

CHRISTMAS at the *White House*

Historical background to an American Tradition

This Teacher resource guide was designed to accompany the special temporary exhibit “Christmas at the White House,” running from November 25, 2005 through January 8, 2006 at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum.

Over the years, Christmas at the White House has become an American tradition. Each President, First Lady and First Family has contributed to the customs and rituals surrounding the holiday season in the Executive Mansion making it a multi-layered, rich and meaningful celebration.

George Washington, our nation’s first president, spent Christmas night 1776 crossing the Delaware River in bitter cold and biting wind. Indeed, for the early presidents, Christmas was a simple, private affair compared to our modern times. Religion played a central role in holiday celebrations, along with joining family and friends for a festive meal. In fact, up to the Civil War, many Americans did not even celebrate the holiday. Some even saw celebrating Christmas as a sin.

By mid-1800s, however, holiday traditions were taking hold. Decorated Christmas trees became more popular. Children’s books spread the customs of trimming trees and presents from Santa. Women’s magazines gave holiday decorating tips. In the 1860s, famed cartoonist Thomas Nast gave us our modern glimpse at Santa Claus. Following the description of Santa in Clement C. Moore’s *Twas the Night Before Christmas*, Nast drew Santa as a plump and jolly man in a red suit with fur trim.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Americans were decorating trees, singing carols, baking Christmas goodies and shopping for presents to exchange. Like the rest of us, the First Families each held their own holiday traditions which they brought to the White House with them and shared with the American people.

White House Tree

The first president to bring a Christmas tree inside the White House was Benjamin Harrison during the Christmas season of 1889. Placed in the upstairs oval room (the Family Library during Abraham Lincoln’s administration), the tree was decorated by First Lady Caroline Harrison and adorned with lit candles. While not all presidential families following Harrison would have indoor Christmas trees, this first tree

began a famous White House tradition. In 1929, First Lady Lou Henry Hoover decorated the first “official” White House Christmas tree. Since that time, the custom has continued annually and has always been overseen by the First Lady.

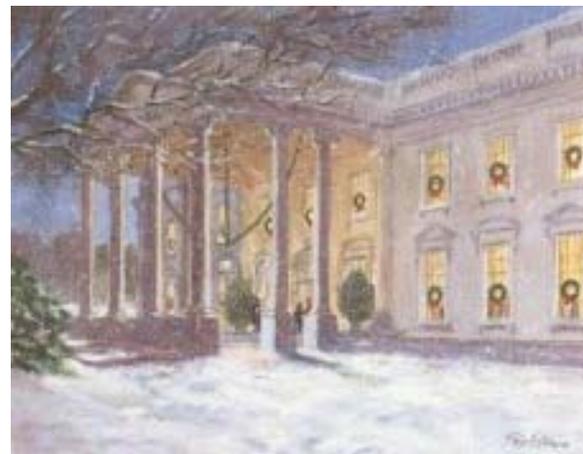
The idea of a “themed” White House Christmas tree came from First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. In 1961, she chose a “Nutcracker Suite” theme from the ballet by Tchaikovsky. Ornaments included gingerbread cookies, tiny toys, wrapped packages, candy canes and straw ornaments. These ornaments were made by disabled or senior citizen craftspeople across the country. Since that time, each First Lady has chosen a theme for the White House Christmas Tree. Some of the more memorable themes are listed below.

Johnson

In 1966, the Johnsons chose an Early American theme featuring nuts, popcorn and fruit. Wood roses from Hawaii, a paper maché angel and gingerbread cookies rounded out the decorations.

Nixon

The Nixons chose State Flowers for their 1969 tree. Each state flower was embossed onto velvet and satin balls made by disabled workers in Florida.



This painting of the North Portico by Ray Ellis graced the Clinton’s 1999 official Christmas card.

Ford

In 1974, the Ford tree was decorated with homemade items to emphasize thrift and recycling. Decorations included patchwork and handmade ornaments, while blue moire swags lined with more patchwork encircled the tree.

Carter

For their 1977 tree, the Carters featured trimming made by disabled men and women of the National Association of Retarded Citizens. The ornaments were made from nut pods, eggshells, foil and painted milkweed pots.

Reagan

Nancy Reagan chose Mother Goose as a theme for the 1986 Christmas Tree. Wooden gingerbread cookie ornaments, state balls, Christmas card ornaments and soft sculpture miniature geese decorated the tree. At the top sat a soft sculpture angel, while at the base of the tree were 15 soft sculpture scenes of characters from Mother Goose rhymes.

Bush (41)

The 1991 Bush tree featured needlepoint tree ornaments, red glass balls, a turn-of-the-century needlepoint village and needlepoint figurines from Noah's Ark.

Clinton

The 1998 Clinton tree was based on the theme "A Winter Wonderland" with fabric snowmen ornaments, knitted mittens and hats, and painted wooden ornaments.

Bush (43)

To decorate their "Home for the Holidays" tree in 2001, the Bushs invited artists from all fifty states to design miniature replicas of historic houses from their regions.

