Chapter 1

Moravian Christmas Traditions and the Evolution of the Holiday

"The Moravians know how to keep Christmos [*sic*]."

— The Wachovia Moravian, *December 1894*

What was an early southern Moravian Christmas like? Nowhere did anyone write down in one place a detailed description of all of the activities at church and at home leading to the celebration of one of the most important events in Moravian church history: the birth of the baby Jesus. However, through diaries, journals, church reports, and letters, along with an informed speculation, we are able to piece together a narration. So, to begin, let us part the curtains to the past on an early southern Moravian Christmas.

It is a brisk, cold day in late November about two hundred years ago in Salem, North Carolina. The cacophony of tradesmen's tools, the creaking of wagon wheels, and the rhythmic clip-clopping of horses' hooves mingle with the shrill squeals of pigs being readied for butchering in several backyards along Main Street. Children scurry about to help their parents in this arduous, but necessary task, a job so essential that it takes precedence over school. In readiness for the making of cider, wine, and brandy, the pungent odor of fermenting apples wafts from the direction of the brewery and distillery west of town. Faint sounds of music issue from the church where the organist practices a special Advent anthem. The first whisper of Christmas is in the air.

As December 25th approaches, a rosy-cheeked girl, excused by her parents from school for the day, rushes importantly from one of the clapboard houses, quickly returning with a small collection of the neighbor's tin cookie cutters bundled in her checked apron. Eventually the spicy aroma of freshly baked Christmas cakes drifts from the outside oven sheltered in a lean-to at the back of the narrow lot. The mouth-watering smell mingles with the honeyed odor of warm beeswax emanating from a nearby shed where several women are dipping candles for the lovefeasts. Two young men emerge from the community store with some loosely-wrapped sugar candies, purchased for their godchildren, and walk briskly down the dirt street. As they stride along, deep in conversation, indistinct German phrases float upward, linger, and fade. All through town households are being tidied and doorsteps and yards swept (if the mud is not too great). In between their everyday chores some mothers, older sisters, aunts, and grandmothers find time in their orderly houses to hem a small woolen petticoat or cut out a striped short gown for a little girl, knit some warm socks or sew up a new linen shirt for a growing boy. If they finish in time, these useful gifts may be placed on a table in the sitting room to be distributed when the family returns from the Christmas Eve lovefeast at the church.

A few days before Christmas the schoolteacher and some of his pupils, all wearing closely knit warm caps, pass by on a borrowed horse-drawn wagon bound for the country where they will seek out a supply of pine, cedar, laurel, and moss to use in the church decoration. When they return, the teacher and several adult friends from the Single Brothers' house begin to construct their essential Christmas decoration, the Putz. *During the construction they hang some bedsheets to conceal the unfinished project. They painstakingly build a framework to be placed at the back of the minister's table and then piece together the green garlands, festoons, and swags, attaching to them large cut-out paper letters of German words that when translated read "Glory to God in the Highest." A small watercolor*

Let them believe in Santa Claus, or St. Nicholas, or Kriss Kringle, or whatever the name the jolly Dutch saint bears in your region.

Marion Harland

The Christmas Holly, 1867

Putz* at the Salem Tavern, early twentieth-century. *Old Salem Historic Photograph Collection, Old Salem Museums & Gardens (hereafter OSHPC).

transparency of the Holy family is placed in the center of the arrangement, and a number of candlesticks are arranged beside and behind it to effectively illuminate it when the time comes. After many hours or even days of work, on completion they celebrate at the afternoon vesper with a glass of wine, a slice of apple cake, coffee, and perhaps a good cigar.

