



*Holiday edition*

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# The Magic Of Charles Dickens

Impoverished Charles Dickens wrote "A Christmas Carol" to avoid debtors' prison.


Charles Dickens was born in 1812 to impoverished surroundings. When he was twelve years old, his father was imprisoned for debt. Charles was taken from his home and put to work at Warren's Blacking Factory, a workhouse for children. His mother and siblings all were sent with the father to Marshalsea Prison.

When the family finances were partially settled, the family was released, and Charles was able to reunite with them. Charles had already been scarred psychologically by the terrible experience of being in the factory. It was to haunt him all of his life. In later years he only spoke of it to his wife and his closest friend. The dark secret became a source of creative energy with the themes that would eventually emerge most notably, in his works, "David Copperfield" and "Great Expectations".

In later years, his father was able to enroll Charles as a pupil in a school in London. When he was fifteen he began work as an office boy for an attorney's office while he studied shorthand at night, eventually becoming a free-lance reporter, and a very successful shorthand reporter of Parliamentary debates in the House of Commons.

His first published literature appeared when he was twenty-one, followed by a good number of other stories and sketches. He adopted the pen name of "Boz".

The character, Mr. Micawber, in "David Copperfield", was fashioned after his father, and when his father was once again imprisoned for debt, Charles came to his aid. The first series of "Sketches by Boz" was published in 1836 followed by "The Pickwick Papers" which became enormously popular and was published in monthly parts. After the success of "Pickwick", Charles embarked on a full-time career as a novelist, producing work at an incredible rate. He began work on "Oliver Twist" which also was published in monthly parts.



One of Charles Dicken’s most famous works, “A Christmas Carol”, had begun in 1843 and ran in parts through July of 1844 and was intended as he phrased it, “A whimsical sort of masque intended to awaken loving and forbearing thoughts”. It was known as “His little Christmas book” and became instantly successful, selling over six thousand copies in one week. It was originally written under stress to help him pay off a debt to avoid debtors’ prison, and it has been said, the story’s popularity played a critical role in redefining the importance of Christmas and the major sentiments associated with the holiday.

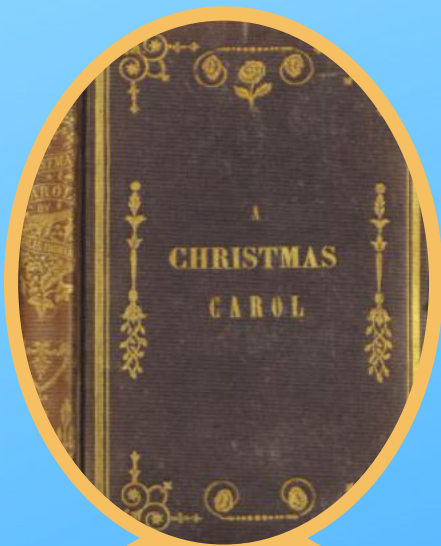
“In “A Christmas Carol”, “I have endeavored in this ghostly little book, to raise the ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humor with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly. God Bless us, one and all” Charles Dickens, December, 1843

Written by Tuxedo Park Magazine

References: Charles Dickens: The man who invented Christmas, Andrew Billen, 2005: London, Sinclair-Stevenson.

A Victorian Celebration: Dicken’s Christmas 2009, Andrew Billen. London: Shortbooks.

A Christmas Carol, 1843, Charles Dickens: Chapman & Hall.



# Christmas Eve In Tuxedo Park Late 1800's

Garland dressed with holly and ivy was carried through the kitchen from the pine grove, as the snow dusted onto the floor like flour while being carried down the corridor to decorate the hall mantles.

Clouds of steam escaped from the lids of huge pots nestled on the stove as delicious scents from stuffing and hearty winter soup drifted through the kitchen.

Icicles framed the wide windows, and the dark, threatening sky could not be relied upon for light, despite the early afternoon hour. Holiday preparations were near completion in the mansion kitchen where this jovial prelude seemed as festive as the holiday itself.

In the corner of the kitchen near the butler's pantry, a massive woodstove balanced two kettles of steaming apple cider. The vapors rich with the scent of cinnamon and cloves softened the threat of an impending snowstorm. The cooks bustled around one another with trays of candied Christmas cakes, pans of gingerbread and dishes piled high with home-made ribbon confections.

