

Spirit of Christmas

Paradise Tree is forerunner to today's Christmas Tree

Of all Christmas customs, perhaps the most universally treasured is the Christmas tree.

From the exciting moment when the tree is erected, it commands a position of central importance during holiday festivities.

So much so that it is difficult to believe that 200 years ago the custom of trimming a tree at Christmas was not widely observed outside its native Germany.

One legend credits Martin Luther, the 16th-century theologian, with having set up the very first Christmas tree. According to this legend, Luther conceived of a tree alight with countless candles as a way of representing to his children the glory of the starlit heaven.

However, historical sources indicate that the first Christmas tree can be traced to the early 17th century, when fir trees - decorated with colored paper, gold foil, apples, toys and candies - were reported in the German city of Stasburg.

What are the antique origins of the Christmas tree?

Historians point to a multitude of sources, among them the Roman custom of decking residences with evergreens during the festival of the Kalends.

Many early Christian beliefs stand behind the tradition of trimming a tree at Christmas. For instance, it was customary for people to bring flowering trees, like hawthorn or cherry, indoors during the autumn so that they might bloom and bring forth fruit on Christmas Eve.

This tradition may be derived from the belief that St. Joseph of Arimathea, settling at Glastonbury in western England, planted his staff in the earth, whereupon it became a thorn tree and sprouted leaves. Furthermore, it miraculously blossomed.

December 24, according to the old church calendar, was the Feast of Adam and Eve, on which day it was traditional to hang a fir tree with red apples.

This Paradise Tree, as it was called, is certainly a forerunner of the Christmas tree as it is known today.

There are some very pretty sto-

ries associated with both pine and fir trees, among the most popular choices for Christmas trees. According to one legend, the pine tree provided a hiding place for the Holy Family when they were fleeing from the soldiers of Herod.

The fir tree, according

to another legend, boasted both flowers and fruits until Eve discovered the tree and plucked its treasures.

From that time on, the legend continues, only needles grew on the fir tree until on the evening of the Nativity, it suddenly blossomed once again.

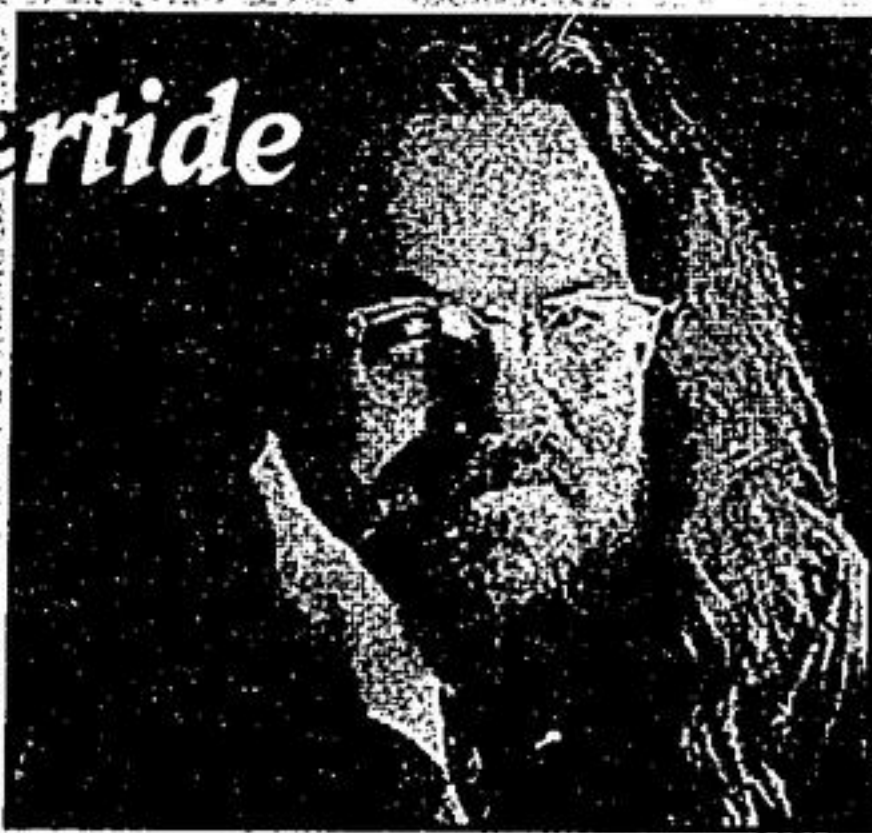
HOLIDAY HOURS

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22	- CLOSED
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23	- OPEN
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24	- CLOSED
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25	- CLOSED
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26	- CLOSED
SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27	- OPEN
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28	- OPEN
MONDAY, DECEMBER 29	- CLOSED
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30	- OPEN
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31	- CLOSED AT 6:00 P.M.
THURSDAY, JANUARY 1	- CLOSED
FRIDAY, JANUARY 2	- OPEN

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