hostility to Christmas was gradually relaxed and in the late 19th century, authors praised the holiday for its 'liberality, family together ness and joyful observance'.

"One commentator suggested the Puritans had actually done the day a service in reviling the gaming, dissipation and sporting [commonly seen in England]. When the day's less pleasant associations were stripped away, Americans re-created the day according to their tastes and times. The doctrines that caused the Puritans to regard the day with disapprobation were modified and the day was rescued from its traditional excesses of behavior. Christmas was reshaped in late 19th

Century American with spirituality, commercialism, nostalgia, and hope becoming the day's distinguishing characteristics."

So, although we are amazed today in 21st century America that any group would be so straight laced as to actually outlaw the most popular holiday of the last 100 years or so, we now see that the Puritans in a way, saved and re-shaped Christmas into family holiday that we celebrate today.

Christmas Trees in America

So now that we've established the fact that the Puritans who originally settled this area, were not big fans of Christmas. How did we get to the Christmas overload that we've come to expect starting sometime before Halloween and continuing on into January?

Well, we certainly owe a lot of how we perceive Christmas from Authors Clement Moore, of 'Twas the Night Before Christmas, Charles Dickens, of A Christmas Carol, and Illustrators Thomas Nast and Norman Rockwell not to mention movies like Miracle on 34th Street, It's a Wonderful Life and the ever popular White Christmas.

So now maybe we can understand how Christmas got hyped up with magical powers well beyond its religious scope. But let's focus, if we may, on how the Christmas tree, specifically, came to be one of the primary symbols of the holiday.

From Wikipedia: "A Christmas tree is a decorated tree, usually an evergreen conifer such as spruce, pine or fir or an artificial tree of similar appearance, associated with the celebration of Christmas. The modern Christmas tree was developed in early modern Germany (where it is today called Weihnachtsbaum on Christbaum)."

The tree was traditionally decorated with 'roses made of colored paper, apples, wafers, tinsel, and sweetmeats. In the 18th century, it began to be illuminated by candles which were ultimately

replaced by Christmas lights, such as garlands, baubles, tinsel and candy canes. An angel or star might be placed at the top of the tree to represent the archangel Gabriel or the State of Bethlehem from the Nativity. Edible items such as gingerbread, chocolate or other sweets are also popular and are tied to or hung from the tree's branches with ribbons." Traditionally, Christmas trees are set up and decorated on the first Day of Advent or in some families on Christmas Eve and taken down on Twelfth Night, January 5th.

"Modern Christmas trees originated during the Renaissance of early modern Germany. Its 16th century origins are sometimes associated with the Protestant reformer Martin Luther who is said to have first added lighted candles to an evergreen tree.

Although the tradition of decorating the home with evergreens was long established in Britain in the 18th century, the custom of decorating an entire small tree was unknown in Britain until two centuries ago. At the time of the marriage of George !! and his German born Queen, she introduced the concept of a decorated tree in 1800. By the time Queen Victoria married her German cousin, Prince Albert, in 1841, the Christmas tree custom had become wide-spread as wealthy middle class families followed the lead of the Royals. Into the latter half of the 19th century, Christmas trees were still the norm only in the upper classes and thus the custom of decorating larger trees for public viewing in public space. Public entertainment, charity bazaars, and hospitals frequently set up brightly lit and decorated Christmas for the 'less fortunate' to view. In the US, the Christmas tree tradition became popular in the early 19th century.; An 1853 article on Christmas customs in Pennsylvania defines them as mostly German in origin, including the Christmas tree, which is planted in a flower pot filled with earth and its branches covered with presents, chiefly confectionary, for the younger members of the family. The article distinguishes between customs in different states however, claiming the in New England generally "Christmas is not much celebrated", whereas in Pennsylvania and New York it is.

Edward H. Johnson, vice president of Edison electric Light company, is thought to have the first electrically illuminated Christmas tree at his home in 1882. Johnson became known as the "Father of the Electric Christmas Lights".

In 1965, a TV special A Charlie Brown Christmas coined the term Charlie Brown Christmas tree as describing any poor-looking or malformed little tree.