Presidential Holiday Cards

Although George Washington was known for sending Christmas letters, the first official Christmas message to the American people was written in long hand by President Calvin Coolidge on White House stationery. Coolidge had received so many requests for a holiday greeting that he asked newspapers across the country

to publish his message. And so began a holiday tradition. In 1953, President Eisenhower greatly increased the number of Presidential Cards he sent out and included American ambassadors abroad, the members of Congress and his Cabinet as well as government officials, heads of state and other important dignitaries. From that point on, the White House Christmas Card became the official holiday greeting of the president.



Courtesy White House Collection

Hoover

In 1929, during the Hoover administration, Mrs. Hoover drew upon her collection of old prints and selected a reproduction of an etching of the South Portico for the White House Christmas Card. In 1931, the Hoovers opted for a more personal card featuring a picture of the President in the Rose Garden of the White House grounds. Hoover's personalized holiday greeting served as a caption to the photograph.

Roosevelt

The Roosevelts' cards often featured a photograph of the couple in various venues of the White House. Others featured images of the White House.

Truman

The Truman's on the other hand lived in Blair House from November 1948 until March 1952, while the White

House underwent restoration. As a result, their 1951 Christmas Greeting showcased a photo print of the Blair House and was sent to friends, family and the Cabinet.

Eisenhower

Compared to previous presidents, Eisenhower's Christmas cards were very different. This administration's cards were simple and elegant, often embossed with the Presidential Seal and a red, white and blue color scheme.

Kennedy

Kennedy's 1961 Christmas card also featured the Presidential Seal and the words "Season's Greetings 1961" on smooth white card stock with a wide green silk screen border. The 1963 card was never sent—not even thirty had been signed when the couple departed for Dallas where President Kennedy was killed.

Johnson

President Johnson took office after Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963 and was approached five days later to choose an official White House Greeting Card. The plain white card, with a thin red border at the bottom, was embossed with the Presidential Seal. In 1967, President and Mrs. Johnson chose a reproduction of Robert Laessig's interior painting of the Christmas tree in the Blue Room for their official White House Christmas card. The couple sent 2,600 cards that year.

Nixon

The Nixons' 1969 White House card was framed in red and featured a simple embossed image of the White House. Their 1971 card showcased an N.C. Wyeth painting created in 1930, depicting President Washington and architect James Hoban inspecting the uncompleted White House of 1798. So began a tradition for the Nixon administration of featuring historic depictions of the White House on their holiday cards.

Ford

The Ford family followed suit in their 1974 official card, selecting an 1831 engraving of the White House after a drawing by English artist H. Brown. To



Eisenhower Official Christmas card, 1955. Courtesy White House Historical Association

spotlight their “Old-fashioned Christmas” theme, the Ford’s chose an 1858 painting entitled “Farmyard in Winter,” by George H. Durrie, to grace their 1975 greeting card.

Carter

Roslyn Carter relied on a family friend to create the image of the White House used on their 1977 Christmas card. In 1978, the couple used a hand-colored wood engraving of the White House. This became the first of the historic White House scenes the Carters used on subsequent cards.

Reagan

The Reagans’ decided to invite young artists to paint scenes of the Executive Mansion for their Christmas cards. The rooms featured over the course of Reagan’s term included the Red Room, the Green Room, the Blue Room, the State Dining Room, the North Entry and the East Room.

Bush (41)

In 1990, President Bush opted to feature the Oval Office on the White House Card and in 1991, the Bush family shared a first view of their family quarters on their official greeting. Another first for the presidential family was to feature the National Christmas Tree on their 1992 card.

Clinton

After discarding several paintings, President and Hillary Clinton opted for a photograph of themselves for their 1993 Christmas Card. For subsequent cards, the First Lady wanted to highlight the house and so chose

Thomas McKnight to paint the Red Room, the Blue Room and the Green Room.

Bush (43)

Laura Bush opted to highlight areas in the White House never before seen on a presidential card. The 2001 Presidential Christmas card featured the Second Floor Corridor of the White House, designed by artist Adrian Martinez. The Psalm used on the card was selected by Mrs. Bush shortly after the 9/11 attacks. The 2002 White House card featured a painting of the 1938 Steinway grand piano in the Grand Foyer of the Executive Mansion. Their 2003 card showcased a watercolor of the Diplomatic Reception Room.

National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

The idea of a National Christmas Tree and a ceremony by which to light it began in November 1923 when Lucretia Walker Hardy, the acting general director of the Community Center Department of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia, wrote to President Coolidge’s secretary and suggested the erection of a Christmas tree on the grounds of the White House. She also suggested that the tree be lit by the President in a public ceremony. That Christmas Eve, amidst much fanfare and trumpets, Coolidge pressed a button and illuminated 3000 lights on the first National Community Christmas Tree. A new tradition had begun.

In 1924, however, the tradition nearly ended. Coolidge was against cutting down live trees to be used for decoration. To save the tradition, a 35-foot living Norway spruce was planted

on White House grounds to be used annually as the National Tree. It survived five years, before the abuse of heavy ornaments, hot lights and ladders propped against its branches ended its life. In 1925, the lighting of the tree was covered on national radio, reaching all parts of the country.

