

Byers' Choice® Ltd.

Caroler Chronicle



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Pam Byers, Editor

Lamplighter Lights Up the Holidays

With a sturdy ladder thrown over one shoulder and a long-handled torch in his hand, our newest Caroler® figurine, the Lamplighter, looks ready to illuminate the sidewalks for holiday shoppers.

Lamplighters were a common sight in the streets of London until about 1825 when gas lamps made these night-time workers obsolete. Gas had been available as a means of lighting for many years before that, but it took some time before the public accepted this new form of energy as safe and efficient. It also was a major undertaking for the city of London to install the pipelines needed to provide a constant supply of gas to both street lights and private homes.

Resting his ladder against a sturdy lamppost, the Lamplighter would climb agilely to the top. The lamp lid often found itself perched atop the lamplighter's head, so he could have his hands free to tend to the wick and the oil.

Our Lamplighter wears a tall black hat and a warm red scarf over his long green coat. In a street setting of Carolers complete with lamppost, our Lamplighter will help to light up your holiday display this Christmas.



The Byers' Choice Visitors Center and Caroler Museum will open in late 1994. A new manufacturing facility and offices are under construction across the street from our present location. Part of our new facility will include space for Joyce's early Carolers, plus her extensive collection of Santas, Christmas dolls, and other holiday memorabilia. Visitors will even get a glimpse of Carolers being made. Look for a grand opening date and more information about the Visitors Center and Museum in upcoming newsletters.

A Family Christmas with Byers' Choice Collectors

We had a fun time reading through the many cards and letters we received in response to our "A Family Christmas" contest. It truly felt like Christmas in July as we read and re-read the entries (picking the winners was no easy task!). We were delighted that so many of you were willing to fill us in on your holiday traditions even in the heat of summer. Many thanks to all who wrote to us. The four winners whose letters appear here each received a pair of signed Carolers.

A Merry Family Christmas

Santa's Chimney first started appearing at our Christmas dinner when I was about 7 years old. It was also the first time that my Uncle Arthur joined us for Christmas. There in the middle of the table was a large box wrapped in Christmas paper and filled to the brim with small packages. Each package was tied with a ribbon that led to a place at the table. My brother and sisters and I were quite amazed to hear that Santa had made one final stop at our house just minutes before we were to sit down to dinner. As Uncle Arthur explained (for he was the expert on this), everyone at the table had a small present in the chimney to be opened only after dessert. Needless to say, Christmas dinner seemed to take forever, but finally we were done. As Uncle Arthur explained (for he was still the expert), we were to tug at our ribbons to see whose package was on top. We all waited anxiously as one by one the packages were reeled in and opened up.

Every Christmas from then on the chimney mysteriously appeared on our dining room table. When I was 25, Uncle Arthur couldn't be at our house for Christmas. It was only about a week before Christmas when I realized that without Uncle Arthur, there would be no wonderful chimney either. I knew exactly what had to be done. To the delight of both young and old, there, in the middle of the table, was the chimney bursting with packages. What delight and pleasure I had the first year that I was Santa. As I picked each and every gift, I thought how surprised and pleased everyone would be to see the chimney once again.

It is now 15 years later and things have changed a little. What hasn't changed is the joy and excitement that my three children share with the rest of the family when they discover Santa has indeed filled the chimney again. This tradition will be with my family a long, long time. God bless you, Uncle Arthur, and Merry Christmas to you all!

submitted by Wendy Perry Hartung of Richboro, Pennsylvania





A Bruxwoort Family Christmas

A few years ago, our family retreated from the flurry of charging the seemingly perfect Christmas gift. Instead of purchasing gifts, we decided to make gifts for one another.

In 1991, my uncle's family had returned to the century farm where my uncle was raised to begin a farming and milking business. A record-breaking drought that year meant money was tight and led to our decision to spend less on Christmas. At first it was sad to think we would have a limited gift exchange, but surprisingly the farm offered a wealth of ideas for original gifts.

Our gift exchange began as usual on Christmas morning following a traditional Dutch breakfast of boiled eggs, breads, meats and cheeses. My father began by opening a neatly wrapped, oversized box that literally contained hay for feeding a pet calf (the rest of the load could be obtained in July!). My mother was given a handmade squirrel feeder and a box of corn to place in it. My father

gave coupons to everyone: shoe shines (redeemable on rainy days), lawn mowing services, and a wash-and-wax for family automobiles. My twin cousins made apple-shaped wooden trivets for my mother and me, the teachers. My mother gave everyone banana or pumpkin bread, hot chocolate mix, and a bag of party mix to nibble on while the rest of the gifts were unwrapped. Grandmother's gift was quite special. She gave each member of my family a jar of raspberry preserves and a loaf of fresh-baked bread wrapped in semi-wrinkled Christmas bags collected from holidays past.

