

For immediate release
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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary to Mrs. Ford

Christmas at the White House this year revolves around an old-fashioned Children's Christmas in America. Mrs. Ford chose the theme to usher in the Bicentennial year and to reflect a personal interest in traditional handmade ornaments, which have often been the focal point of Ford Christmas trees in the past. Children's touches are provided by antique toys, carousel figures and children's portraits.

The White House Christmas tree is reminiscent of trees decorated in early American homes. (An 18-foot Douglas fir, this year's tree was grown by Guy D. Cockburn of Garrison, N. Y. It was chosen this year's National Champion by the National Christmas Tree Growers Association.)

The tree is decorated with about 3,000 handcrafted ornaments. The ornaments represent a combination of traditions indigenous to the United States and popular over the last hundred years. Other tree trims represent national traditions brought to this country, including straw stars and yarn dolls from Denmark, corn dollies and gingerbread men from England, and thread stars and crocheted snowflakes from Poland.

All decorations are constructed from the types of readily available and inexpensive materials used in early America. The emphasis is on such natural materials as acorns, peanuts, dried fruits and vegetables, straw pine cones, and gaily colored scraps of fabric, yarn and ribbon. Foil, sequins and glitter are omitted to preserve a traditional, old-fashioned feeling.

Most of the ornaments for the tree were made by volunteers from Colonial Williamsburg, but individuals and organizations throughout the country also made contributions. Such groups as nursing homes, 4-H Clubs and Girl Scout Troops from as far away as California, Wisconsin and Massachusetts sent handcrafted items. Volunteers were urged to use creativity and imagination in constructing ornaments from natural or inexpensive items readily available to them.

The voluntary effort was coordinated through the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection at Colonial Williamsburg under the direction of Beatrix Rumford. Williamsburg's folk art collection was established in 1932 by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to encourage appreciation of American artists and craftsmen who had not been exposed to formal art training.

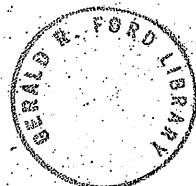
Portraits of children by early American artists are on display, as well as antique toys and carousel figures loaned by the Folk Art Collection in Williamsburg.

Wreaths and garlands are of materials that would have been used in early homes. They were made by about 75 volunteers from the floral industry who came from a nine-state area.

An 18th Century Italian creche is on display in the East Room. The nativity scene is composed of 30 hand-carved Baroque figures of the Holy Family, the Wise Men and attendants, the shepards, angels and animals. The creche was donated in 1967 by Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard Jr. of Far Hills, N. J.

Decorative lights have been limited to those on the Christmas tree. They are tiny white bee lights and consume about 1,000 watts of power (about 10 100-watt bulbs). They will be turned on during regular White House tours and for social events during the Christmas season.

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WHITE HOUSE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

NORTH PORTICO

The hanging lantern is decorated with pine garlands.
Four Douglas Fir trees decorated with small white lights flanking main entrance.

GRAND FOYER

Two holly trees, one on either side of main entrance.
Over the main entrance is an evergreen and apple arrangement in a fan effect.
The Grand staircase and pillars are draped with pine garlands.
A kissing ball made of boxwood hangs over the Grand Staircase.
The mantel in the Grand Foyer is decorated with evergreen and apple arrangements.
A painted wood antique Santa Claus stands on landing of Grand Staircase.

CROSS HALL

Two Douglas Fir trees in niches on south wall.
Antique carousel figures (camel and giraffe) flank entrance to Blue Room.

STATE DINING ROOM

North wall: Gingerbread house made by Hans Raffert (all edible except smoke and windows).
West wall: Arrangement of evergreens and fruit--pineapples, pears, apples, lemons, limes, and oranges--on mantel.
South wall: Plain green wreaths in windows.
East wall: Fruit trees made with tiny apples, lemons, limes, and lotus seed pods, interspersed with greenery on tables.
Dining Table: Smaller trees made with fruit.

RED ROOM

Arrangements of variegated and green holly on tables.
A cranberry tree stands on table near east wall.

BLUE ROOM

Christmas tree decorated with hand-made ornaments and lights stands in center of room surrounded by antique toys.
Ten paintings of children done by early-American artists hang on the walls.
Arrangements of evergreens and apples on tables.
Plain evergreen wreaths in windows.

GREEN ROOM

Arrangements of variegated and green holly
Bowl of pomegranates on table

EAST ROOM

Mantels are decorated with arrangements of evergreens, including Noble Fir, magnolia leaves, etc., with centers of gilded magnolia leaves, lotus seed pods, okra pods, and pine cones.
An arrangement of evergreens stands on the piano.
An eighteenth century Italian creche stands on east wall flanked by two fir trees.

BALCONIES

The State Floor balcony is decorated with wreaths of evergreens and apples and draped with pine garlands.
The Truman Balcony is draped with pine garlands.

MAIN FLOOR

An antique horse carousel figure stands in the main floor hall.

Arrangements of poinsettias are placed throughout the House.



DETAILED INFORMATION ON THE WHITE HOUSE DECORATIONS

Childrens Portraits in the Blue Room

In keeping with the theme "A Childrens Christmas," ten antique paintings and portraits of children have been hung on the walls of the Blue Room. They are on loan from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Collection.

- Boy in Plaid, artist unknown, about 1840-1850.
- Rosa Heywood, artist unknown, about 1840 in Massachusetts.
- Portrait of Two Children, Joseph Badger, about 1758, Massachusetts.
- Girl with Doll by J. Bradley, 1836.
- Boy on Stenciled Carpet, Erastus Salisbury Field, 1835, Massachusetts.
- Girl beside a Waterfall, artist unknown, about 1840.
- Sarah Louisa Spencer, Henry Walton, 1842.
- Boy with Gold Locket, artist unknown, about 1840.
- Girl Seated on Bench, William Matthew Prior, 1840.
- Children with Toys, William Matthew Prior, about 1845.