The tree lighting tradition continued under Hoover’s term. President Roosevelt added his own imprint to the tree lighting ceremony on its tenth anniversary by delivering a long greeting broadcast to the nation. His speech began a new practice followed by all subsequent presidents. As the country approached a world war, the President’s Christmas messages reflected the hopes and fears of a nation.

With the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Roosevelt was joined at the tree lighting ceremony by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Both leaders addressed the American public

that Christmas Eve from the South Portico of the White House.

Christmas 1942 saw the country in its second year at war. Because of wartime rationing there were no electric lights for the tree. Instead, President Roosevelt sounded chimes which were broadcast over the



Raising the National Christmas Tree, 1928. Courtesy Library of Congress

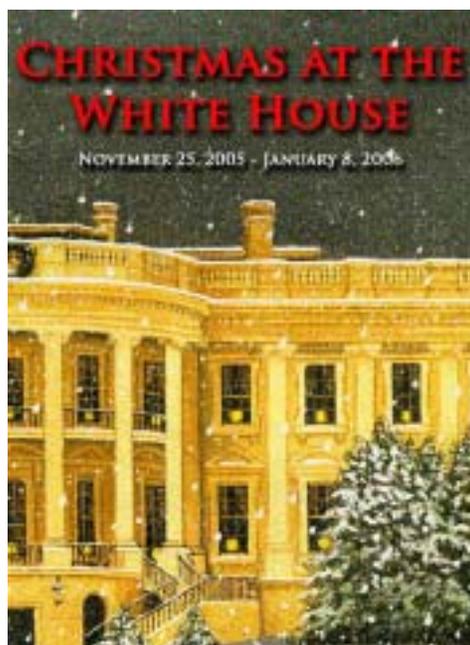
radio. With peace came a new twist on the tree lighting ceremony. When President Truman lit the tree in 1946, it was televised for the first time in history.

Over the years, presidents were not always present to light the tree, but the ceremony continued to draw throngs of people. In December 1963, President Johnson lit the tree in memory of John F. Kennedy who had been assassinated just one month earlier. President Nixon marked the fifty year anniversary of the Tree Lighting Ceremony in 1973.

The tree remained dark again under President Jimmy Carter’s administration in 1979 to mark the fifty American hostages held in Iran. Carter vowed that the lights would be turned on when the hostages were set free. The lights remained dark again the following year—the hostages still held captive. With the hostages free, President Reagan lit the tree again in 1981; however, for security reasons he was never personally present at the ceremony throughout his eight years in office. In 1991 hostages freed from captivity in Lebanon accompanied President G.H.W. Bush in the Tree Lighting Ceremony that year. Also of note during the Bush administration was First Lady Barbara Bush’s love of riding to the top of the National Christmas Tree in a cherry picker to place the star.

The events of September 11, 2001 resulted in restricted access to the Tree Lighting Ceremony. In dedication of those who died, First Lady Laura Bush lit the tree that year. Andrew De Millo of the *Washington Post* wrote “It was a sign of normalcy and tradition in a year that has been anything but...”

This year the 2005 National Tree Lighting Ceremony will take place on Thursday, December 1. Tickets are required but are free on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, visit the National Park Service President’s Park web site at <http://www.nps.gov/whho/pageant/>.



Christmas at the White House is a special temporary exhibit running November 25, 2005 through January 8, 2006 at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum. The exhibit features one dozen Christmas trees decorated to resemble the White House Christmas trees of several American presidents. Original ornaments used in the White House will adorn some of the trees, along with faithful reproductions, allowing students to trace the

evolution of the holiday as experienced by the residents of the Executive Mansion.

The exhibit will also showcase the extensive collection of renowned author Mary Evans Seeley. These objects, some of them nearly 200 years old, include presidential Christmas cards, messages and gifts given by and to Presidents, First Ladies, children, and staff over the years.

Students will learn how Abraham Lincoln observed wartime Christmases in the White House, as well as who was the first president to light the National Christmas tree. In exploring how the ideas of themed Christmas trees, greeting cards and other presidential holiday traditions were started and modified throughout our nation’s history, students will uncover how war, economic strife, environmentalism, personal values, public sentiment and family traditions impacted the celebration of Christmas in the White House.

The Seeley Collection

Dr. Ronald Seeley and his wife Mary began acquiring their collection of Christmas memorabilia associated with the holiday traditions of the White House in the early 1980s. Their first purchase was a red velour presentation folder containing a print of George Washington which had been a gift from President and Mrs. Nixon to a White House employee. The collection grew from there and led

to the highly researched work *Season’s Greetings from the White House* by Mary Evans Seeley, documenting in stories and pictures the history of Christmas at the White House.