Editor's Note: *Remember the trees of the mid-century? They were nothing like the magnificently manicured and groomed trees available to us today. In many respects, it is the groomed tree phenomenon that heralded the passing of the tinsel – remember tinsel? long single strands of silver to be placed – one by one – on the trees branches – as now they is not enough space to let the tinsel drop and hang appropriately suspended between branches, thus the need for garland. I loved tinsel -. I was one of those who had to arrange it strand by strand and worse still – I meticulously took as many strands as I could off the tree at the close of the season – and saved it for us next year! I miss tinsel!*

Since the early 20th century, it has become common in many cities, towns and department stores to put up public Christmas trees such as the Rockefeller Center Tree in New York and the White House Christmas Tree on the South Lawn.

The use of fire retardant has allowed many indoor places to place real trees and still be compliant with local fire codes but more and more artificial trees are becoming the norm as they continue to morph into more realistic versions of the real thing – gone are the silver aluminum trees of the 60's! Ironically, although artificial trees were developed as early as the 1920's in response to continued concerns regarding deforestation of our woodland, most of the artificial trees on the market today are neither recyclable or biodegradable. Think about it! Artificial trees are also considered safer as natural trees can pose a significant fire hazard. The current estimate is that about 58% of Christmas tree in the US are artificial.

In the world of ever increasing political-correctness, public display of Christmas trees as well as Nativity displays have come under fire. In 2005, the City of Boston renamed the spruce tree used to decorate the Boston Common a "Holiday Tree" rather than a Christmas tree. The name change drew unfavorable response from the public and it was reverse after the city was threatened several lawsuits!

Also from Wikipedia:

Tinsel, is a type of decorative material that mimics the effect of ice, consisting of thin strips of sparkling material attached to a thread. When in long narrow strips not attached to thread, it is called "**lametta**", and emulates icicles. It was originally a metallic [garland](#) for [Christmas decoration](#). The modern production of tinsel typically involves plastic, and is used particularly to decorate [Christmas trees](#). It may be hung from ceilings or wrapped around statues, lampposts, and so on. Modern tinsel was invented in [Nuremberg, Germany](#), in 1610, and was originally made of shredded [silver](#).

A **garland** is a decorative [wreath](#) or cord (typically used at festive occasions) which can be hung round a person's neck or on inanimate objects like [Christmas trees](#). Originally garlands were made of flowers or leaves.



A **bubble light** is a decorative device consisting of a liquid-filled vial that is heated and lighted by an [incandescent light bulb](#). Because of the liquid's low [boiling point](#), the modest heat generated by the lamp causes the liquid to boil and [bubble](#) up from the vial's base thus creating a decorative effect.

Ornaments or **baubles** are [decorations](#) (usually made of glass, metal, wood, or ceramics) that are used to festoon a [Christmas tree](#). Ornaments take many different forms, from a simple round ball to highly artistic designs. Ornaments are almost always reused year after year rather than purchased annually, and family collections often contain a combination of commercially produced ornaments and decorations created by family members. Such collections are often passed on and augmented from generation to generation. Santa Claus is a commonly used figure. Candy canes, fruit, animals, angels and snowflake images are also popular choices.

Antiques Appraisal Night update

Let us take a moment to thank, once again, Bobby Cianfrocca and Casey Smollen for bringing their considerable expertise to the table at our Annual Antiques Appraisal Night. Always fun, always a wide variety of items, always a good time. If you missed us this year, look for us again in the fall of 2018, usually October.

Thank you Bobby and Casey!

Annual Meeting update

As usual, the pot-luck supper preceding our Annual Meeting and Lecture proved to be a spectacular array of delicious foods. We thank all the participants who shared their 'covered-dish' with us. Special thanks to the members of the board of Directors who provided the wealth of pies for dessert – chocolate cream, pecan, pumpkin, apple and cherry – Delicious!

Moving into the Barn, we had the business portion of our meeting including election of Board members and Officers, list to follow, before moving onto our Guest Speaker Professor Steven Russell of Northern Essex Community College who spoke about the WPA between the Great Depression and World War II. We were able to display and bring to Prof. Russell's attention several Rowley specific WPA projects as well. Thank you Prof. Russel and thank you Janet Peabody for finding him for us!

2017-18 Officers and Board Members

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Sam Streiff – Treasurer
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Congratulations All!