

The original documents are located in Box 32, folder “Christmas Tree (White House)” of the Betty Ford White House Papers, 1973-1977 at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Mrs. Ford -

I thought
you might enjoy
seeing your Christmas
instructions - in
every color.

Sheila



THE WHITE HOUSE

1600 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20500



A WHITE HOUSE



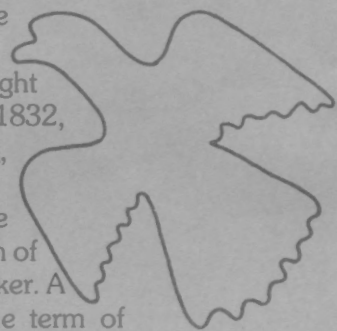
CHRISTMAS 1975

A NUTSHELL HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN CHRISTMAS TREE

Many of the Christmas traditions familiar to modern Americans have developed since 1840. In fact, the tree-trimming ritual wasn't widespread in the United States until after our Civil War. In 1850, the English novelist Charles Dickens referred to the Christmas tree as that "new German toy".

Some say that Hessian soldiers, hired by England's George III to quiet his rebellious colonists, introduced the custom here; but the claim remains undocumented. Researchers have definitely established that Charles Follen, a refugee who taught German at Harvard "dressed" a tree for his young son in 1832, while living in Boston. Ten years later in Williamsburg, Virginia, Charles Minnigerode, a German immigrant teaching at the College of William and Mary, shared the traditions of his youth by decorating a tree for the children of a friend and colleague, Professor Nathaniel Beverley Tucker. A tree first graced the White House in 1889, during the term of Benjamin Harrison.

By 1850 city people could purchase toys and shiny glass ornaments for Christmas use. But many Americans lived simply in rural areas. Using spare bits of cloth, various nuts and vegetables, wood scraps, and plenty of imagination, these folk managed to create a Christmas every bit as warm and gay as their wealthy, worldly neighbors living in towns.



THE WHITE HOUSE TREE

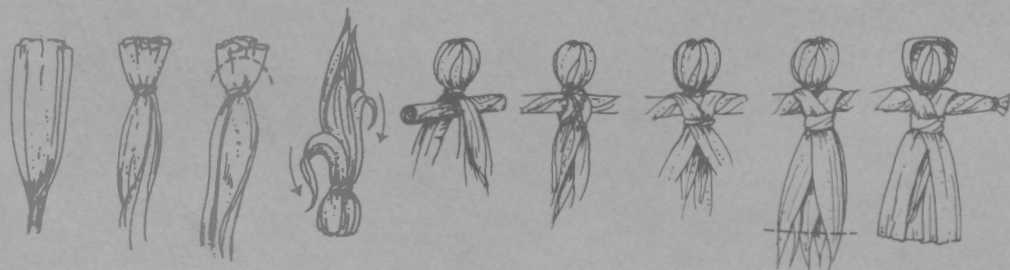
For a second year, the White House's Christmas tree decorations reflect Mrs. Ford's interest in traditional, homemade ornaments. All the trimmings are hand-crafted and constructed of such readily available, inexpensive materials as acorns, peanuts, dried fruits and vegetables, straw, pine cones, gaily-colored scraps of fabric, yarn, ribbon, and so forth. No plastic, foil, or metal has been used. Most of the simple handmade ornaments have been created by volunteers in Williamsburg, Virginia, supervised by staff from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection.



In our increasingly synthetic world, it is reassuring to know that one can still make special things from ordinary ones through the combination of imagination, skillful hand-crafting, and time.



CORN HUSK DOLL



MATERIALS:

10 to 12 dried corn husks
cornsilk
heavy brown thread
grocery twine

white glue
1" straight pins
cotton
acrylic paint or ink

TO MAKE:

The best time for gathering corn husks is in the fall during harvest. Husks from sweet corn bought in the grocery store may be used, but they must be dried thoroughly. Dried corn husks must be dampened before beginning, to make them pliable. Soak the husks in water for at least five minutes. Select four of the longest husks and place them flat against each other. Tie the ends of the corn husks tightly together 1" from the top with brown thread. Round off corners of the short end with a pair of scissors.

