

Merry Christmas, 2021

With Addendum

A Family Digging Podcast

P: Hi everybody, and welcome to the Family Digging podcast. I am Paul Hendee, and I am here with Carolyn Lancaster to talk a bit about Christmas; and this is going to be a mishmash of memories, favorite traditions, food, music, music etc. We have placed a number of links in and at the end of our transcript so that you can enjoy some of the things we enjoy about this season of the year. But first, a bit of housekeeping; in our last session we said we would be starting a three-part series on getting an education for genealogy in December. For several reasons, we are delaying that until January. That having been said, what do you have today, Carolyn?

C: Hi everyone! Christmas is both a religious and a secular holiday. Both Paul and I are practicing Christians, but we also enjoy the festivities surrounding Santa Claus and way more. The only thing I do not like about Christmas is the over commercialization of it.

When I describe the work of a genealogist, it is the sum of being part historian, part researcher, part lawyer, part detective, part writer and part storyteller. Whereas I enjoy all parts of it, other people tend to have much more interest in the stories than in the research or any other part. In fact, no one I've ever met has found vital records the reason for their interest; it's the stories and the sharing of those stories that are at the top of the list. We do the other stuff to make these stories more complete and accurate. So, we're going to share some stories about Christmas with you, and provide you with some places to go to hear some of the stories and legends at your leisure during the Christmas season, and we're going to share some of our personal favorite memories and traditions.

P: So let's begin with our first link from The History Channel, posted on their blog on December 8, 2021, called "The History of Christmas". This is about the secular and sacred and cultural history of the season, and it is broken down into eight major parts, each of which has links to a number of other places where more information can be found. Carolyn and I have found this a good way to explore Christmas; it is really well done. This can be absorbed on your own or it could provide topics for some good dinner table or FaceTime conversations with your family throughout the season. Just click on the link in our transcripts (History of Christmas) (<https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas>).

C: I've been collecting things to do with Christmas (including memories) in a file called Holidays and Holy Days. One thing in that file that fits both the secular and religious side of Christmas is a bit of history that we think everyone should become aware of, if they are not already. The Christmas Truce of World War One in 1914 (a remarkable story). There are a number of places the story has been told, yet I was unaware of it completely until just a few years ago. It has been documented in pictures and by eyewitness accounts, so it's not a legend - it's an account of an actual event. Why we never learned of these things when we were in history class at school I can't explain. You can find a good example on YouTube.com. It's on their History

Channel, World War One the Great War Christmas Truce. The link is on our transcript (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LegcGx4okiA>). By the way, the topic of war might not be the best way to teach young children about Christmas; you may wish to view it first to decide what's best for your family.

P: Christmas memories have a habit of creating traditions. Carolyn recently asked me what is my favorite Christmas memory as a child, so let me share that with you too. Ever since I was four or five years old, I remember my mother and father setting up the Christmas tree, I'm going to guess a day or two after Thanksgiving. First, all the lights went on, then the bulbs, then tinsel, etc. Then the Christmas tree lights were turned on - this was an exciting time! And I remember one light on the tree that was most intriguing. It was in the shape of a candle with like a mistletoe underneath it; when the lights came on the bottom would heat up some liquid on the inside and there was a bubble always rising up in the tree. I really enjoyed watching that - I was just mesmerized by that incredible site.

Of course, there were the presents, and I remember coming downstairs Christmas Day and under the tree was a Lionel train that was the most magnificent gift I'd ever had. And today I still have that train. Of course, over the years I've collected more – one of my favorite hobbies is model railroading.

C: You even have them outside of your house. (**P:**I do.) And I enjoy them too. I really enjoy talking about trains because they have significant memories for me. I have fond memories of my dad as a railroad conductor providing us with such goodies as passes so we could go anywhere we wanted for free. So, each year in December we would make a train trip into New York City about 60 miles from home. The menu of activities varied each year, one year going to Radio City Music Hall for the Rockettes' Christmas movie and show, watching the ice skaters, and seeing the great Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center. Another year we attended The Nutcracker, saw all the magnificently decorated windows at various department stores across town, and had a visit with Santa Claus at Macy's. That was a great Saturday adventure each year!