Hands moved swiftly, preparing baked goods as if assembling the pieces of a puzzle to complete this feast for Christmas. The door to the butler's pantry swung like a fan as huge platters were retrieved from the highest closets where they rested between holidays.

Rows of pies were pushed into ovens with wide aprons serving as potholders against the cast iron doors. Teakettles whistled, pots clanged and the head cook shouted orders.

Suddenly as if on cue, all was silent. Everyone gazed at the wide windows that tilted upward toward the cloud-covered sky. Against the backdrop of thick, green pine trees, the wind shifted toward the kitchen as it carried snow like a white thin veil. Cascading flakes, resembling the down on a thistle, began to sweep against the glass panes, and you knew...Christmas was truly here.



## *A Winter's Kiss*

A mask of snow lies deep tonight  
outside the woods that sleep;  
the fire's glow is bright within  
to warm where shadows sweep.

The brilliant white of nature's blend  
that holds the world so still;  
embraces depth and sanctity  
of every sloping hill.

Cascading ice and sculptures form  
across the mountain's face;  
through rock formation crevices  
creating nature's grace.


The world's a silent place tonight,  
as whiteness blinds the lake;  
no words describe the measured depth,  
that forms each chiseled flake.

An upturned face toward sky and snow  
when nature's at its best;  
converts the anguish of the world  
to peace and tranquil rest.

Slumber deep and comforting  
on such a night as this;  
can measure not that pearl white flake  
so like an angel's kiss.

By Tuxedo Park Magazine





*December morning at  
the mansion*

There was a vividness in color that came only to a December morning sky. Clouds pushed across the rising sun, creating a soft, pink pattern that weaved its way through the tall pines. Such mornings were for long breakfasts beside a roaring fire.

Steaming pots of aromatic coffee were carried into the breakfast room, while the outdoors was still draped in ice from the night before. Scented baskets full of rosemary, cloves and cinnamon rested on the hearth, spicing the air and carrying the mood of Christmas into the room.

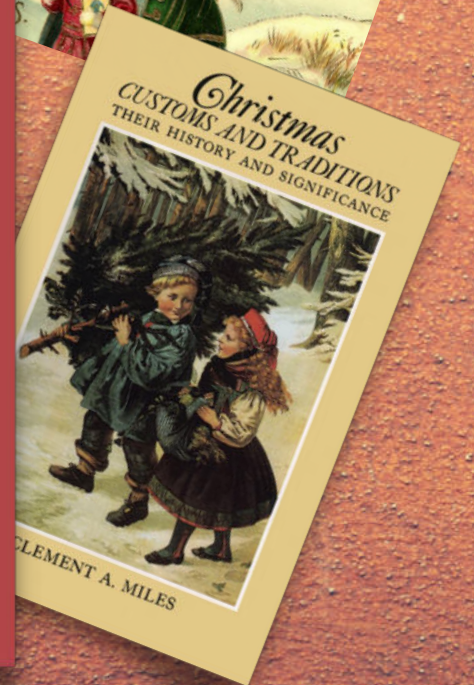
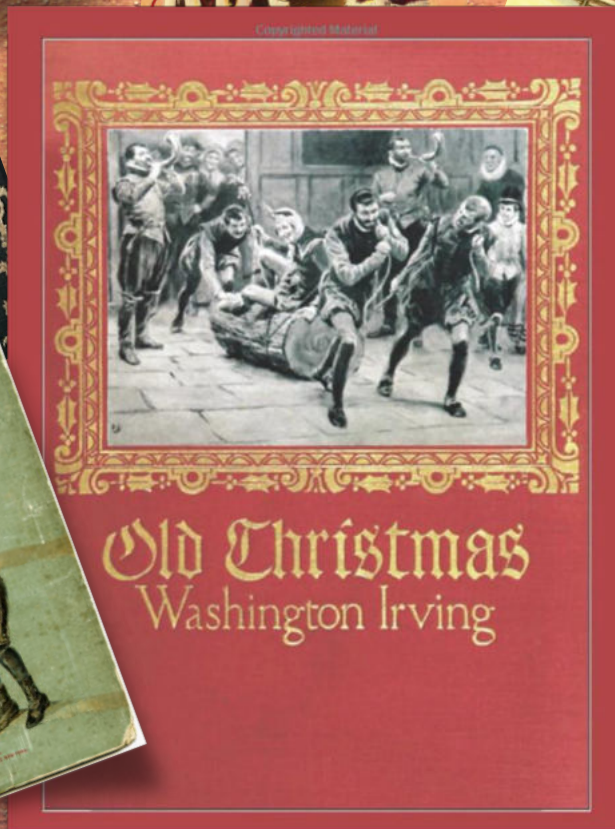
Outside the French doors, in the woods beyond, the frozen, crusted snow sparkled like pearl dust, seeming to create a crystal cocoon that surrounded the mansion each time the wind blew. One savored the hearty breakfasts and conversations of these mornings, for unlike the scene outdoors, they were forever frozen in time.