Then turn upside down and peel back in two sections with two husks on either side. Take a small piece of cotton and wrap it around the short ends to form a head about 1½" in diameter. Tie the long ends securely below the cotton forming the head. (Use pins if necessary to hold husks around the doll's head.) Take two other long husks and roll up to form a long cylindrical piece, or braid three husks together. Tie each end of this roll off with brown thread. Insert this roll between the two sections of husks at right angles to the doll's head and tie again below this roll forming the doll's arms. While arms are still wet, bend into desired position.

Take two fairly narrow (1" wide) husks and wrap them in a diagonal pattern—one across each shoulder to form the doll's bodice and hold her arms in place. Tie loose ends at waist. Extra skirt may be added by bending husks in half and tying them at the doll's waist. When doll is dry, the face may be painted and hair added by gluing cornsilks or unraveled twine on top of doll's head.

Other accessories may be added to suit your imagination with extra pieces of corn husks, tassles, or kernels.

NUT PEOPLE



MATERIALS:

1" dressmaker's straight pins
3" T pins
white glue
florist wire
nuts, acorns, buckeyes,
walnuts, hemlock and
pine cones

drill
clear plastic fish line
acrylic paint

TO MAKE:

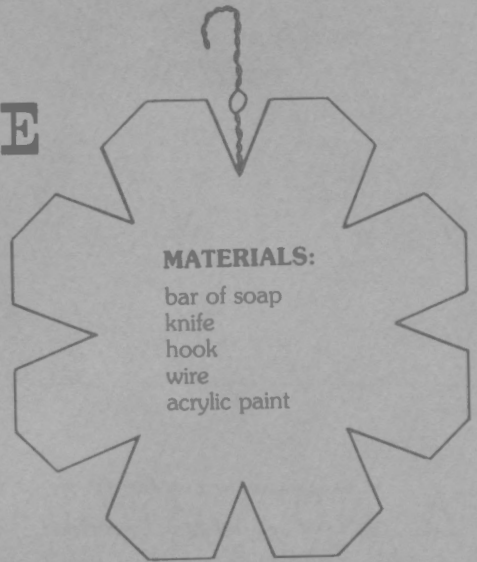
Choose a pine cone or buckeye to form an appropriate sized body. Attach arms and legs by either pushing a T pin through soft hemlock cones or nuts and pinning this row of nuts to the body, or stringing florist wire through holes already drilled in acorns. The T in the T pins will keep the hemlock cones on, or you may bend the end of the florist wire so the nuts do not drop

off. The figure's head—consisting of a walnut, acorn, buckeye, etc.—is attached by sticking a T pin through it and pinning it to the body. Glue may be used to help hold the head in place. Ears or nose may be added by pinning hemlock cones or small acorns to the head. (The drill is only necessary when the nut is too hard to push a pin through.) The face may be painted with acrylic paint, and halves of walnuts or pieces of pine cones can be glued on for hats. Nut people can be hung from clear plastic fish line or florist wire.

SOAP SNOWFLAKE

TO MAKE:

Soak bath-size bar of soap in water for approximately one hour to keep bar from cracking. Remove from water and let dry overnight. Trace snowflake design onto top of bar and carve away unwanted soap. Carefully push wire into carved piece. If desired, various patterns may be painted onto the snowflake to enhance the design.



MATERIALS:

bar of soap
knife
hook
wire
acrylic paint



COOKIE CUTTER TREE TOYS

MATERIALS:

1" dressmaker's straight pins
colored thread
sewing needle
scissors or pinking shears
cookie cutters
construction paper
pencil
fabric: cotton, calico, felt, wool fiberfill, shredded
stockings or light-weight filler
colored yarn
buttons

TO MAKE:

Trace cookie cutter or draw figure of your own onto construction paper. Cut out figure and pin to two pieces of fabric with wrong sides of fabric facing inward. Cut out fabric along lines of paper model with scissors or pinking shears.