In recent years, the White House has broadened its holiday celebrations to include other faiths, cultures and traditions from around the world. Check out the official White House web site for information on the celebration of Hanukkah, Ramadan and Kwanza at the White House. Go to: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/ramadan/2005/> and <http://www.whitehouse.gov/president/holiday/hanukkah/index.html>.

The Lincoln Family Christmas

Historians know very little about how the Lincoln family celebrated Christmas. Like other Americans during the nineteenth century, the Lincoln's did not participate in what we consider traditional holiday pastimes. In 1834, when Lincoln was a member of the Illinois state legislature, he actually voted against adjourning for a Christmas Day recess! Lincoln rationalized that the tax payers of the state were paying legislators to work.

There is some evidence to suggest that the Lincoln family did partake in some traditional customs. Ruth Painter Randall's 1955 biography entitled *Lincoln's Sons* states that the Lincoln family hung stockings to be filled with Christmas gifts. On December 24, 1860, the store register of John William & Co. recorded Lincoln's purchase of women's linen handkerchiefs, gentlemen's silk handkerchiefs and children's silk handkerchiefs. Could these have been for Christmas presents?

That same Christmas, as President-elect, Lincoln received callers and dealt with Cabinet issues. He was especially concerned that federal forts had been taken in the South; and on December 20 he received the stunning news that South Carolina had seceded from the Union.

The Lincoln family's holiday celebrations did not appear to change much upon their arrival in Washington. White House Christmases were still a relatively simple matter in Lincoln's day—no Christmas trees or extensive decorations, no lighting ceremonies or holiday programs. A long, grueling New Year's Day Reception was a major White House holiday tradition in the nineteenth century. Christmas, on the other hand, was a normal work day for the President, except for an evening dinner with the family and select friends. Only in 1861—their first presidential Christmas—were all members of the First Family together for the holidays (son Eddie had died in 1850). Son Willie died before the next Christmas. His empty chair in the family circle, together with continuing war worries, dampened holiday spirits in the White House over the next three Christmas seasons.

To mark the Christmas of 1861, Lincoln attended services at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church on December 22. On Christmas morning he held an important Cabinet meeting, but was able to entertain a large number of dinner guests by evening. For her part, the First Lady spent every Christmas between 1861 and 1864 caring for the wounded soldiers at Campbell's and Douglas hospitals. She personally raised a thousand dollars for Christmas dinners and donated a similar amount for oranges and lemons when she heard that there was a threat of scurvy. All gifts of liquor received at the White House she sent directly to the hospitals for "medicinal" purposes. None of these good deeds were ever widely publicized.

In 1862 President Lincoln again was absorbed with

military matters and was preparing the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. Both Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln visited Washington hospitals on Christmas Day.

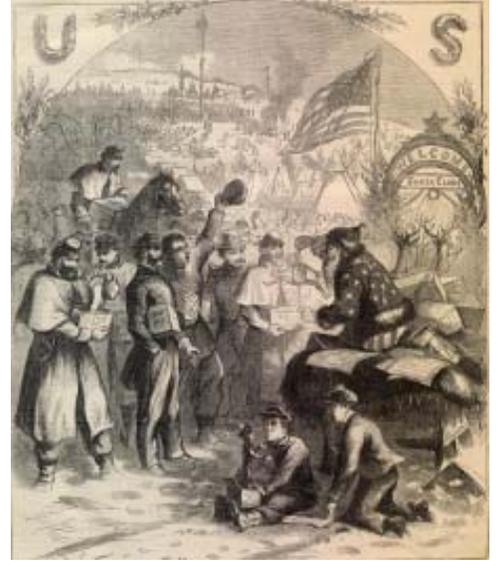
During the Christmas season of 1863, Lincoln's son, Tad, accompanied his father on his annual hospital visits. Observing the loneliness of the wounded soldiers, Tad

asked his father if he could send gifts of books and clothing to these men. The President agreed and packages signed "From Tad Lincoln" were sent to area hospitals that Christmas.

Tradition holds that Lincoln and Tad frequented the small Stuntz Toy Store (only 14 feet wide) a few blocks from the White House. There Lincoln bought gifts for his youngest son—custom-carved toy soldiers and other wooden toys. "I want to give him all the toys I did not have," Lincoln reportedly said, "and all the toys that I would have given the boy that went away" (a sad reference to son Willie who died in 1862).

It is unclear what the Lincoln family ate for Christmas dinner that year. Upon learning that his pet turkey Jack was going to be served, little Tad Lincoln begged his father to grant the bird a reprieve. "He's a good turkey, and I don't want him killed," sobbed Tad. Convinced by his son that killing the turkey would be "wicked," the President scribbled a note of reprieve which Tad quickly delivered to a startled would-be executioner from the White House kitchen.

In 1864 President Lincoln received the following dispatch from General Sherman, who had captured Savannah, Georgia: "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the city of Savannah with 150 heavy guns & plenty of ammunition & also about 25000 bales of cotton." To which Lincoln replied: "My dear General Sherman: Many, many thanks for your Christmas gift, the capture of Savannah." On December 26 Lincoln gave a Christmas reception at the White House. In four short months the long war would be over, but for Lincoln, he had celebrated his last Christmas.



