

O, CHRISTMAS TREE!

true holiday story of an unsung hero

Did you know that the Christmas Tree is a hero? Whether it be an artificial tree doused with pine-scented spray or a massive floor-to-ceiling homage to holiday cheer, the Tree has a noble place in history. Here are a few of this mighty evergreen's most valiant deeds:

In Which the Christmas Tree Brings Independence to the United States...

December, 1776: Troop morale is down, and the English are as strong as ever. Standing amidst his shivering and starving men, George Washington decides on his next move—a surprise attack on the Hessians based in Trenton, NJ. On December 25, Washington's army crosses the treacherous Delaware River, and in the early hours of December 26, thoroughly trounces the Hessians. The Battle of Trenton is a key victory for the Continental Army, and the tables are turned in the Revolutionary War. Why were those Hessians, usually so well-prepared, so unprepared to face battle on December 26? Why were the strong so weak that fateful morning? Instead of sleeping the night away or preparing for battle, the Hessians fell prey to the compromising force of holiday cheer and caroused with their Christmas Tree late into the night. When the battle broke out the next day, the hung-over Hessians were no match for the sober soldiers of the Continental Army, who had spent the previous night preparing for battle and stoically crossing the frozen Delaware River.

In Which the Christmas Tree Befriends a Queen and Revives Christmas...

Christmas had fallen on hard times in England. The world was rapidly industrializing, and the English factory owners tethered their workers to the machines around the clock. And, on top of that, centuries before, Puritans had stripped Christmas of the medieval traditions which had made it such a delight, a day of cheer in the bleak winter months. Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* began to bring much needed change to Christmas in England, reminding the people of the good will, lavish decoration, sumptuous food and general merriment of days of yore. But complete restoration was a job too big for one man alone. England needed the powers of an idolized Queen, and of course, the ever-heroic Christmas tree. In Germany, Christmas was truly celebrated; families gathered around a table that held gifts and a small tree decorated with glass ornaments and sweets. Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's German husband, brought not only the power of his political alliances, but also these beloved Christmas traditions to Windsor Castle. In 1848, *The Illustrated London News* published a portrait of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and the Royal Family surrounding their decorated Christmas Tree. The fashionable families of England took note, and the Christmas Tree boldly went where no evergreen had gone before. The Christmas Tree entered homes across the nation, bringing with it the revival of England's Christmas spirit.

In Which the Christmas Tree Tears Through the Iron Curtain and Makes Some East German Lives Much More Comfortable...

Before there was Hallmark, there was Lauscha: the German town that invented and then devoted itself to the manufacturing of hand-made glass ornaments. No other Christmas Tree decoration could even begin to compare to the beautiful ornaments of Lauscha. Americans couldn't get enough and imported the delicate glass orbs en masse. But this free-market Christmas trade was not to last. When the Iron Curtain fell, Lauscha was relegated to Communist East Germany. Ornament exportation stopped. Deprived of their livelihood, the townspeople of Lauscha suffered greatly. But the ornaments quickly became a hot commodity on the black market, and Lauschan artisans snuck through the dark of night to the border to get the ornaments out, and to get much needed supplies for themselves. Thus, the love for a well-decorated Christmas Tree pierced the Iron Curtain, and East German ornaments came to adorn the trees of the West.

And now, the Christmas Tree Can Help Save the Planet... with a little help from Actors Theatre's subscribers...

Give this noble hero a noble end: don't just toss your tree, go green! The City of Louisville will recycle your tree into evergreen mulch at no cost. You can use the mulch yourself or donate it to the city for use in Louisville's parks. Check out louisvilleky.gov for more information.

—Rachel Lerner-Ley