Method I: Sew right sides together stitching around edges $\frac{1}{4}$ " from border leaving a space of $\frac{1}{4}$ " to insert stuffing. After trimming edges, turn the fabric so that right sides are out and stuff with fiberfill, stockings or light-weight filler. Stitch up stuffing hole. Add eyes (buttons may be used), tail, wings or mane using scraps of fabric or yarn. Sew on thread loop for hanging ornament.

Method II: Place right sides of the fabric facing outward, and stitch around edges leaving $\frac{1}{4}$ " border. Leave $\frac{1}{4}$ " space for stuffing. Stuff with fiberfill, shredded stockings, or light-weight filler. Sew up hole; add eyes and other decorations. Add thread hanging loop. This is a faster method; however, pinking shears must be used in the original cutting of the fabric as these edges are exposed.

PAPER SILHOUETTES

MATERIALS:

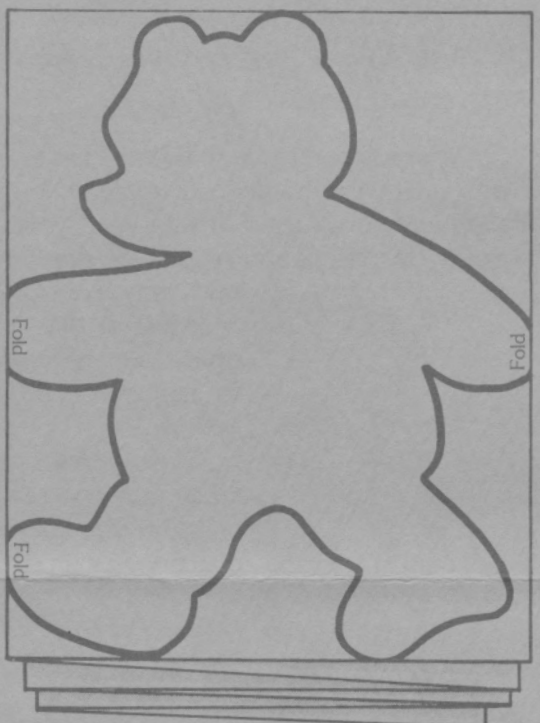
colored construction paper
pencil
scissors

TO MAKE:

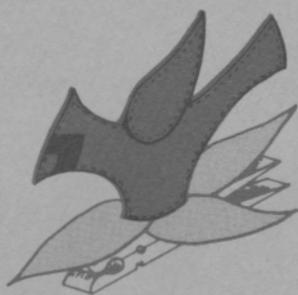
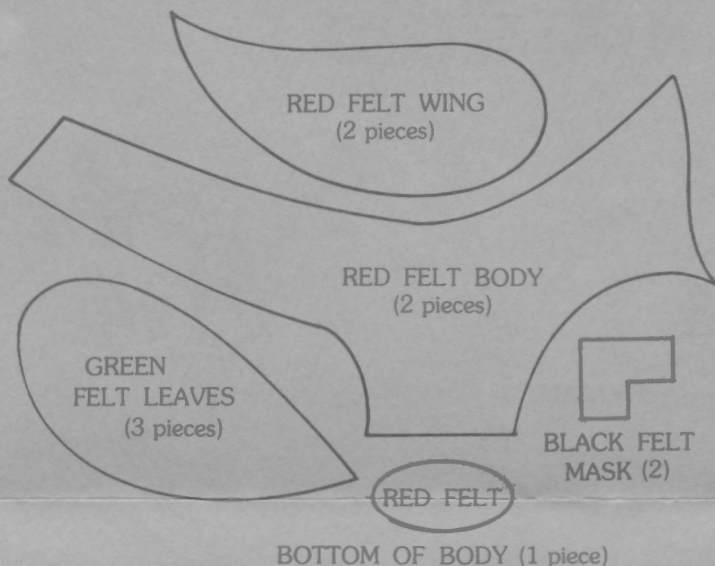
Decide upon a figure to be made. It may be a string of animals, such as bears or elephants, or a set of figures, such as angels or snowmen. Fold the construction paper into several layers wide enough to accommodate the figure and thick enough to make the chain a desired length.

