

Byers' Choice® Ltd.

Caroler Chronicle



Edition II, 1994

Pam Byers, Editor

Old Befana: A Christmas Witch from Italy

Perhaps it's unfair to call her a witch, but that is often how Befana is characterized in Italian folk literature. Her name comes from the word Epiphany, which is the season of the church year that immediately follows Christmas. Befana makes her rounds on January 6, the day that the three Magi found the Baby Jesus and bestowed on Him their gifts.

Legend has it that the Magi came upon Befana on their way to Bethlehem and asked her if she knew the way. Befana, who was too busy sweeping her house to take much notice, told them that she knew nothing of Bethlehem or the Holy Child and to be on their way.

Soon, though, guilt and doubt about her hasty dismissal of the Magi began to disturb Befana. She packed a bundle of gifts, cakes and candies to take to the newborn Child and took along her broom, with which to sweep his room. But finding the Baby Jesus was difficult, so Befana decided to visit each little child in Italy, in case he or she was the Holy One that the Magi had been seeking.

To this day, Italian children set out their shoes on the eve of January 6 and awaken to find them filled with gifts... and to a cleanly swept floor.





A Dream Come True

Last winter Byers' Choice employees got together and presented Bob and Joyce with a framed mat signed by all of them that contained a square opening for a picture to be inserted later. Inside the opening was printed: "Insert Dream Here."

When the last of the snow melts from the front lawn and the spring flowers begin to bloom, Bob and Joyce will take a picture of their dream and complete this very special plaque to be hung in a place of prominence in the new Byers' Choice facility.

Ground breaking took place last July, when all of the employees marched a few hundred yards down the street from the old plant to the site of a new one that Bob and



Joyce had been visualizing for many years. A contest among the employees had yielded four beautifully hand painted and decorated shovels with which to perform the ceremonial first excavations. The dream was going to become a reality.

Construction workers were busy throughout the fall and into winter as Bob and Joyce and their sons reviewed plans for everything from landscaping to bathroom tiles to placement of lighting and electrical outlets. The intention was to be able to move into the new building right after Christmas. But of course unexpected things began to crop up, not the least of which was an unusually harsh Pennsylvania winter. Moving day finally arrived in the beginning of February.

The first moving day went relatively smoothly. On the second day, a winter storm hit. With most of us snowed in, Bob and Joyce and a handful of intrepid employees continued to shuttle office furnishings, sewing machines, worktables and Caroler supplies to the new facility despite the driving snow and mounting drifts.

What a surprise awaited Byers' Choice employees when they arrived back to work -- a beautiful environment had been thoughtfully created with them in mind. Generous skylights let in plenty of sunlight over the handcrafters' workbenches, and in this new place even the office area had a nice bank of windows. There were still some snags to work out, but all of the deliberation, planning and work would be worth it.





*You're Invited
to the Byers' Choice
Christmas Gallery
featuring The Caroler[®] Figurines*



Grand Opening July 15, 1994

Hours: Mon. - Sat., 10 - 4 pm

Closed January

*Groups of 20 or more should phone
(215) 822-6700 to arrange a visit.
See back of newsletter for directions.*

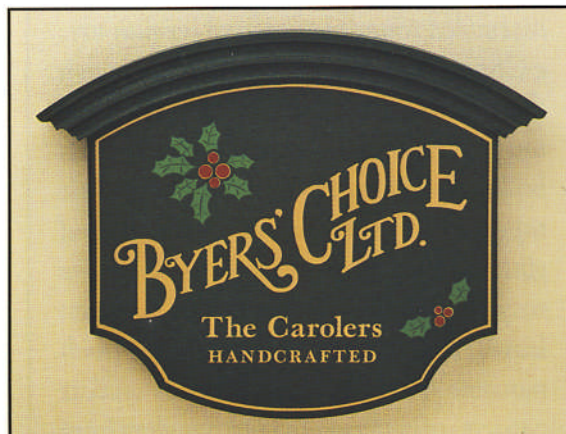




A Dream Come True, Part 2

Joyce and Bob had always received many requests from collectors to tour the place where the Carolers are made. Unfortunately, collectors were invariably turned away, as the old building just wasn't set up to handle this activity. That's where part two of their dream comes in.

The idea for the new Byers' Choice building was conceived with a wing in mind dedicated to fans of the Carolers. This visitors' center contains our "Christmas Gallery" featuring the Carolers, opening July 15, 1994. The Christmas Gallery consists of five separate areas where collectors and Christmas aficionados can view the Carolers strolling among the streets of a London-like city, acting out the roles in Dickens' A Christmas Carol, skating on the frozen mill pond and much more.



Included in the Gallery is a display of Joyce's very first Carolers as well as many retired pieces, a video of Caroler history and how the Carolers are made, and an observation deck that overlooks the Dressing Department and offers a glimpse of the other main areas of the production floor. A gift Emporium located next to the Gallery will be stocked with all manner of Caroler- and Christmas-related gifts and goodies.

We cordially invite all of our collectors to come visit us in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, for a very special look at the Carolers in a unique and charming Christmas setting made especially for them and you.



First Carolers on Display

The Byers' Choice Christmas Gallery offers collectors a unique opportunity to see Joyce's earliest Carolers on display. The figure on the left was one of Joyce's earliest inspirations. For her first Carolers, Joyce often used scraps of fabrics from a variety of sources around her home. This gentleman's coat was once a part of her mother's black cape.