Christmas Eve arrives at last. To simplify matters, a late vesper and early supper may be combined. As the afternoon fades, mothers with their babies and small children walk to the church at the corner of the square for the five o'clock lovefeast service especially designed for the little ones. Two hours later families, including their larger children, return for the Christmas Eve service. They divide into their special choir sections upon entering at the two separate doors, the men and older boys sitting on one side, the women and older girls on the opposite side. Children sit at the front. Led by the minister, who reads the Christmas story from the second chapter of Luke, they enjoy singing in unison as well as antiphonally (responsively) some carefully selected hymns accompanied by musicians playing violins, a viola, trombones, clarinets, and French horns. There are a dozen or more visitors in the sanctuary, many of them guests at the tavern, and they sing the familiar tunes softly in their own language, while the enslaved African Americans seated on the long bench at the back of the church follow along as best they can, some in German and some in English. By the soft light of the golden-colored candles the devout group drinks warm tea or sugar-sweetened lovefeast coffee mixed with milk and savors the hearty and substantial yeast bread. The children receive gifts that have been neatly tied to two small evergreen trees arranged on either side of the nativity scene. Cries of delight indicate their appreciation of the printed Bible verses lovingly embellished by the minister's wife, shiny red apples, and spicy cakes (Lebkuchen). *The older boys and girls recite their verses received at last year's celebration before they are all presented with lighted candles to represent Christ as the light of the world. It is quite dark now, and the flickering flames dance and weave, forming giant shadows on the walls. Stepping into the cold night air, the*

congregation observes snowflakes gently cloaking the trees in white. As they tread gingerly through the powdery mixture, some of the older adults reflect on their own long ago childhoods in Pennsylvania, as well as various countries of Europe, England, and Africa.

Upon reaching home, the parents stir up the coals from the ashes of the fireplace, add more wood, and observe that a bucket of water on the opposite wall has begun to freeze. While the children remove outer garments and nibble on their cache of sweet cakes from church along with apples and cider, a fire is built in the sitting room and finally that door, which had concealed the adults' Christmas preparations including the Putz *and some small gifts, is opened with a flourish. Revealed on the table is a small carved wood or paper nativity set, lovingly unpacked from a chest in the garret and carefully nestled in moss and evergreens with a few sheep grazing close by on a rocky slope. The young people are mesmerized at the sight of such a diminutive scene highlighted by the tallow candles, and the parents are content with their efforts to bring the story of the beloved Jesus into their home. A song is sung, a prayer is said, and the young people may again repeat their memorized Bible verses. As the family retires, they hear the night watchman's voice calling the hour and chanting a verse from one of the hymns earlier sung at church. Tomorrow morning the children will carefully place the tiny infant in the empty crib and linger there, repositioning the animals and adding to the straw as they relish each tiny detail of their own* Putz.

A few neighbors with their children may visit each other's Putz *decoration.*

Christmas Day begins with chores and perhaps some work projects. There may be two morning church services, the first liturgical and the second a longer preaching service at which there are again some visitors to whom the minister may offer a portion of the sermon in English, and of course there is much music. At home for dinner served at about noon there is a piece of roasted pork, or maybe a turkey, sauerkraut or cabbage, potatoes, pickles, bread and butter, a fruit pie, pound cake, and beer, wine, or cider. Later in the afternoon there are short choir meetings where a vesper of coffee or tea with the Christmas ginger cakes is enjoyed. A few neighbors with their children may visit each other's Putz *decoration. A supper of leftovers is taken in haste so as to hurry again to church for more music, worship, and fellowship. At this meeting perhaps some of the school girls present a well-rehearsed ode, a recitation and musical dialogue about the birth of Jesus, which has been prepared by the minister.*

As Salem grows and evolves over time, the English language becomes

Salem *Putz* at Home Moravian Church's Candle Tea. *Courtesy of Women's Fellowship, Home Moravian Church.*

prevalent and many more goods are brought from afar. As a result, sometime in the mid-century, Moravians in Carolina begin to observe increasingly elaborate Christmas traditions. However, the church services are still at the center of the celebration. The Fries children are curling up at home with a little book in which the gift bringer is pictured coming down the chimney with a pack of toys. Another picture book shows a decorated tabletop tree covered with small presents. The Putz *grows to include buildings, running water, and an expanse of space. Trees are laden with homemade as well as store-bought gifts. A drink of eggnog is enjoyed upon arising on Christmas morning, and imported oysters, oranges, figs, nuts, and chocolates are part of the day's fare for those who can afford such extras. An assemblage of useful and edible items gathered for the few enslaved helpers is passed out in a little ceremony during the day. The scene fades. The years pass. Additional elements of Christmas celebration are introduced.*