In retrospect, our Christmas giving in 1991 was reminiscent of the first Christmas in Bethlehem. As a family tradition, we are continuing to make, bake, and create the perfect Christmas gifts for one another.

submitted by Crystal Bruxwoort of Des Moines, Iowa

A Desmond Family Christmas

Several years ago when our three boys were younger, Christmas seemed to be a time of frustration and I was always frazzled instead of it being a family time of joy and celebration. It seemed to be an overwhelming task to care for small children, keep up with the housework, buy imaginative gifts for family and friends, decorate, bake no less than 12 kinds of Christmas treats *and* stay cheerful. Somehow I was able to accomplish everything but the cheerful part. By dinner time I was screaming at the entire family!

So I came up with a thoughtful and loving way to accomplish the holiday preparations and still keep our joyous anticipation of the Christ Child alive. It was the year of the "Love Basket." Every evening at the dinner table, someone would receive a special gift of "love" from another family member, contained in a decorated basket. This basket proved to be the most interesting centerpiece ever placed on the Desmond table.



Since there are five in our family, I divided up the days of December so that each family member had four dates, one for each of the other members. On each day, one family member was responsible for providing a gift of love for the person assigned. It could be a small gift purchased or made, or a loving thought or poem. Our youngest child at the time was 2, and I helped him, but my other sons, ages 6 and 9, came up with very thoughtful ideas. On alternate days I set aside time for special holiday readings. The result was that dinner time became the focal point of our day in a positive way. Our love basket was a wonderful way to encourage consideration of each other and to have an opportunity to share our feelings.

By the time Christmas Day arrived, our emotions were loving and caring and our nerves were not so frazzled. We all learned something that year about the true meaning of giving. It was truly a Christmas to remember!

submitted by Susan Desmond of North Kingstown, Rhode Island



A Schoessow Family Christmas

Our family has many Christmas traditions that are special to us, from opening one gift after church on Christmas Eve to finding that Santa has wrapped each gift in different paper—truly an amazing feat! But really special is our snowflake tree.

In 1970 my husband and I and our two young children moved to Australia where we spent five very hot Christmases. We loved getting beach toys and togs instead of sleds and mittens, but we truly missed our Wisconsin cold and snowy Christmas days. My sister sent me my first snowflake to cheer me up during our stay “down under”, and since then our collection has snowballed.

We now have a special tree in the living room covered with some 250 snowflakes. They are gifts from friends, relatives, and acquaintances from all over the world, as well as souvenirs of trips and special occasions. They're made of anything from tin cans, glass or straw to silver and gold. My sister says we've become a bit “flaky”, as the snowflakes appear on everything, including address labels and clothes. I know that one day when I can no longer enjoy activities in the snow outside, I will have my own snowflakes inside filled with memories.

submitted by Julie Schoessow of Racine, Wisconsin

Noël in France

The Santons of Provence



Much of French Christmas tradition centers around the crèche, or manger scene. In France, colorful clay figures called santons (literally “little saints”) are an integral part of the crèche. Santons represent all aspects of French country life. Fishermen, shepherds and winemakers, and even thieves, fools and convicts, are among the diverse figures who appear in the crèche, each bearing a gift for Baby Jesus. Although many types of crèches can be found in France, the classic French manger scene includes the distinctive santons of Provence.

The santon makers of Provence, a region in the southeast corner of France, have raised their craft to the level of a fine art over the past two centuries. Italian peddlers first brought their clay Christmas figures to Provence in the early 1800's. The locals loved the feel of these country figures and adopted the art for their own.

The art of making santons is a family business, with the secrets of production and unique designs passed down from generation to generation. The clay figures are molded in two halves; when pressed together, they fuse to form a whole. Artisans pay special attention to the fashioning of the features and expressions. Accessories such as hats and baskets are added later with an adhesive. After the clay has dried and hardened, the santons are bathed in a gelatin solution to further harden the clay and prevent the colors from running. Painting takes place in stages, with the faces being completed first, followed by the hair, clothing and accessories.

In addition to the clay santons, clothed santons are also made. However, it is the clay figures that are especially indicative of this Provençal craft. Each year in the port city of Marseilles, a santon fair takes place. Only a few dozen santon makers are present, yet a hundred different types of clay and clothed santons may be present at one maker's stand.

The humble country santons reflect the French view of the simplicity of the manger scene, which is naturally set in the lovely French countryside. The crèche with its santons is a place where all of humanity is represented, each figure in its own way there to honor the Christ Child.



Goodbye!

The end of 1993 marks the retirement of the following Caroler figurines:

- Postman
- Skating Santa
- Victorian Mother with Toddler
- Parson
- Mrs. Claus
- Chestnut Roaster

A host of new Caroler designs will be featured in the Winter 1994 *Caroler Chronicle*. We can't wait to see what Joyce has come up with!





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