Thomas Nast, "Santa Claus in Camp"
Harpers Weekly, January 1863

New Year's Day Receptions

John and Abigail Adams, the first presidential couple to occupy the Executive Mansion, held the first New Year's Day Reception there in 1801, thereby beginning a custom which would continue for over one hundred years. The public, government officials, diplomats, and military officers all looked forward to this event every year. Everyone was welcome at the reception from the ordinary citizen to the highest ranking official. The number of guests increased to over 6,000 by the early 1900s and lines often wound around the outside of the White House and to the Old State, War, and Navy building, which is now the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. The receptions regularly made front-page news with details ranging from fashions of the ladies to musical selection.

The New Year's Day Reception on January 1, 1863 held by President Lincoln was particularly relevant because it was also the day he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The reception began at 11:00 am with the Cabinet Members, military officers and diplomatic corps being the first to attend. The doors were opened to the public at noon. According to the protocol of the day, the President stayed for three hours shaking hands with the public. Immediately after the reception, Lincoln went upstairs to his office to sign the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. He did not call the Cabinet to witness this momentous event, but he signed it in front of some friends. Lincoln spoke of how his hand shook so violently, he could not write. "I could not for a moment control my arm....in a moment I remembered that I had been shaking hands for hours with several hundred people, and hence a very simple explanation of the trembling and shaking of my arm." He also made sure he signed his full name rather than "A. Lincoln" as he knew the importance of the document. As he signed his name, he said, "I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right than I do in signing this paper."

President Herbert Hoover held the last New Year's Day Reception in 1932. The 129-year-old tradition had become too large. It was discontinued and never restarted.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you find a link between the specific themes certain presidents chose for their trees and the times in which they lived? Give examples of specific presidents to support your answer.
2. What does the theme chosen for the White House tree say about the President or First Lady? Does the theme reflect more upon the First Lady and her interests? Give examples citing specific presidents in your answer.
3. Choose three presidents and reflect upon how each president approached Christmas at the White House with regard to their political, economic and social policies?
4. How did war affect Christmas at the White House?
5. How does each White House celebration reflect the cultural values of the times in which they occurred? For example, does the choice of materials used for ornaments make a statement about the culture of that time period?

Writing Prompts

1. Should the White House continue with Christmas traditions given that a large percentage of the American population is not Christian?
2. The Christmas at the White House exhibit is centered on the extensive collection of Mary Seeley. Why do you think people collect things? Is collecting important? Why? What kinds of things do you collect?
3. What is a tradition? Write about holiday traditions celebrated in your home. How did they start? Why do you continue? Do you think family traditions are important?
4. What was Christmas like during Abraham Lincoln's time? What kinds of decorations, customs, foods or gifts might Lincoln have had at the White House?
5. Imagine you were a child during Abraham Lincoln's presidency. What kinds of things might you find in your Christmas stocking? How is that different from what you might find in a stocking today?

Christmas at the White House Worksheet

Name: _____

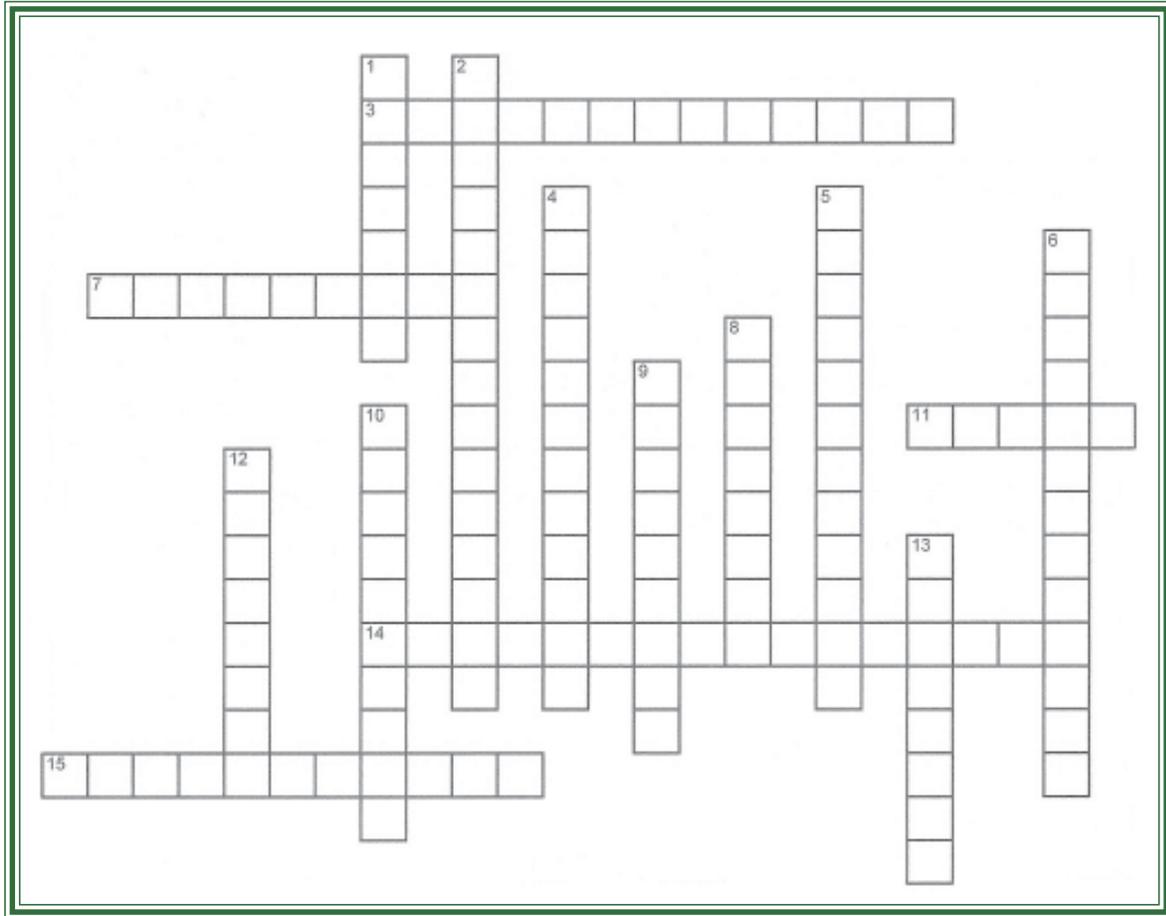
You can find the answers in the *Christmas at the White House* exhibit at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, on-line, or at your local library.