The vignettes above illustrate the active participation of children in all of the Moravian Christmas traditions. Although the nineteenth century was the real beginning of the American model for Christmas as we recognize it today, the Moravians had indeed been known as participants in a meaningfully celebrated

Bethlehem: "The Christmas City"

Moravian archivist Dr. Adelaide Fries called Bethlehem's name "a Christmas souvenir."[i] Although contemporary historians have asserted that the name Bethlehem had already been picked in Europe, the following story is a charming one of the little settlement's first Christmas, as related by Fries:

"In 1741 Count Zinzendorf was spending the Christmas season with the Brethren in the log house which had been built near the banks of the Lehigh,—a house constructed Continental fashion, with dwelling rooms and stable under one roof. Following the custom of that day the Brethren on the Lehigh were holding a Christmas Eve Watch Service, the Count presiding. During the service, on a sudden impulse, the Count arose and led the company into the stable, there continuing the service and singing a very old Christmas hymn which began 'Not Jerusalem, Rather Bethlehem, Gave us that which Maketh life rich.' The little village, thus far without a name, took the name Bethlehem from this idea."[ii]

Engraving of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1750-60, engraved by J. Noual, London. ***Collection of Old Salem Museums & Gardens (hereafter OSMG).***

Christmas Day for much longer. As a writer in *The Moravian* in 1863 wrote, "In our own Church, it has ever been the custom to dedicate [the festival of Christmas] almost exclusively to [children's] instruction and enjoyment."[1] In 1870 the editor reminded adults "Let us rear the Christmas tree for them [the children], and make the house full of joy and Christmas warmth and light. But let us not neglect to tell them *what it all means* [emphasis added]."[2] The reason for that attention was well explained in the Southern Church publication some years later: "The manner in which the Son of God entered our human nature has sanctified the estate of childhood. He came as a babe laid in the manger in order that the little children might be loved and prized as they never had been before. If, therefore, in homes and Sunday schools we make children happy, we are doing what Jesus did in his birth at Bethlehem."[3]

Perhaps the greatest contributor to the value that Moravians gave to the nurturing and education of children was the prominent church leader and bishop John Amos Comenius (1592-1670). Comenius, known far and wide as the "Father of Education," instituted many positive and still enduring theories of an early and broad education for children. Teaching by pictures as well as by text and entertaining children as they were learning were creative approaches used by Comenius in his book *Orbus Pictus*, published in 1658 and considered the "first illustrated school book,"[4] or "the first children's picture book."[5]

Employing pictures, visual images, and even plays to mentally and emotionally teach and inspire churchgoers had long been a successful method of the Catholic Church, particularly for those who were illiterate. For example, it is said by many historians that the miracle plays or "Moralities" presented in medieval European churches of Bible stories (such as Adam and Eve with a Paradise tree hung with apples) was the scene from which came the forerunner of the Christmas tree and probably the *Putz*. The Moravians were also adept at using these techniques effectively and meaningfully, not only with children but also with adults. They understood the impact of images and symbols and used such things as greenery-enhanced illuminated nativity scenes, colorfully executed Bible verses, the light of candles, a star, a lamb, and even Christmas trees and pyramids to inform and enlighten.

Early gift bringer image, mid-nineteenth century. Courtesy of the North Carolina Office of Archives & History.