Trace the chosen shape onto the folded paper; then cut it out being careful to leave a segment of the folded area on each side of the shape intact. If the folds are cut through entirely, the figures will not form a chain but will instead be separate and unattached to one another.

After cutting is complete, open the paper figures to find a chain to surround the tree limbs!



CLOTHESPIN CARDINAL



MATERIALS:

felt—red, green and black
cotton or fiberfill
3" pinch clothespin
white glue
black glass beads
sewing needle
thread
scissors
1" dressmaker's straight pins
pencil

TO MAKE:

Trace pattern onto colored felt with pencil. Cut out felt pieces. Assemble pieces into body shape; sew around edges of cardinal's body leaving 1" space at bottom open. Stuff bird with cotton or fiberfill; close 1" opening. Sew red felt base onto bottom of bird. Glue three green felt leaves to top of 3" pinch clothespin. Glue stuffed bird to top of leaves. Glue or sew black glass beads on for eyes, or use tiny squares of black felt for eyes. Attach clothespin to tree.

THE PRESIDENT AND I WISH YOU
MERRY CHRISTMAS

Betty Ford

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Christmas in Williamsburg

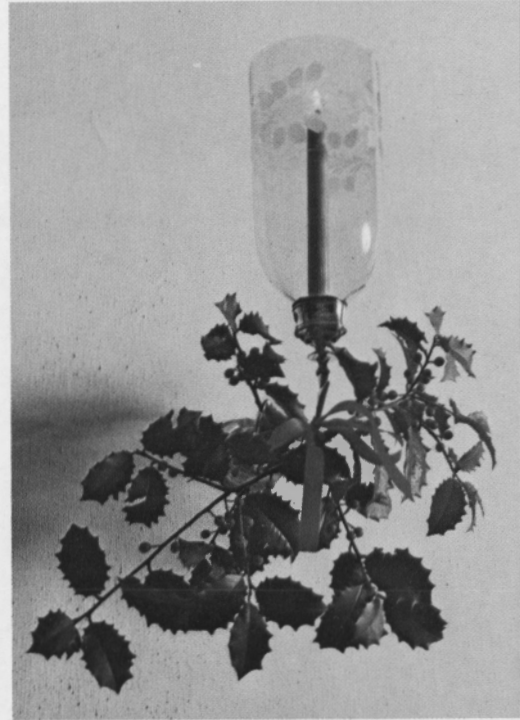


*An enchanting glimpse of holiday customs two centuries old
as the colonial capital lights its candles, decorates
its doors, and cooks its Christmas specialties.*

by

TAYLOR BIGGS LEWIS, JR. and JOANNE B. YOUNG

Christmas in Williamsburg





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FOR SEPTEMBER 16, 1975 MEETING WITH MRS. FORD

MR. CARLISLE HUMELSINE

President
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Education

University of Maryland, B. A.
College of William and Mary, LL. D. (honorary)
Hampden-Sydney College, LL. D. (honorary)
University of Maryland, Doctor of Humanities (honorary)

Professional Background

President of Colonial Williamsburg
Mr. Humelsine has been associated with
Colonial Williamsburg for the past 20 years.
Chairman of the Board, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Deputy Undersecretary and Assistant Secretary of State
under 4 Secretaries of State
Former President, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
Former First Chairman, American/Revolution Bicentennial
Commission; appointed by President Johnson 1969

Military

U. S. Army, Assistant to General Marshall

Board Memberships

National Geographic Society
National Gallery of Art
C & P Telephone Company
Garfinckel's, Brooks Brothers, Miller and Rhoads
New York Life Insurance Company



MISS BEATRIX TYSON RUMFORD (TRIX)

Director

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection
Williamsburg, Virginia

Education

Wellesley College, 1958-1962; B. A. in English Literature
and Fine Arts

State University of New York at Oneonta and New York State
Historical Association at Cooperstown, 1964-1965;

M. A. in Museum Training and American Folk Culture

Fellow at the Seminar for Historical Administration at
Williamsburg, Summer 1965

Professional Background

Director, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection,
1973-present.

