

## THE CHRISTMAS TREE STORY

At the time I was designing the tree ornament, I had no idea that it was called a feather tree. When I found out, I did some Christmas tree research.

The custom of the Christmas tree developed in Germany (where the tree is called the Weihnachtsbaum or Christbaum or “Tannenbaum”). Predecessors can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> and possible 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the Christians brought decorated trees into their homes.

The Christmas tree is a decorated tree, an evergreen such as spruce, pine or fir. The tree was traditionally adorned with apples, nuts or other foods. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it began to be illuminated with candles, later the candles were replaced with lights.

This tradition spread throughout Europe and was brought to the United States by German settlers and Hessian mercenaries who fought in the Revolutionary War. In 1804, the U.S. soldiers stationed in Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) hauled trees from surrounding woods to their barracks at Christmas. However after the war, the popularity of this tradition did not continue.

In 1816, the Pennsylvania Germans finally brought the Christmas tree to America to stay. But most Americans, not of German descent, associated the Christmas tree with the German culture and didn't think to make it part of their own tradition. German immigrant Charles Minnegrode accepted a position as a professor at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1842. Entering into the social life, Minnegrode introduced the German custom of decorating an evergreen tree and he became one of the many influences that prompted the Americans to accept the tradition of decorating a tree at Christmas. August Imgard, living in Wooster, Ohio, was the first to decorate the tree with candy canes. In 1847, Mr. Imgard asked the Wooster village tinsmith to construct a star, which he also added to his blue spruce tree along with paper ornaments and candy canes.

Shortly before the Civil War, there was a new spirit of Christmas in the United States. The idea of having a decorated tree brought into their home gave people a sense of wonder and appealed to both the rich and poor. It seemed the Christmas tree was one of the few things that all American could afford. All they had to do was to go outside and find an evergreen.

In 1851, Mark Carry, using oxen and sleds loaded with trees, hauled them from the Catskill to the streets of New York City. Here he opened the first known retail Christmas tree lot in the United States. By the 1880s, the Christmas trees were so popular that many worried the seasonal rush would soon make the evergreen trees extinct. Artificial trees made out of feathers or brush were introduced but did not catch on very well. Though it took some time, the idea did eventually catch on.

Franklin Pierce, our 14<sup>th</sup> President, brought the Christmas tree tradition to the White House. In 1923, President Calvin Coolidge started the National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony now held every year on the White House Lawn. Since 1966, members of the National Christmas Tree Association have presented a beautiful, fresh Christmas tree to the President and first family. This tree is displayed each year in the Blue Room of the White House.

Today we have a wide variety of traditional ornaments, such as garland, tinsel, and candy canes. An angel or the star may be place on top of the tree to represent the Star of Bethlehem from the Nativity. Others have now adopted bows and ribbons, or whatever else they may find attractive. Even pickles appear on the tree.

Do you think maybe, there might be a Christmas pickle hidden in the White House Christmas tree???