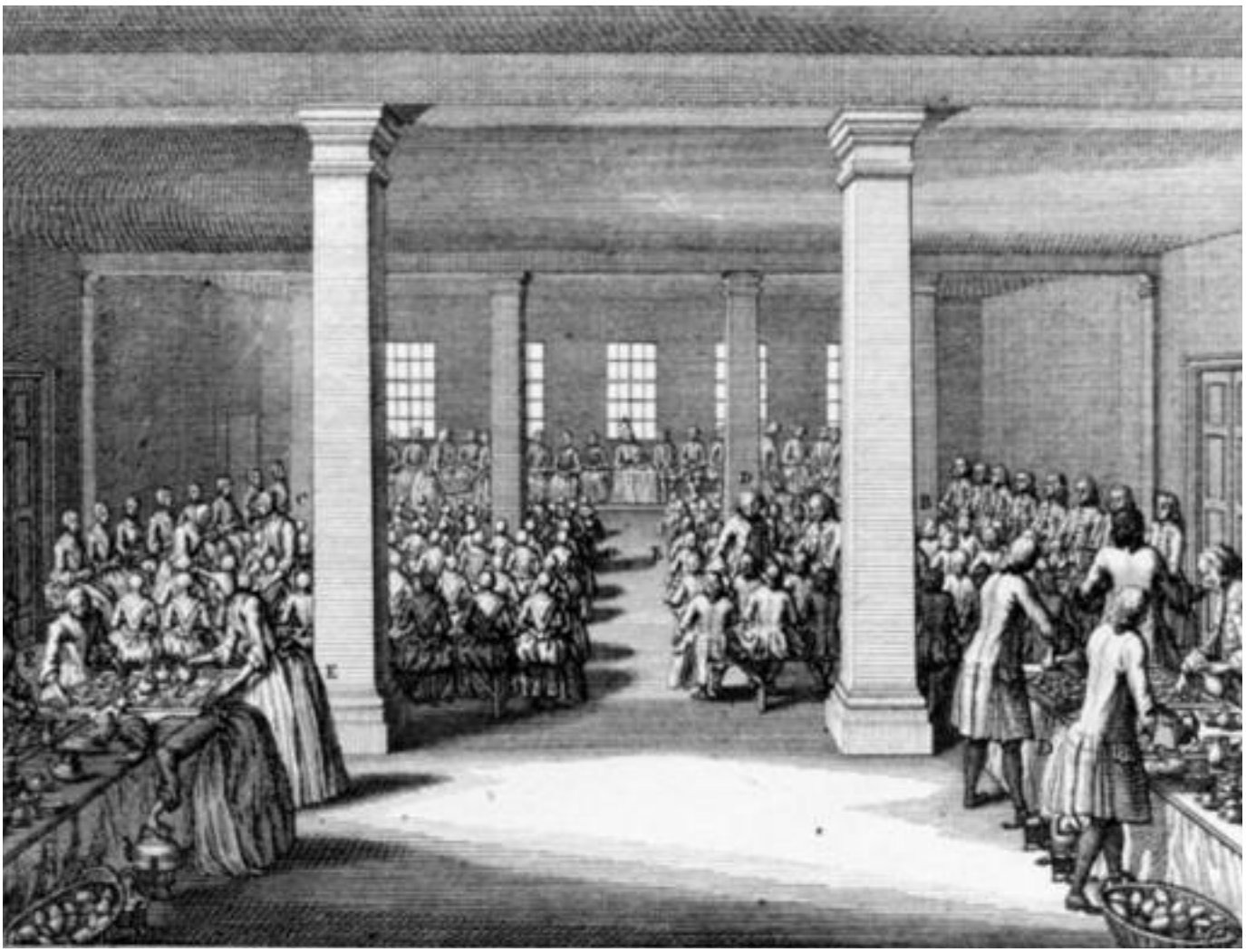
Underscoring that the Moravians were always mindful of their children and of the importance of visual references to reinforce their faith, Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg, in his definitive exposition of Moravian beliefs published in 1778, wrote "God gives his angels to the service of children; and therefore children, who are of so much value with God, should

likewise be precious and dear to us."[6] As a group in the church very young children themselves were known as angels.[7] Religious support groups called choirs were formed to correspond to the children's ages, and thus suitable instruction was ongoing in the progressing stages of life.[8] Angels were an important and common theme at that time; nineteenth-century Christmas pictures sometimes depicted children as angels and the gift bringer to the children as a young angel.[9]

The use of Christmas candles on 24 December 1747 in Marienborn (near Herrnhut, now in Germany) for a Christmas Eve watch service illustrates the Moravians' early use of visual symbols for children. Brother Johannes von Watteville, son-in-law of Count Zinzendorf, told the children of the birth of Jesus and to remind them of His great sacrifice presented each little one with a burning taper, tied with a red ribbon. Holding their lighted candles high as Brother Johannes sang, the children clearly grasped the symbolism of Christ's redemptive love as the light of the world in the hearts of people.[10]