1. Which presidential pet starred in a video about Christmas at the White House?
2. Which presidential couple took turns dressing up as Santa Claus?
3. In 1967 who celebrated a Christmastime wedding in the White House?
4. Which president made his Christmastime guests watch a movie about wolves?
5. Who chose “presidential pets” as a theme for Christmas?
6. Which First Lady promoted simplicity and thrift in a pamphlet on how to make Christmas decorations from scrap materials?
7. Which First Lady liked to ride to the top of National Christmas Tree in a “cherry-picker” in order to place the star at the top?
8. Whose presidency marked the first Christmas as an official paid holiday for federal employees?
9. According to Barbara Bush, whose capture on Christmas Eve “made our Christmas”?
10. Which First Lady first chose electric Christmas tree lights for the White House tree?
11. Which First Family began the tradition of placing a Christmas tree in the White House?
12. Which First Lady introduced the idea of a *themed* Christmas tree at the White House and what was the first theme?
13. Which presidential family’s Christmas tradition included skiing?
14. Which presidential daughter had an emergency appendectomy on Christmas Day 2000?
15. Which President objected to destroying trees and didn’t want a Christmas tree in the White House?
16. Which first family baked cookies and decorated their own tree on Christmas Eve?
17. Which president instituted a formal annual White House Christmas party for all Congressional members?
18. President John F. Kennedy never lit the National Christmas Tree. Who did so in his place?
19. Which former President proposed to his second wife on Christmas Day 1895?
20. Which administration’s gingerbread house featured marzipan figures of their pet cat and dog?
21. Who lit the National Christmas Tree in celebration of the release of American Hostages held captive in Iran?
22. Under whose administration did the number of trees in the White House reach twenty-seven in 1958?

Christmas at the White House Cross Word

Name: _____

Use the clues below to fill in the crossword puzzle. You can find the answers in the *Christmas at the White House* exhibit at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, on-line, or at your local library.



Across

3. The modern image of Santa Claus (a fat jolly elf with a bag of presents drawn by Thomas Nast) first appeared in this publication during the 1870s & 1880s.
7. The _____ became one of America's favorite Christmas gifts and the most successful toy in history as a result of a fable about President Theodore Roosevelt.
11. On Christmas 1958 at 3:00 a.m., President Eisenhower's young grandson, _____, could be seen sneaking into the East room to see if Santa had left any presents.
14. This President refused to use the "new fangled" electric lights out of fear of being shocked.
15. The National Christmas Tree remained unlit until three days before Christmas 1963 to observe a 30 day national mourning period following this President's assassination.

Down

1. A Christmas stroll through London inspired the Clintons to name their daughter after this section of that city.
2. Christmas was first observed as an official Federal