Prior to Colonial Williamsburg, Miss Rumford was art
research editor for D. C. Heath and Co.; did
freelance research for American Heritage
magazine; and was a research associate with
the Chicago Historical Society.



Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection

Williamsburg, Virginia 23185

September 11, 1975

To: Ms. Sheila Weidenfeld
From: Beatrix T. Rumford
Re: 1975 White House Christmas Tree (Background for Press Release)

NUTSHELL HISTORY OF AMERICAN CHRISTMAS TREE

Many of the Christmas traditions familiar to modern Americans have developed since 1840. In fact, the tree-trimming ritual wasn't widespread in the United States until after our Civil War. In 1850, the English novelist Charles Dickens referred to the Christmas tree as that "new German toy".

Although undocumented, some claim that Hessian soldiers, hired by England's George III to quiet his rebellious colonists, introduced the custom here. Researchers have definitely established that Charles Follen, a refugee who taught German at Harvard "dressed" a tree for his young son in 1832, while living in Boston. Ten years later in Williamsburg, Virginia, Charles Minnigerode, a German immigrant teaching at the College of William and Mary, shared the traditions of his youth by decorating a tree for the children of a friend and colleague, Professor Nathaniel Beverley Tucker. The first White House tree occurred in 1889, during the term of Benjamin Harrison.

By 1850, city people could purchase toys and shiny glass ornaments for Christmas use. But in the 19th century many everyday Americans lived simply in rural areas. Life was often hard. However, at Christmas time, using spare bits of cloth, various nuts and vegetables, wood scraps and plenty of imagination, these folk managed to create a Christmas every bit as warm and gay as their wealthy, worldly neighbors living in towns.

1975 WHITE HOUSE TREE

For a second year, the White House's Christmas tree decorations reflect Mrs. Ford's interest in traditional, homemade ornaments. All the trimmings are hand crafted and constructed of such readily available, inexpensive materials as acorns, peanuts, dried fruits and vegetables, straw, pine cones, gaily-colored scraps of fabric, yarn ribbon, etc. No plastic, foil, or metal has been used. Most of the simple handmade ornaments have been created by volunteers in Williamsburg, Virginia, supervised by staff from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection.



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PROPOSED ORNAMENTS AND MATERIALS REQUIRED

Braided yarn dolls	Balsam wood bird with feathers
Nut "soul" people	Stitched & stuffed "cookie cutter" toys (fabric scraps)
Burlap animals	Dressed clothespin dolls and soldiers
Corncob dolls and pigs	Paper cornucopias with candy
Crochet snowflakes	Popcorn strung with red peppers
Small gift packages	Iced sugar cookies in traditional shapes
Whittled toys	Gilded walnuts, milkweed pods, sweet gum balls, and teezles
Papier-mache figures	Strings of cut-out paper silhouettes
Tiny paper hats	Wreaths of peanut husks tied with picot ribbon
Corn husk dolls	Gingerbread men with raisin eyes and buttons
Corn husk scarecrows	Knit yarn balls and bells
Hemlock strings	Pine cones tied with red ribbon
Corn dollies	Salt box drums
Wishbone men	Tin toys
Jigsaw ornaments	Wood-shaving icicles and stars
Eggs	

NATIONAL TRADITIONS REPRESENTED IN ORNAMENTS SELECTED

Denmark:	Straw stars Yarn dolls	Mexico:	Tin toys Papier-mache figures
England:	Corn dollies Gingerbread men	Poland & Ukraine	Crochet snowflakes Eggs
Finland:	Thread star	Sweden:	Straw goats
Germany:	Sugar cookies Pine cones with red ribbons		

Other ornaments represent a melange of traditions indigenous to the United States which have been popular over the last hundred years.