Seemingly in contradiction to this long Moravian tradition of recognizing children as members of the congregation in need of special attention is the fact that the Moravians emerged from an unmistakable European communal society. In Salem, the Moravians had lived in family units from the beginning, but their strong sense of church and mission work had emphasized a Christ-centered focus above all else. In Europe, and even occasionally in Salem, to carry out God's work sometimes meant departure and separation from family for months or years, but with the secure understanding that other responsible adults were always available to act as surrogates for their children in choir groups, in the church, and in homes.[11]

While the communal aspects of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century Salem made the Moravians distinct from their Carolina neighbors, by the mid-nineteenth century Salem society had changed significantly. The eighteenth-century model of a congregation town with service to God and the church placed above all else had all but disappeared and



A children's lovefeast, 1760, engraved by I. Rod Holzhalb, France or Germany. *OSMG*.

The Maxims for Parents on Rearing Children

The Moravian published some maxims for parents in 1863.[iii] Originally appearing in a handbill published in Birmingham, England, they began with a quote: "When the ground is soft and gentle, it is time to sow the seed; when the branch is tender, we can train it easiest; when the stream is small, we can best turn its course."

1. Begin to train your children from the cradle. From their earliest infancy, inculcate the necessity of obedience.
2. Unite firmness with gentleness.
3. Never give them anything because they cry for it.
4. Seldom threaten; and be always careful to keep your word.
5. Never promise them anything, unless you are quite sure, you can give them what you promise.
6. Always punish your children for willfully disobeying you; but never punish in a passion.
7. Do not be always correcting your children; and never use violent or terrifying punishment. Take the rod (so Solomon says,) let it tingle, and pray God to bless it.
8. On no account allow them to do at one time what you have forbidden under the same circumstances at another.
9. Teach them early to speak the truth on *all occasions*.
10. Be very careful what company your children keep.
11. Make your children useful as soon as they are able, and find employment for them as far as possible.
12. Teach your children not to waste any thing; to be clean and tidy; to sit down quietly and in good order to their meals; to take care of and mend their clothes, to have "a place for every thing, and every thing in its place." (I Cor. XIV, 40. John VI, 12.)
13. Never suffer yourself to be amused by an immodest action; nor, by a smile, encourage those seeds of evil which, unless destroyed, will bring forth the fruits of vice and misery.
14. Encourage your children to do well; show them that you are pleased when they do well.
15. Teach your children to pray, by praying with and for them yourself. Maintain the worship of God in your family, if you desire his blessing to descend on you and yours.
16. Impress upon their minds that eternity is before them, and that those only are truly wise who secure eternal blessings.
17. Above all, *let parents be themselves what they would wish their children to be*."

Maxim illustration, nineteenth century. *Author's collection.*

Emil De Schweinitz of Salem with his toy train, c. 1868. *OSHPC*.

Anna Paulina De Schweinitz of Salem with her doll in carriage, c. 1868. *OSHPC*.

"Marie Agnes von Zinzendorf" (1735-84) by Johann Valentine Haidt. *Courtesy of the Moravian Archives, Herrnhut, Germany.*

a recognizably American community emerged with the family unit as the focus. This movement away from communal organization was driven by gradual assimilation of southern Moravians into American society. And not only was the family receiving closer attention in Moravian communities in Wachovia, it was becoming more important in American homes in general. For both groups, the individual pockets of culture of eighteenth-century, backcountry America had often formed insulated units. By the later nineteenth century, for better or for worse, the American cultural "tossed salad" was beginning to be stirred into a "melting pot."[12] For the Salem Moravians, assimilation into American society had been occurring in increments since the town's beginnings, but officially took place in 1857 when Salem ceased to exist as a closed church community or theocracy, less than a century from its founding.[13]