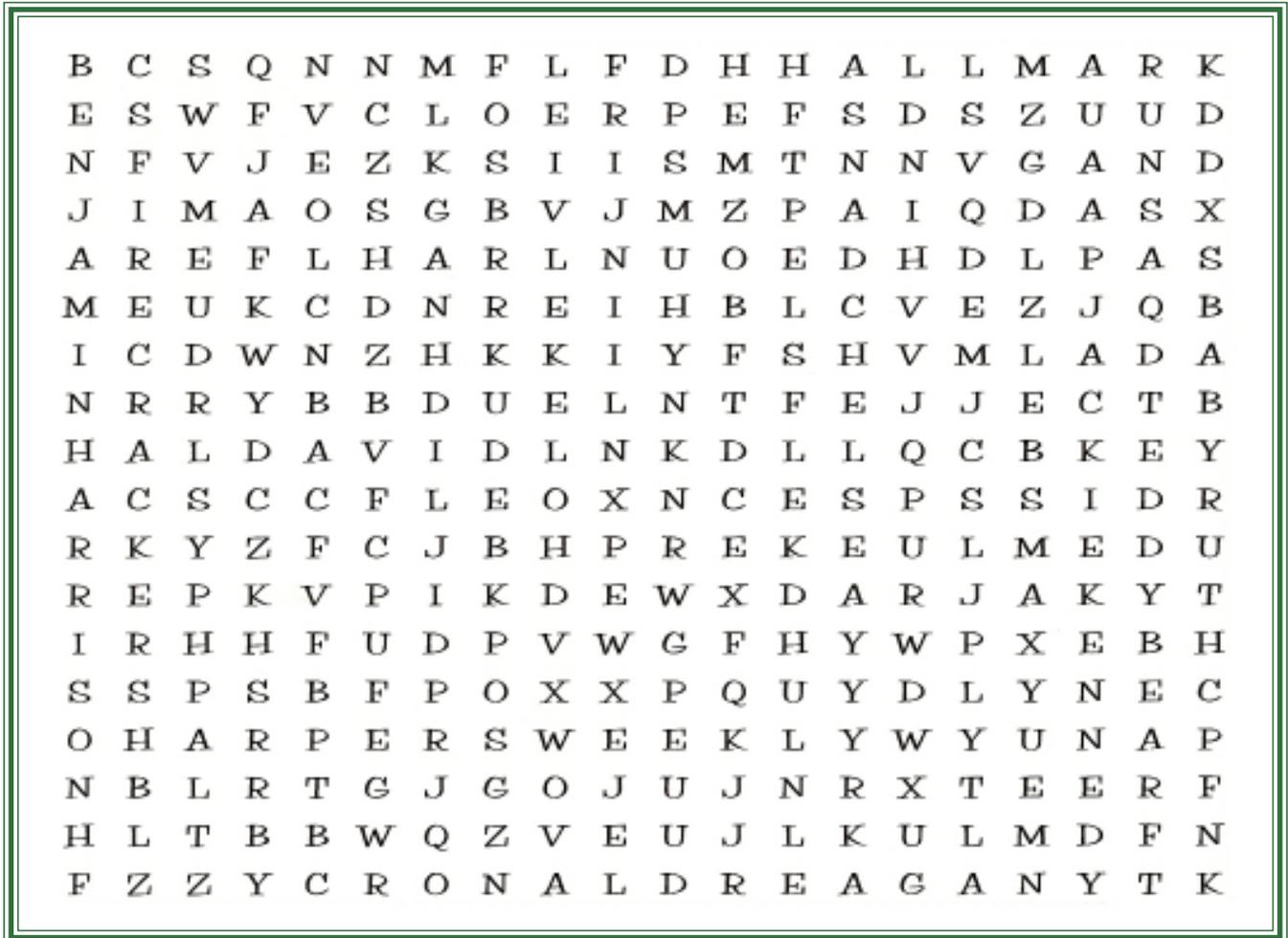
paid holiday in December 1885, during this President's administration.

4. This President and his wife took turns playing Santa Claus at private family dinners.
5. The Lincoln family participated in the mid-19th-century tradition of stuffing stockings. Popular gifts included toys, books, candy and these, which we normally associate with July 4th.
6. This First Lady introduced themed Christmas trees to the White House.
8. This candy bar was named after President Grover Cleveland's first daughter.
9. Lyndon Johnson's daughter, _____, was married in the White House during Christmastime 1967.
10. President Reagan once had a gingerbread house with a chimney made of _____, his favorite candy.
12. President Eisenhower's hobby of oil painting provided images for this company's cards and gifts.
13. President Eisenhower involved many foreign guests in the Washington Christmas celebrations. During one celebration a live _____ escaped into the streets disrupting traffic. Did Santa only have seven left?.

Christmas at the White House Word Hunt

Name: _____

To complete the word hunt, use the clues below to help you identify the words. You can find the answers in the *Christmas at the White House* exhibit at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum, on-line, or at your local library.



1. A Christmas stroll through London inspired the Clintons to name their daughter after this section of that city.
2. This candy bar was named after President Grover Cleveland's first daughter.
3. Christmas was first observed as an official Federal paid holiday in 1885, during this President's administration.
4. Lyndon Johnson's daughter, _____, was married in the White House during Christmastime 1967.
5. President Reagan once had a gingerbread house with a chimney made of _____, his favorite candy.
6. President Eisenhower involved many foreign guests in the Washington Christmas celebrations. During one celebration a live _____ escaped into the streets disrupting traffic. Did Santa only have seven left?.
7. The modern image of Santa Claus (a drawing by Thomas Nast of a fat jolly elf with a bag of presents) first appeared in this publication during the 1870s and 1880s.
8. The Lincoln family participated in the mid-nineteenth century tradition of stuffing stockings. Popular gifts included toys, books, candy and these, which we normally associate with July 4th.
9. This President refused to use the "new fangled" electric lights out of fear of being shocked.
10. President Eisenhower's hobby of oil painting provided images for this company's cards and gifts.
11. The _____ became one of America's favorite Christmas gifts and the most successful toy in history as a result of a fable about President Theodore Roosevelt.
12. On Christmas 1958 at 3:00 a.m., President Eisenhower's young grandson, _____, could be seen sneaking into the East room to see if Santa had left any presents.
13. This President and his wife took turns playing Santa Claus at private family dinners.
14. The National Christmas Tree remained unlit until three days before Christmas 1963 to observe a 30 day national mourning period following this President's assassination.
15. This First Lady introduced themed Christmas trees to the White House.