My favorite childhood Christmas memory includes trains as well, as it had to do with the tradition my mother instituted in us from a very early age - learning how to be more about giving than getting at Christmas. Each year we would discover a person or a family that could use some special attention and had the fun of playing Secret Santa for them. One year it turns out that the choice was our neighbors across the street from us. They had just experienced a really difficult year: a lost job, a health crisis, a death in the family. It was pretty brutal. Mom planned a true feast for them -a ham, all the sides, and a big box of cookies, candies and fudge that we all helped to make. She told us to prepare to give a child one of our nicer toys and we did that. I have no memory whatsoever of what either my sister or I chose, but I do remember what my brother Bob chose: his entire Lionel train set, which was by far his very favorite toy. Somehow, I think Bob had learned best how to become a giver. Everything got wrapped up as gifts from Santa.

The deal was you could NOT get caught playing Santa. So, on Christmas morning before daylight, we all snuck across the street and placed our gifts on their front porch and snuck back home. Then about dawn Bob snuck back over there as we watched from inside our house. He rang their doorbell and then took off running in the direction of the nearby woods. He had a long walk around to get back to our house out of sight. We kept watching to make sure someone actually answered the door. Then when Bob got back home we had a splendid Christmas breakfast. I don't think we ever got caught, which only made the experience more fun.

P: Well, another favorite Christmas memory involved my dad and his closest friend Leon. Leon was Leon Bernstein, and he and my father were friends since, well they were young boys. They grew up together and they were just like brothers together. My father worked at Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, NY, and Leon owned the gas station across the street - the Esso gas station, as I remember. Anyways, every year Leon would rent my father a Santa Claus suit. Leon would go down to the store and he would buy all these Christmas presents for young boys, and just before Christmas they would go down to Saint Joseph Villa in Rochester, NY, which was an orphanage for boys. My father would play Santa Claus and Leon was the Elf, and he passed out all the gifts to all the young boys. It was a great tradition, and I was very proud of my father and Leon for doing that. I have often wondered, though, that Leon - well he was Jewish. I just never thought as a kid that Jewish guys actually celebrated Christmas, but I guess everybody celebrates Christmas. Carolyn?

C: Well, my parents were Baptists, and Baptists don't do Advent, but every year, like clockwork, four Sundays before Christmas we would begin opening our Advent calendar. We would all gather around to open the window for that day which would reveal a picture or a symbol of something about Christmas. Mom used the calendar to introduce the topic for the day- a tradition somewhere in the world, like hiding the pickle ornament which German households enjoyed, or reading a story and doing our daily Bible reading. I still love opening my Advent calendar, re reading those stories and listening to the music. It just doesn't get old!

Music is a major part of my Christmas experience each year. YouTube has a wealth of music, and I love the traditional Lessons and Carols, the classical heavyweights like Handel's "Messiah", and the modern secular songs. The best part of YouTube, I think, is the ability to create your own playlists, and I have a number of them - at least five of which are for Christmas. Just go to YouTube.com and do a search for what you want - a particular song, a particular artist, a particular type of music - and create or add to your own personal playlist; or they have pre-done lists as well. This has been very helpful during these past two years of being home to avoid Covid. Christmas without music? Unheard of where I come from! (And I don't want to hear about it either).

This is a new one from Gaither Music TV called "Christmas Marathon 2021" that I've been enjoying this past week from a gospel music point of view. The link is on our transcript (https://youtu.be/Su_vY9a-YdE), and at the end of the transcript of this session we have listed more of our favorite music, books and movies.

P: You know as you grow older you get to create your own traditions. My wife Joanne and I had the wooden shoes. The wooden shoes I bought over in Holland when I was representing the Boy Scouts in 1966. After my wife and I got married, we used the wooden shoes every Christmas, and we filled them with gifts, little, tiny gifts. Christmas Day we would open them up and celebrate our Christmas. As years went on, we had children; I guess it happens when you're married sometimes. Anyway, our son loved the wooden shoes, and today he has the wooden shoes to continue the tradition. I remember when he was young, what a time he had! He basically would come down for Christmas every year, and he would open up the presents inside the wooden shoes. Then he would clog around the house in those shoes - we had wooden floors: Clog, Clog, Clog, all over the house for Christmas Day. Well today he's a Marine Gunny Sergeant and he celebrates Christmas with those wooden shoes. He is expecting a young daughter, a daughter I should say, I guess before Christmas sometime; hopefully as she gets older she'll clog around the house in those wooden shoes.