As the nineteenth century progressed, the Moravians in Salem and their fellow Americans increasingly made a niche for family, friends, and charges to gather around the figurative hearth for bonding, fellowship, and conversation. Painful memories of the Civil War increased ties to home. "Let the fires of home religion be kindled anew," pled *The Moravian* of 1868.[14] The editor of *The Moravian* remarked in 1870, "Christmas is emphatically a home-festival."[15] "Home, sweet home" was becoming an American goal, although it poignantly had not always been so in the American reality. A Civil War soldier had written in 1863 in "The Children's Column" of *The Moravian* in Bethlehem to express his "New-Year's greeting from the army." He described his life as a soldier in realistic terms: the tent-covered "pine twigs" and "corn-blades" makeshift bed dug into a

trench, and the "cracker-box" table on which he was writing. A positive touch was a "nice fire," so life was not totally unbearable, although he stated, "'Home, Sweet Home' is far preferable."[16] Religion was an integral and influential part of a large segment of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century life in America, especially as the country became more settled and traveled, industrialized, urban, and materially endowed. Many people were moving from rural farms to take jobs in factories in the cities. The middle class was expanding and becoming more educated and refined as it purchased cheaper and more affordable manufactured goods, thereby increasing its comforts and leisure. As some mothers had fewer children, and health care and improved sanitation helped those offspring to live longer, a heightened interest in the family emerged. The broader dissemination of printed materials in the form of books, periodicals, and newspapers increasingly served to inform and enlighten people on many topics. The results of the Industrial Revolution were more and more apparent in the various Moravian communities. The trades town of Salem found it harder to sell its more expensive handmade goods, and so mills and factories began to be established and manufactured goods were brought in from outside, thus contributing to the demise of the little church town as a closed community.

One national social trend that occurred was that children gradually began to receive more attention and status within the family from what had been a more repressed condition. Young mothers did not necessarily know how to cope with children in this new role, and so magazine and book writers dispensed needed advice not only in straightforward treatises, but in the guise of "domestic fiction," "woman's fiction," or "sentimental fiction."[17] Such writers as Mrs. Lydia Maria Child, Marion Harland, and the Beecher sisters wrote manuals with compilations of recipes and remedies as well as advice on housekeeping, domestic economy, and raising children.[18] The Beecher sisters "affectionately inscribed" *The American Woman's Home* in 1869 to "The Women of America in whose hands rest the real destinies of the republic, as moulded by the early training and preserved amid the maturer influences of home."[19] Such books were immensely popular and sometimes went through as many as a dozen printings.

Home Sweet Home die cut decoration, Germany. ***Author's collection.***

In 1856, in the first volume of the newly started paper *The Moravian*, "Mr. Moravian," the children's editor, highlighted the pleasures of winter, Christmas, and the comforts of home in the following passage: "Apples and grapes, and chestnuts, and hickory nuts, and Christmas and new-year's gifts, and snow and ice, and sleds and skates, and warm firesides and home comforts rise up before you at the sound of their names."[20] A number of years later in a story in the same publication entitled "The Christmas Blessing," home was given its important place. "Christmas is preeminently also a family, as well as a Church, festival...celebrated in the domestic circle as in the Church with particular reference to the children... ."[21]

The loving scene described by Mr. Moravian did not always embrace America's early children, however. For them, life was sometimes a litany of "dos and don'ts" with their infrequent appearances at adult functions strictly controlled and regulated by the idea that children were often neither to be seen nor heard. Consider the 1805 edition (originally appearing in 1783) of a popular and widely used textbook for American students,

Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Old Salem Museums & Gardens (hereafter MESDA).

Adam and Eve Charger

This delftware charger "Adam and Eve" was made in Bristol, England, about 1650-1690 by an unknown potter. Polychromed dishes like this were more decorative and meant to be hung on the wall or prominently displayed as a sign of some affluence. The subject here is the fall of Man and includes an apple tree entwined by a serpent to represent evil. This motif was in part popular because of the publication in 1667 of John Milton's poetic immortalization "Paradise Lost." It also has a Christmas significance coming from the Christian medieval church "mystery" or "miracle" plays, popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in which stories of the Bible were depicted with props to visually teach the mostly illiterate parishioners. Even after the plays were no longer performed sometime in the fifteenth century, people remembered the depiction of the "Paradise" tree representing immortality and the Tree of Life and Adam's fall, all as associations of Christmas. On the early saints calendar Adam and Eve Day was on December 24. It was, therefore, only natural to erect a tree decorated with apples for this significant event.