As the afternoon approached, the raw wind continued to hold us indoors. Logs crackled and snapped in the hearth of the marble fireplace as the snowflakes slid down the exterior of the French doors. Blackberry pipe tobacco sweetened the scent of the library's rich, mahogany paneling, and an overall feeling of tranquility reigned over the grand home. A late luncheon of cold roast venison with chive and raspberry dressing over wild rice was ordered from the kitchen. The clink of brandy snifters could be heard over muffled stock market conversations, for this was the era of ticker tapes, rich tastes and those with tenacious business dispositions.

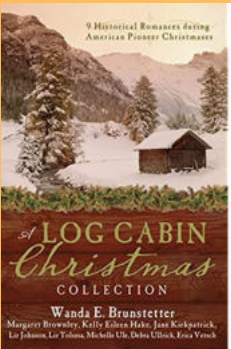
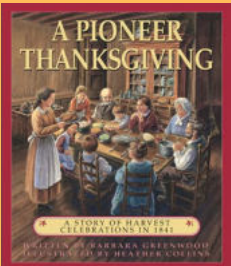




# The nursery library at Christmastime



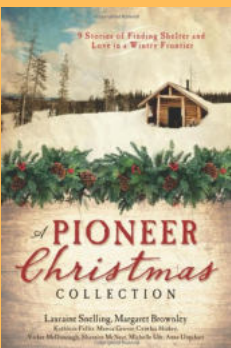
# Come home to the prairie for Christmas



By the mid-1800s, the American Christmas tradition included much of the same customs and festivities as it does today, including tree decorating, gift-giving, Santa Claus, greeting cards, stockings by the fire, church activities, and family-oriented days of feasting and fun.

But for those in the Old West, far away from the more civilized life of the east, pioneers, cowboys, explorers, and mountain men, usually celebrated Christmas with homemade gifts and humble fare.

Christmas for many in the Old West was a difficult time. Those on the prairies were often barraged with terrible blizzards and savage December winds. For mountain men, forced away from their mining activities long before Christmas, in fear of the blinding winter storms and freezing cold, the holidays were often meager. But to these strong pioneers, Christmas would not be forgotten, be it ever so humble.



Determined to bring the spirit of Christmas alive on the American frontier, soldiers could be heard caroling at their remote outposts, the smell of venison roasting over an open hearth wafted upon the winds of the open prairie, and these hardy pioneers looked forward to the chance to forget their hard everyday lives to focus on the holiday.

Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote of the preparations for Christmas on the Kansas Prairie: "Ma was busy all day long, cooking good things for Christmas. She baked salt-rising bread and 'Injun bread, Swedish crackers, and a huge pan of baked beans, with salt pork and molasses. She baked vinegar pies and dried-apple pies and filled a big jar with cookies, and she let Laura and Mary lick the cake spoon. That very Christmas, Laura Ingalls was delighted to find a shiny new tin cup, a peppermint candy, a heart-shaped cake, and a brand new penny in her stocking. In those days, these four small gifts in her stocking were a wealth of gifts to the young girl.

Though perhaps modest, these hardy pioneers made every attempt to decorate their homes for the holidays with whatever natural materials looked attractive at the bleakest time of year, such as evergreens, pinecones, holly, nuts, and berries.

For some, there might even be a Christmas tree, gaily decorated with bits of ribbon, yarn, berries, popcorn or paper strings, and homemade decorations. These homemade decorations were often figures or dolls made of straw or yarn. Cookie dough ornaments and gingerbread men were also popular. In other places, wood was too scarce to "waste" on a tree, if one could be found at all. Other pioneer homes were too small to make room for a tree.