Beatrice T. Rumford
Director



June 12, 1975

MEMORANDUM TO NANCY HANKS

FROM: Fred Lazarus

RE: White House Craft Christmas Tree

*File Christmas Tree
B.F.*

Overview:

Below are outlined four separate alternative approaches for decorating the White House Christmas Tree. Each alternative would require a full time person to develop the theme, solicit the items for the tree and decorate the tree. Much of the logistical work in Washington could be done by volunteers who would work under the director of the full time project manager. The manager should be paid; but if no funds are available, it might be possible to find a qualified volunteer.

The first two alternatives below would use professional craftsmen; most of whom would be "one of a kind" in contrast to multiple. These programs would be national in scope. The second two alternatives would involve amateur craftsmen. One of the "amateur" is national; the other, regional.

required

American Crafts Council: The ACC would be requested to secure the ~~specified~~ number of items, in keeping with the pre-determined theme. The theme would dictate kind, size, color and material of the items. The criteria would also dictate ethnic and geographic spread. ACC would be responsible for selecting the items to be used. The project manager would take care of the mechanics of receiving, cataloguing and returning the items as well as decorating the tree. If the items could be donated to something after Christmas, it might add to the spirit of the event and save the problem of returning everything. Cataloguing would be required in any case so that thank you notes could be written by Mrs. Ford.

State Entries - Professional: Each governor would be requested to solicit through the S.A.A.'s 15 craft items according to the pre-determined criteria. These items would be shipped by the states to Washington and handled as the ACC entries were handled. The States would pick items of quality and items that were representational of their area.



State Entries - Amateurs: Each governor again working through state arts agencies would select 15 items from different interest groups, but in keeping with the theme. The pattern could be similar to the selection done by states of activities for the Smithsonian Folk Festival. The entries would be shipped and handled as in the other alternatives. Local crafts would come from senior centers, youth groups, etc.

Local Amateur: There are two local groups that could be used as the source of the ornaments. The Glen Echo summer program could be requested to develop some children's crafts. A group called Handicraft Marketing Sales is already working with senior centers in Maryland, Virginia, and the District in developing ornaments for sale to major stores. They have good items ready now and could show samples. The Project Manager would work closely with both groups to develop the ornaments. Logistics are easier with this alternative because of the groups' proximity. The products would still follow a pre-set theme. This example tends to lend itself to more replication. Governors could be asked to organize to ~~organize~~ similar activities for groups in their states. Also, these products would be closer to ones that could be produced by people for their own trees.

Demonstrations and Workshops: Whichever alternative is chosen for the tree should be accompanied by demonstrations and workshops at the White House by the craftsmen on how their ornaments were made. A selective number of the craftsmen would set up in the White House and make their items for some appropriate audience. Naturally, there would be press. Getting the craftsmen to the White House is cheaper for the local alternative, but it might be possible to get some of the states to bring in some of their people if that alternative were chosen. Funds for ACC craftsmen to travel would be difficult.

Lazarus

Project Manager: Jonna would like to do this and would be great. She was a trim-the-tree-buyer for Carson Pierre Scott at one point; she helped start Handicraft Marketing Sales and is on their board; she knows crafts and she worked with the Renwick on all the cataloguing and set up for the Craft Multiples show. She also has pretty good local contacts for "professional" volunteers through her work at NCFCA and elsewhere.

Additional Concerns:

1. All the ornaments will no doubt have to be fire-proofed -- who will pay for this?
2. Who at the White House does this project fall under? Does the project manager report to Mrs. Ford?
2. Are there any "security" problems?

FL:sh

