



International Leadership Institute

830-13 A1A North, #317
Ponte Vedra Beach FL
32082
www.ili.cc

Volume 2, Issue 12

December 2008



The National Christmas Tree beside the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC



A Lesson on English

Christmas in the U.S. A.

by Sara Tusek

Celebrated on December 25th, Christmas Day is an American official holiday. Christmas commemorates of the birth of God's son, Jesus Christ. Although a Christian holiday, Christmas is widely celebrated by many non-Christians; some of its popular celebratory customs have pre-Christian or secular themes and origins.

Popular Christmas customs include gift-giving, special music, an exchange of greeting cards, church celebrations, a special meal, and the display of various decorations such as Christmas trees, lights, and garlands, mistletoe, nativity scenes, and holly. Santa Claus, who lives at the North Pole with his wife Mrs. Klaus, brings gifts to children who've been "good" all year.

EARLY COLONISTS

Many European settlers brought the celebration of Christmas with them to the

New World, although it was banned in some parts of the United States. Between the years of 1659-1681, the Puritans in New England disapproved of the celebration of Christmas; they considered it a heathen holiday because the

Bible mentions that the Lord's day is the only day that should be considered holy. Meanwhile, non-Puritan colonies such as Virginia, Maryland and New York went on celebrating as they had in Europe.

QUEEN VICTORIA'S INFLUENCE

The celebration of Christmas Day fell out of favor in the just-born USA after the American Revolution, as it was thought to be an "English Custom" and the people of the United States didn't want anything to do with the English way of life. Congress was actually in session on Christmas Day in 1789, the first Christmas under America's new constitution.

But as time went on, the Americans made peace with their English cousins, and with the celebration of Christmas. In 1850, Christmas trees started to be sold commercially in the United States, after images of the English royalty with their Christmas tree were printed. (England had restored the celebration of Christmas in 1660 after one hundred years of reformation and Puritan restraint). Because England's Queen Victoria was admired for her fashion sense, even in American society, Christmas trees became fashionable. In 1870, Christmas became a federal holiday; in 1885, Congress extended the Christmas holiday to all federal employees.

International Leadership Institute Providing Leadership Development Services and Programs in the US and Europe since 1985

Vol. 2, # 12 December 2008



Sara and Jarda Tusek with Klaus. "A Lesson on English" is a series of short lessons created for people who want to become fluent in conversational English. The lessons are practical and useful for students learning English in a traditional classroom setting or on their own.

Most of the information in this article is from wikipedia.com



"Merry
Christmas
and Happy
New
Year!"
From Sara,
Jarda &
Klaus

Christmas in the U.S.—from p. 1

THE NATIONAL CHRISTMAS TREE

The tradition of having a "National Christmas Tree" in Washington, D.C. began in 1923 during the presidency of Calvin Coolidge.

That year, a 48-foot Balsam Fir from Vermont, Coolidge's home state, was donated by Paul D. Moody, President of Middlebury College in Vermont, and placed in the Ellipse outside the White House. At 5:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve, standing at the foot of the tree, President Coolidge briefly addressed a crowd and lit up the tree electrically with a touch of a button. 2,500 electric bulbs in red, white and green, donated by the Electric League of Washington, illuminated the tree.

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt led the ceremony in 1934, he pointed to the statues of German, Polish and French Revolutionary War heroes in Lafayette Park as symbols of diversity found among the American people, saying the spirit of Christmas knows no race or creed.

In 1941, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom was at the White House for a war council meeting on Christmas Eve and took part in the lighting ceremony. Because of wartime restrictions during World War II, no new ornaments were purchased and old ornaments, many donated by schoolchildren in the Washington area, were used to decorate the tree. The National Community Christmas Tree was not lit for security reasons -- the President used the switchbox symbolically.

By 1953, the radio broadcast and the telecast of the tree lighting program was watched on television "by millions," and the President's address was broadcast through the Voice of America in thirty-four languages. Having used cut trees from around the country since 1954, the Christmas Pageant of Peace reintroduced a living tree in 1973, responding to hundreds of letters from individuals and environmental groups around the country requesting that conservation concerns be addressed. (Note: two trees are now deco-

rated in Washington, one live and the other cut.)

CHRISTMAS ENDURES

In recent years, Christmas has been the subject of controversy. Some people think that making Christmas an official holiday violates separation of church and state. This issue has been brought to trial several times; most recently, the verdict for *Ganulin v. United States (1999)* states that "the establishment of Christmas Day as a legal public holiday does not violate the Establishment Clause because it has a valid secular purpose."

Customs change, but the official American holiday known as Christmas continues to be a time of festivity and fun across the USA. Christians have the added dimension of celebrating the birth of God's son, Jesus Christ, as the center of their Christmas activities. Whether sacred or secular, the celebration of Christmas gives millions of Americans the chance to reunite with family and friends for a time of "peace on Earth and good will to all people."