

500 Years of Real Trees



Decorated by the Missouri Christmas Tree Association

1500s

The first written record of the decorated Christmas tree comes from Riga, Latvia. In 1510, the men of the Merchants Guild decorated a tree with paper roses for the marketplace. The fir tree commemorated the Holy Child while the roses a symbol for the Virgin Mary. In 1530, there is a record from Alsace, France, that trees were sold in the marketplace and brought home. Laws limited the size of the trees to “eight shoe lengths,” a little over four feet.

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*Decorated by the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers
Association*

1600s

In the churches of this time, apples were used to decorate evergreen trees as props for the “miracle plays.” The Christmas tree with apples symbolized the “Tree of Paradise” in the Garden of Eden; it was used as a means of teaching the Bible story, of good versus evil in paradise. The first record referencing the “Christmas Tree” to describe a decorated tree was Strassburg, Alsace, 1604. This is recognized as a pivotal event in the history of the Christmas tree.

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Decorated by the North Carolina Christmas Tree Association

1700s

In homes of this period, it was common to decorate evergreens with apples, gilded nuts, cookies and red paper strips. Edible ornaments became so popular that the trees were often referred to as “Sugar Trees.” In this century the first accounts of lighted candles being used as decorations on Christmas trees came from France. A letter to a friend dated 1798 described the enchanting beauty of many candlelit trees seen in the houses of the times.

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Decorated by the Virginia Christmas Tree Growers Association

1800s

The Christmas tree was introduced in the United States by German settlers first as a tabletop size and soon became a floor-to-ceiling tree. In 1851 Christmas trees began to be sold commercially when Mark Carr hauled two ox sleds of evergreens into New York City. During the 1870s, blown glass ball ornaments from Lauscha, Germany, appeared as decorations. These evolved as chains of balls, toys and figures and became a favored American tradition.

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1900s

The first electric lights on a Christmas tree occurred at the home of Thomas Edison's assistant, Edward Johnson, in 1882. President Grover Cleveland first used tree lights in the White House in 1895. In 1903, electric lights referred to as "switchboard lights" were sold in New England; they did not become widely popular until the 1930s. Under President Calvin Coolidge, the first annual lighting of the White House Christmas tree began in 1923.