At the very least, almost every home would make the holiday a time of feasting — bringing out preserved fruits and vegetables, fresh game if possible, and for those that could afford it, maybe even beef or ham. Many women began to bake for the holiday weeks ahead of time, leaving the plum pudding to age in the pot until Christmas dinner.

Many of the homemade gifts, including corn husk dolls, sachets, carved wooden toys, pillows, footstools, and embroidered hankies, might have had the family members working on for months ahead of Christmas. Others knitted scarves, hats, mitts, and socks. If the family had had a good year, the children might find candies, small gifts, cookies, and fruit in their stockings.

Christmas Eve would generally find most families singing carols around the Christmas tree or fireplace. On Christmas Day, most would attend church, return home for the traditional Christmas meal, and spend the day visiting with friends and neighbors.

Then, as it is today, Christmas would also find many a mountain man, explorer, or lone cowboy, spending a solitary evening without the benefit of festivities. The more things change, some things inevitably remain the same.



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## Tuxedo Park Visits Newport 1889





## A Victorian Christmas

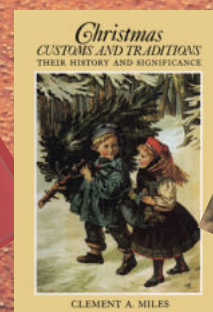
In 1843 Henry Cole commissioned an artist to design a card for Christmas. The illustration showed a group of people around a dinner table and a Christmas message. At one shilling each, these were pricey for ordinary Victorians and so were not immediately accessible. However the sentiment caught on and many children - Queen Victoria's included - were encouraged to make their own Christmas cards. In this age of industrialization color printing technology quickly became more advanced, causing the price of card production to drop significantly. Together with the introduction of the halfpenny postage rate, the Christmas card industry took off. By the 1880s the sending of cards had become hugely popular, creating a lucrative industry that produced 11.5 million cards in 1880 alone. The commercialization of Christmas was well on its way.

Another commercial Christmas industry was born by Victorians in 1848 when a British confectioner, Tom Smith, invented a bold new way to sell sweets. Inspired by a trip to Paris where he saw bon bons - sugared almonds wrapped in twists of paper - he came up with the idea of the Christmas cracker: a simple package filled with sweets that snapped when pulled apart. The sweets were replaced by small gifts and paper hats in the late Victorian period, and remain in this form as an essential part of a modern Christmas.



Decorating the home at Christmas also became a more elaborate affair. The medieval tradition of using evergreens continued, however the style and placement of these decorations became more important. The old custom of simply decking walls and windows with sprigs and twigs was sniffed at. Uniformity, order and elegance were encouraged. There were instructions on how to make elaborate synthetic decorations for those residing in towns. In 1881 Cassell's Family Magazine gave strict directions to the lady of the house: "To bring about a general feeling of enjoyment, much depends on the surroundings... It is worth while to bestow some little trouble on the decoration of the rooms".

Gift giving had traditionally been on New Years but moved as Christmas became more important to the Victorians. Initially gifts were rather modest - fruit, nuts, sweets and small handmade trinkets. These were usually hung on the Christmas tree. However, as gift giving became more central to the festival, and the gifts became bigger as well as shop-bought, they moved under the tree.



The Christmas feast has its roots from before the Middle Ages, but it's during the Victorian period that the dinner we now associate with Christmas began to take shape. Examination of early Victorian recipes shows that mince pies were initially made from meat, a tradition dating back to Tudor times. However, during the 19th century there was a revolution in the composition of this festive dish. Mixes without meat began to gain popularity within some of the higher echelons of society and became the mince pies we know today.

The roast turkey also has its beginnings in Victorian Britain. Previously other forms of roasted meat such as beef and goose were the centerpiece of the Christmas dinner. The turkey was added to this by the more wealthy sections of the community in the 19th century, but its perfect size for a middle class family gathering meant it became the dominant dish by the beginning of the 20th century.

While carols were not new to the Victorians, it was a tradition that they actively revived and popularized. The Victorians considered carols to be a delightful form of musical entertainment, and a pleasure well worth cultivating. Old words were put to new tunes and the first significant collection of carols was published in 1833 for all to enjoy.