My favorite part of Christmas these days is watching the children in anxious amazement of Santa Claus and what he will bring them. We also have particular foodways. Joanne is from Italian home where pasta is always a highlight. I am a Yankee, through and through, and we have American cuisine featuring ham, mashed potatoes, vegetables, etc. So now our tradition each year is to have the kids over for dinner on Christmas Day and we serve both cuisines: we have the typical ham and all that stuff and the fixings, and we also have the lasagna gnocchi - all kinds of good Italian traditional foods. We also have apple pie AND we have Italian cookies. It's a great tradition, and it's making me hungry.

C: I've never been one to want one from column A OR one from column B; I want both. I'm glad to see you and Joanne do as well - love it! One of my favorite Christmas foodways is to have a different menu every year but all with a red and green color scheme. One year my dad had some oral surgery scheduled and we knew he wasn't going to be able to chew well, so I made a meatloaf in the shape of a wreath, with lots of his favorite chili sauce for the topping and some bay leaves for decoration and served it with green peas, a baked potato and for those of us who could eat it, a salad. Dad loved it. Another of my foodways for years was to roast pecans for family and friends.

Well, I think we're out of time for today. We hope you enjoy the Christmas season and that you not only create memories and traditions, but also find ways to pass them on to your VIP's: spread the season of love and joy.

As usual, if you would like a copy of this transcript with the addendums at the end for your enjoyment, please go to our website, familydigging.com, and go to the Transcripts tab. Feel free to download or email it to yourself for your personal use; and if you wish to be notified when another podcast has become available, please subscribe. Merry Christmas, Diggers!

Merry Christmas, Diggers, and have a Good New Year too.

Some of our Favorites for Christmas

Movies and/or *Books

Miracle on 34th Street	Holiday Inn
How the Grinch Stole Christmas*	It's a Wonderful Life
A Christmas Carol*	White Christmas
Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer*	Elf
A Christmas Story	The Muppet Christmas Carol
A Charlie Brown Christmas	Trading Places
Christmas in Connecticut	Call Me Claus
It Happened on Fifth Avenue	The Other Wiseman*
The Gift of the Magi*	Polar Express
The Nativity Story	Home Alone

Music - Classical

King's College Choir: Lessons & Carols
Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker Suite"
Bach's "Christmas Oratorio"
Handel's "Messiah"
Philadelphia Brass Ensemble's "A Festival of Carols in Brass"

Music - Carols, Hymns & Other Sacred

O Come, O Come Emmanuel
Hark, the Herald Angels Sing
Angels We Have Heard on High
Angels From the Realms of Glory
Once In Royal David's City
Do You Hear What I Hear?
The Little Drummer Boy
O Holy Night
God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

O Come, All Ye Faithful
The First Noel
Away in the Manger
Silent Night
Joy To The World
Go Tell It On The Mountain
Mary, Did You Know?
Ave, Maria

Other Christmas Music Fun

Let It Snow
Mary's Boy Child
Feliz Navidad
All I Want For Christmas Is You
Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree
Over the River & Through the Woods
Silver Bells
I'll Be Home For Christmas
Deck The Halls
Jingle Bell Rock
The Christmas Snow
Here Comes Santa Claus
And ALL Gaither Music Christmas Albums

A Christmas Quotation and a Prayer

A Christmas Prayer

By Robert Louis Stevenson

Loving Father, Help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world. Let kindness come with every gift, and good desires with every greeting. Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake.
Amen.

Sigrid Undset

“And when we give each other Christmas gifts in His name, let us remember that He has given us the sun and the moon and the stars, and the earth with its forests and mountains and oceans, and all that lives and moves upon them. He has given us all green things and everything that blossoms and bears fruit, and all that we quarrel about, and all that we have misused. And to save us from our foolishness, from all our sins, He came down to earth and gave us Himself.”

MERRY CHRISTMAS. EVERYONE!

Paul Hendee and Carolyn Lancaster