Also showcased will be a grand assortment of retired Carolers, from various editions of the Christmas Carol series, to large display figures, to other seasonal figures, such as ones for Thanksgiving, St. Patrick's Day and Mother's Day.

Whether you're a long-time fan of Byers' Choice or relatively new to the fun of collecting the Carolers, our displays of old and retired figures provide fascinating insight into the history and development of these captivating Christmas collectibles.

I have been looking on this evening, at a merry company of children assembled round that pretty German toy, a Christmas Tree. The tree was planted in the middle of a great round table, and towered high above their heads. It was brilliantly lighted by a multitude of little tapers; and everywhere sparkled and glittered with bright objects. There were rosy-cheeked dolls, hiding behind the green leaves; and there were real watches (with movable hands, at least, and an endless capacity of being wound up) dangling from innumerable twigs; there were French-polished tables, chairs, bedsteads, ward-ropes, eight-day clocks, and various other articles of domestic furniture (wonderfully made, in tin, at Wolverhampton), perched among the boughs, as if in preparation for some fairy housekeeping; there were jolly, broad-faced little men, much more agreeable in appearance than many real men — and no wonder, for their heads took off, and showed them to be full of sugar-plums; there were fiddles and drums; there were tambourines, books, work-boxes, paint-boxes, sweetmeat boxes, peep-show boxes, and all kinds of boxes; there were trinkets for the elder girls, far brighter than any grown-up gold and jewels; there were baskets and pincushions in all devices; there were guns, swords, and banners; there were witches standing in enchanted rings of pasteboard, to tell fortunes; there were teetotums, humming-tops, needle-cases, pen-wipers, smelling-bottles, conversation-cards, bouquet-holders; real fruit, made artificially dazzling with gold leaf; imitation apples, pears, and walnuts, crammed with surprises; in short, as a pretty child, before me, delightedly whispered to another pretty child, her bosom friend, "There was everything, and more."

From **CHRISTMAS STORIES** by
Charles Dickens, 1812-1870



Treetop Angel

The top of a Christmas tree deserves a special decoration, and this year Joyce has created an angel that we think looks just perfect.

It's hard to imagine a tree without a spectacular topper, but in earlier times this was often the case. Sometimes a single candle marked the pinnacle; other times the top remained bare or was decorated with a simple flag, rosette or star.

Eighteenth century German Christmas "trees" were actually flowering branches that had no defined top. A particularly significant angel ornament of this period was the Nuremberg gold foil angel; it was hung prominently in the center of the Christmas bush. This early angel has been depicted as a large figure standing in a wreath and holding a candle in each of his outstretched hands.

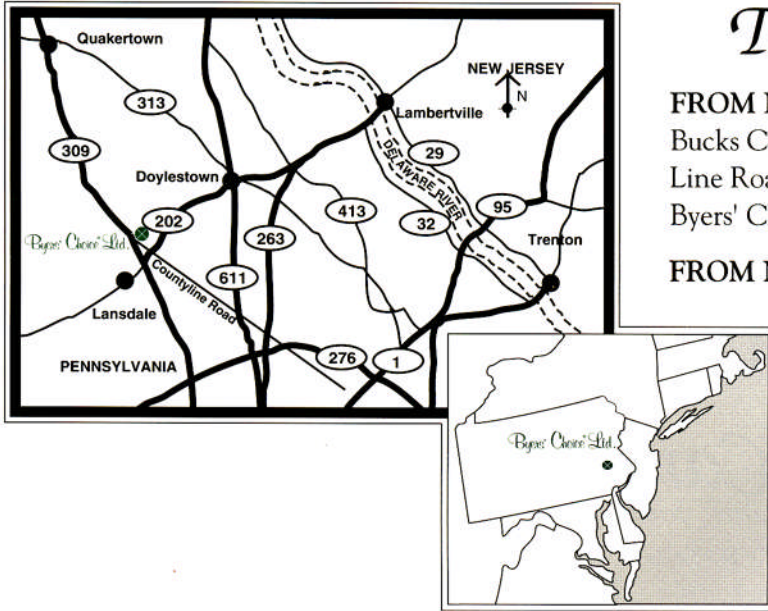
Other antique angel ornaments were fashioned of embossed tin, wax with spun glass wings, or colored die-cut paper transferred to cardboard. Joyce's treetop angel wears an ethereal-looking white gown and a gold-embossed paperboard scapular and wings reminiscent of Victorian Christmas decorations. Best of all, Joyce found the most heavenly hair that we've ever seen on a Caroler. What an elegant topper to any holiday tree!

To Visit Byers' Choice

FROM NEW JERSEY & POINTS EAST: 202 South to Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Turn right at light onto County Line Road approximately 2 miles past Village of Chalfont. Byers' Choice Ltd. is approximately 1/2 mile on the right.

FROM NEW YORK & POINTS NORTH: I-78 West to 309 South. Left onto 202 North at light in Montgomeryville. Left at second light onto County Line Road. Byers' Choice Ltd. is approximately 1/2 mile on right.

FROM PHILADELPHIA & POINTS SOUTH: 76 West to Pennsylvania Turnpike East (I-276). Exit at Fort Washington; take Route 309 North. Right onto 202 North at light in Montgomeryville. Left at second light onto County Line Road. Byers' Choice Ltd. is approximately 1/2 mile on right.



For more information...

...on other attractions in historic Bucks County, please contact the Bucks County Tourist Commission, Inc. at 800-836-Bucks, and ask for a free visitors guide and map containing information on attractions, lodging and dining.

Byers' Choice[®] Ltd.

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