



All Things Canadian

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A Canadian Traditional Christmas Comes From Many Countries

We see them at this time of the year; the cards, the trees, the stockings, the candy, the pastries and the poinsettias. Once in a while, we give maybe a few seconds and ask ourselves the origins of these Christmas artifacts, and then we go on our merry way. This is a short article about these time-tested staples of Christmases past and present.

This is the story of the stocking that was hanged with care. A long time ago, a poor man had no funds to get his three daughters married off. Saint Nicholas overheard a conversation about the man's dilemma and wanted to help.

Since the old man didn't want charity, Nicholas knew that the only way to help the old man was in secret or be a Secret Santa. So Nicholas climbed down their chimney that night, saw stockings hanging by the mantelpiece to dry and inserted a bag of gold coins in each of the daughter's stockings.

The sweet candy cane has a legend which dates back 330 years ago. Legend has it, that in 1670, the choirmaster at the Cologne Cathedral handed out sugar sticks to his young singers to keep them quiet during the long Living Creche ceremony. The hooked candy resembles that of a shepherd's cane.

In 1847, August Imgard, a German - Swedish immigrant was reportedly the person to bring the hanging candy canes on the tree in North America.

This flower or some say plant has a religious overtone to it. Poinsettias have a very interesting legend behind them. There once lived a poor girl who couldn't afford a gift for the celebrations for Jesus in a festival the town held each year.

An angel appeared to her one day telling her to gather weeds and bring them to the church altar. When the child did as she was told, the weeds started to bloom into poinsettias. The rest is commercialized history.

Ever notice that we just don't get cards like we used to? In the days of merry old England, Sir Henry Cole was hired to create the first commercial Christmas card back in 1843. Artist, John Callcott Horsley adorned the card with the illustrations.

The first illustrations were that of a family with a small child drinking wine together. This provided much conversation for the masses and it was decided that this was not the Christmas scene people had hoped for. Regardless, 4,100 were printed and sold for a shilling each.

These early cards rarely showed illustrations of Christmas cheer, but in fact, drawings of flowers, fairies, and other drawings of spring weather.

Just 32 years later and thousands of miles away, Louis Prang printed off the first batch of Christmas cards in 1875 from his printing shop in America.

There was a lull in printing for a few decades to follow. In the roaring '20s, Christmas cards became popular once again. These days, Christmas cards are on the decline. But in 2005, an estimated 1.9 billion cards were sent to friends and families in America.

Oh, that wonderful smell of gingerbread. The smell alone brings back fond memories of helping mother produce ginger bread cookies at Christmas time. Gingerbread has a legend that proceeds the Christmas season itself. Gregory Makar, an Armenian Monk brought gingerbread to Europe in 992. He taught French priests the art of making gingerbread when he left Nicopolis Pompeli and arrived in France.

Gingerbread made its historic travels in the 13 century when German immigrants taught the Swedish people how to make the tasty bread. Swedish nuns made the bread as a way to relieve indigestion in 1444.

The first documented trade of gingerbread dates to the 16th century, where they were sold in monasteries, pharmacies and town square farmers' markets.

Slowly but surely, the art of ginger bread made its way to North America and into millions of children's and adults stomachs.

The Christmas tree is a symbol of the tree of life as it was written in the Garden of Eden.

-Martin Luther

Documents provided show in 1514 the Brotherhood of the Blackheads adorned a tree for the holidays in their homestead.

Trees were not decorated until 1584. In 1570 the first decorations were that of apples, nuts, pretzels and paper flowers.

The decorations of candles were introduced sometime in the early 18th century.

Canadians went without Christmas trees. But in 1781 that was all going to change. Brunswick soldiers stationed in Quebec saw a fur tree, decorated with candles and fruits, at their General's party and brought with them the traditional Christmas tree.

In the early 19th century London's royal family celebrated the season with a tree.

The tradition of the Christmas tree slowly grew to America. Several American cities hold claim to having the first traditional tree.

A Canadian or American traditional Christmas is anything but home grown. These traditions belong to people from many diverse lands that brought with them their own traditions to share with their fellow citizens.