The Victorians also transformed the idea of Christmas so that it became centered around the family. The preparation and eating of the feast, decorations and gift giving, entertainments and parlor games - all were essential to the celebration of the festival and were to be shared by the whole family.

While Charles Dickens did not invent the Victorian Christmas, his book *A Christmas Carol* is credited with helping to popularize and spread the traditions of the festival. Its themes of family, charity, goodwill, peace and happiness encapsulate the spirit of the Victorian Christmas, and are very much a part of the Christmas we celebrate today.



# Grandfather's Clock In Tuxedo Park

The long, carpeted hallway, wrapped around the third floor of my grandfather's estate home in Tuxedo Park many years ago. There was an imposing looking Grandfather clock at the end of the hall which always impressed me as foreboding, until the chimes bellowed the hour, which made it foreboding and scary.

We always visited him for two weeks at Christmastime. Our bedrooms were in an old paneled chamber in the oldest wing of the home, on the same floor as the grandfather clock. Our windows overlooked the formal gardens where now, ice-draped encased shrubbery, leaned down beneath the weight of the December snow.

Just off of our bedroom was a small children's library, where a cozy fire danced in the corner fireplace that was decorated with nursery rhyme themed tiles. The large windows glanced over the lake that was being coated with a new fallen clean white snow. Brand new ice skates sat near the hearth ready for the next morning's enjoyment on Tuxedo Lake.

We could hear the grandfather clock chime as our door was opened by Kate, our grandfather's house keeper since we could remember. Hot chocolate with warm candied cookies greeted our tired senses and rejuvenated our excitement of being on the estate once again.

Continued next pg





Upon getting ready for bed, we approached the high four poster beds, needing a step-stool to climb beneath the heavy quilted coverings . We fell asleep to the chiming grandfather clock, the sound of the crackling log fire in the next room, and the scent of late-night holiday cooking preparations, which permeated the grand home from the estate kitchen.

The anticipation of Christmas, and our new skates, woke us early, and sent us quickly downstairs to a hearty breakfast feast. Among the chatter and elated moods, we could hear the grandfather clock bellowing the late morning hour, which motivated us all to get ready for sledding and skating on the lake. There was an exhilarating cold nip in the air, the sky was gray and over cast, with tiny flakes drifting down through the air.

As evening drew near, we walked back to grandfather's house, where we found the main fireplaces lit and welcoming. As the warm comfort over-took the chill of the afternoon from us, we reveled in the mood of the festivities before us and the comforting feeling of belonging to a time-honored tradition with all of its antiquities that stemmed from it...including the old grandfather clock.



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# All the news in Middle School

There's a lot of news about all the "news" in Middle School at Saddle River Day School this year. We have a "new" Middle School Division Head, and new Advanced Science and Math tracks for our students this year. Our "new" Division Head, Anastasia (Stasia) Kelly, isn't really new to SRDS at all. In fact, she's been at Saddle River Day School for 6 years. Most recently the Director of Teaching and Learning and the Director of the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship here at SRDS, Stasia brings her 20+ years as an educator, a Bachelor of Biological Science from Mount Holyoke, and a Master of Education from Fairleigh Dickinson University to her new role.

Stasia's philosophy is that educators should contribute positively to the emotional and academic success of each student through personalized attention, a constant evaluation and evolution of teaching methods, and the dedication to offering appropriate leadership and advancement opportunities for all the students in the Middle School.

To this end, the Middle School is implementing new accelerated tracks in both math and science in the Middle School. For "advanced students who are performing above their grade level" and who have an interest and a proven aptitude for science and math, this new track offers them a way to pursue areas of research interest and set themselves apart from their peers through high school, into college and beyond. This Accelerated Curriculum will give students the opportunity to work one grade ahead and will free up space in their high school schedules for additional AP or other advanced science classwork. Middle School at Saddle River Day School is a vibrant and lively place where our students can experiment with new ideas, skills and interests while also honing their knowledge and abilities in their identified areas of interest. Ms. Kelly is excited to work, grow and learn with the Middle School community and is looking forward to getting to know each of the students as individuals, where teaching students HOW to think and not WHAT to think is a hallmark of a Saddle River Day education.



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