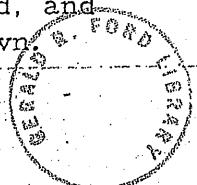
Carousel Figures

Three carousel figures are on loan to the White House from the Rockefeller Collection.

- A horse, whose saddle is decorated with Christmas greens, stands in the ground floor hallway. Attributed to the Dentzel Carousel Company of Philadelphia, Pa., it was most likely made during the period between 1903-1906. The horse was part of a group of six which were in an amusement park in Seattle, Wash. between 1906-1940.
- A Bactrian (two-humped) Camel is one of two carousel figures flanking the Blue Room. It is attributed to the Charles W.F. Dare Company of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, N.Y. and done in the period between 1890-1896. Dare was a maker of toys, phaeton goats, carousel figures and amusement devices of various types.
- Also flanking the Blue Room is a giraffe, by the Dentzel Carousel Company, created during the first quarter of the 20th Century. It is the design of Salvatore Cernagliaro, an Italian-born carousel carver, who came to work at Dentzel in the last part of the 19th Century.

Antique toys

At the base of the Christmas tree in the Blue Room is a grouping of antique toys on loan from the Rockefeller Collection. Among them is a large wooden train made in the period of the 1880s or 1890s. There is also a rocking horse by an unidentified maker. It is created of woods, ptychromed and leather and was most likely done between 1850 and 1880. A larger, lighter tone rocking horse and whips were made in the late 19th Century. The horse is of polychromed wood, and the whips are of leather, rope and brass. The maker is not known.



DECORATIONS DETAILS - 2

The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection (AAR Collection)

Established in 1939 by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, the Museum (located in Williamsburg) has earned widespread recognition for the Christmas celebrations staged annually in Colonial Williamsburg. The Museum was established to foster an appreciation of the work of American artists and craftsmen who had no formal art training. The expertise provided by both the staff of the AAR Collection and Colonial Williamsburg was the foundation for the authentic old-fashioned American Christmas at the White House this year.

Cookies on the Tree

The cookies which have been hung on the tree in the Blue Room are Italian wafer cookies known as pizzelles. The cookies, and the aroma of anise and cinnamon which accompanied them, are part of a long family tradition for their donor, Mrs. Margaret Monta of Arlington, Va. The cookies are made of butter and eggs, sugar, flour, vanilla, cinnamon and anise. The batter is then placed in a hot iron where it is cooked briefly until the cookie is wafer thin and golden.

Various patterns may be imprinted upon the cookie depending on the design of the iron. Mrs. Monta's cookies have a large, daisy-like flower surrounded by the waffle pattern.

Corn Dollies

Many of the straw ornaments used on the White House tree are English harvest decorations called "corn dollies". They were made especially for the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection by Jane Fuell of Wolverhampton and Lettice Sandford of Herefordshire. Miss Fuell was an English exchange teacher at Matthew Whaley School in Williamsburg, Virginia, during 1971-72.

Since ancient times, similar decorations have been made in agricultural communities from the last sheaf of harvested wheat (known as "corn" in England) which was fashioned into a "dolly", or symbolic ornament to embody and preserve the spirit of fertility and insure success for the next crop.

The form of the "dolly" varied in different regions. Sometimes an entire sheaf of wheat was roughly fashioned into the image of a mother, maiden or child. In other places, the last few stalks were plaited into decorative spiral forms. Each community not only had traditional designs peculiar to that region but also had its own form of ceremony associated with the harvesting of the last sheaf of wheat.

Harvest methods changed slowly in England but eventually reapers, binders, and threshing machines were introduced and corn dollies are no longer considered essential for a good harvest. However, corn dollies continue to be made for luck and the folk craft is still handed down from father to son. But modern methods of harvesting now make it imperative for corn dolly makers to acquire their wheat before the reaper and binder destroy it.



DECORATIONS DETAILS - 3

Paper cutouts or Scherenchnitte on Christmas Tree

Contributed by Fred Rothermel of Williamsburg, the paper cutouts are his original designs! The art of cutting paper in decorative designs is as old as time as is practiced by people of all nations. The Pennsylvania Germans -- or "Dutch" -- are particularly famous for the preservation of this country folk art, which is also known as scherenchnitte.

Greens Decorations

The decorations used are all of natural materials; items that you could probably find in your own yard or area. Evergreens; pine, hemlock, magnolia, and holly, their cones and berries; fruits, limes, lemons, oranges, apples, pineapples, and pears are used.

Cones and fruits are wired or picked and attached to or placed in the evergreens.

A frame for the wreaths can be made from heavy wire. The greens are then fastened around the frame by wrapping with fine wire or green string.

Pine garlands are made by tying short pieces of pine together using fine wire or green string.

Among decorations on the tree:

- large gingerbread cookies made by White House Pastry Chef Heinz Bender
- wreaths of peanuts
- figures fashioned from acorns
- garlands of popcorn and red peppers
- pine cone angels
- animals of gingham, felt and other materials
- garland of wood shavings
- animals fashioned from wire
- wreaths, birds and stars made from dough
- paper cutouts (scherenchnitte)
- wood shaving snowflakes
- crocheted snowflakes and bells
- white yarn dolls with lace aprons
- straw baskets with dried flowers
- wooden fish, birds, men and other figures

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