CHRISTMAS at the *White House*

In their own words

Christmas is not a time or a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and good will, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas. If we think on these things, there will be born in us a Savior and over us will shine a star sending its gleam of hope to the world.

*Calvin Coolidge's Christmas Message,
25 December 1927*

This year, my friends, I am speaking on Christmas Eve not to this gathering at the White House only but to all the citizens of our nation, to the men and women serving in our American armed forces and also to those who wear the uniforms of the other United Nations. I give you a message of cheer. I cannot say "Merry Christmas," for I think constantly of those thousands of soldiers and sailors who are in actual combat throughout the world, but I can express to you my thought that this is a happier Christmas than last year, happier in the sense that the forces of darkness stand against us with less confidence in the success of their evil ways...

*Franklin Roosevelt's Fireside Chat,
24 December 1942*

White House, December 26, 1902

...Yesterday morning at a quarter of seven all the children were up and dressed and began to hammer at the door of their mother's and my room, in which their six stockings, all bulging out with queer angles and rotundities, were hanging from the fireplace. So their mother and I got up, shut the window, lit the fire (taking down the stockings, of course), put on our wrappers and prepared to admit the children. But first there was a surprise for me, also for their good mother, for Archie had a little Christmas tree of his own, which he had rigged up with the help of one of the carpenters in a big closet; and we all had to look at the tree and each of us got a present off of it. There was also one present each for Jack, the dog, Tom Quartz, the kitten, and Algonquin, the pony... Then all the children came into our bed and there they opened their stockings.... [In the evening] all our family and kinsfolk... had our Christmas dinner at the White House, and afterward danced in the East Room, closing up with a Virginia reel.

*Theodore Roosevelt's Letters to His Children
(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919).*

Washington, D.C.
The President and Mrs. Cleveland spent the day at home quietly with their little family, and the building has been closed to visitors.

*New York Times, 26
December 1895*

Dear Margie:

I just now went out and took a walk. It is cold as mischief. I looked over the Christmas tree, and walked around the back yard—four Secret Service men and two policemen came along—to keep me from slipping on the ice I guess. A crowd did collect at the back fence. So I guess they were right.

The stage is set up south of the fountain, and one of the pine trees down by the fence is all decorated, and I have to light it and make a speech to the nation tomorrow at 5:16 P.M....

Lots of love,
Dad

*Harry Truman to his daughter Margaret,
23 December 1945*

Monday, December 23, the White House. Gone is the black mourning crepe that swathed the great crystal chandeliers in the State Rooms and draped the high doorways. The flags, at half-mast this long month, now rise—and with them my spirits.

The sense of pall that held the house in hushed quiet has lifted, and we can begin to turn our eyes to Christmas! The mantels are bright with holly and the house smells of evergreen. I have put my small wardrobe of black dresses, worn every day since that day in November, in the back of the closet and put my on my Christmas red.

Lady Bird Johnson, 1963.
Claudia Johnson, *A White House Diary* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970).

I want to thank you very much, and welcome you all to this year's Christmas Pageant of Peace. During this time of conflict and challenge, we once again celebrate the season of hope and the season of joy. We give thanks to our nation and to our families, and to our friends.

The First Lady and I are so honored to be here...In a moment, we will light the National Christmas Tree, a tradition Americans have been celebrating since 1923. The history of this event has included some memorable moments, including 60 years ago, less than three weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, when Prime Minister Winston Churchill made an appearance with President Franklin Roosevelt to light the tree. Now, once again, we celebrate Christmas in a time of testing, with American troops far from home. This season finds our country with losses to mourn and great tasks to complete....America seeks peace, and believes in justice. We fight only when necessary. We fight so oppression may cease. And even in the midst of war, we pray for peace on Earth and goodwill to men.

This is a time of year for families and friends to gather together. Not simply to celebrate the season, but to renew the bonds of love and affection that give fulfillment to our lives. And this is a year we will not forget those who lost loved ones in the attacks on September the 11th and on the battlefield. They will remain in our prayers.

*George W. Bush,
speaking at the Pageant of Peace on the Ellipse, 2001.*

Find these and other first-hand accounts of holidays past in *American Christmases*, compiled by Joanne Martell (Winston-New Salem: John F. Blair, 2005).