Noah Webster's *The American Spelling Book*. Some of the rules of behavior for children were outlined:

Be a good child; mind your book; love your school; and strive to learn. Tell no tales; call no ill names; you must not lie, nor swear, nor cheat, nor steal. Play not with bad boys; use no ill words at play; spend your time well; live in peace and shun all strife. This is the way to make good men love you, and save your soul from pain and woe... . As for those boys and girls that mind not their books, and love not the church and school, but play with such as tell tales, tell lies, curse, swear and steal, they will come to some bad end, and must be whipt till they mend their ways.[22]

An earlier edition of Webster's book was in use in Salem in May of 1791 when President George Washington visited the classroom of Samuel Kramsch where a reading session was in progress.[23] During this period Anna Rosina Gambold, at the remote Springplace, Georgia, Cherokee Mission established by the Moravians, had thirty-eight books, which included Noah Webster's *The American Spelling Book*.[24]

Webster's occasionally laborious book nevertheless was considered a welcome respite from the even heavier scholastic materials formerly employed, with the exception of Comenius's writings. Books solely for the pleasure of children had only become available in the second half of the eighteenth century, and many of these "wagged their fingers in print" against anything "playful and imaginative," as the child had to be early converted to save him from a quick and unexpected death with the eternal accompanying damnation.[25]

Up until such books as Webster's, the catechism and hornbooks for learning the alphabet were considered the basics for the few children who were privileged to learn to read and write. Then chapbooks, religious and otherwise, often sold by peddlers and containing all kinds of stories, became very appealing and, thus, popular. Moral instruction was being encouraged by the Second Great Awakening, which swept through the country from 1795 to 1836 and hence promoted upright, enlightened living. The Sunday School movement, having started in England in the 1770s for underprivileged children, began in 1816 in Wachovia. It fostered memorization of Bible verses, as well as some general education.[26] Salem children, of course, already received both, so a local Sunday School for them was not begun until 1849.[27] The Sunday School Union and the American Tract Society both issued moralistic tracts, and churches sponsored men called colporteurs (an effort in which the Moravians participated), who traveled the countryside, passing out tracts, Bibles, and the dispensation of religion by word of mouth in order to reach each and every uninformed soul, including children.

An image of a family Christmas, early-nineteenth century, from an American Tract Society publication. *Author's collection.*

Long before the advent of Sunday Schools, however, Moravian children at Christmas had been given pretty colored or illuminated Bible verses as part of their gift from the church, along with the aforementioned candles and perhaps a tasty treat, like a ginger cake. They were encouraged to take the verses home and memorize them. When African Americans in Salem obtained their own church, they, too, benefited from some education. On 26 December 1841 at the African American log church, the children recited the Christmas verses they had learned and then received cakes.[28]

The Moravian Church believed that educated people could enhance their lives by reading the word of God directly from the Bible and thus become stronger Christians, so it is not surprising that schools were an early part of the establishment of their towns. As Comenius wrote in *The School of Infancy* about Solomon's wisdom, "A young man duly instructed as to his way, even when old will not depart from it."[29] The Moravians' "heart religion" encouraged a simple, direct, familiar, and joyful communion with God to whom one could always turn in times of need, whatever the age. In knowing God, one knew oneself and grew in that knowledge. This, not doctrine, was the essence of Moravian theology.

Such activities as singing together bound people to each other and to the church. They were used on a national scale by certain influential adults as a way of creating traditions meaningful to families and their children and bringing them not only to each other and the church, but to the larger community as a whole. For the Moravians, music was an essential ingredient in their faith.

Outside the church in the South, revelry associated with the holiday had long been manifested by such activities as shooting matches, fox hunts, cock fights, races, dances, balls, parties, dinners, games, lotteries, noise making, and the inevitable drinking, an issue that eventually led to the temperance movement. Some of these activities were escalating into what could become a population out of control, particularly in the cities. America needed its own solid,

Illustration from *Harper's Weekly*, December 1886. *Author's collection.*

suitable, inspiring celebrations for special occasions, not the drunken, boisterous, unruly, loud, and destructive behavior, which was increasingly becoming a problem, both locally and elsewhere. Social reform was required, and so a renewed interest in religion had developed, ranging from temperance meetings to Bible societies, missionary societies, Sunday Schools, and gospel tract ministries. Some local agnostics, like the outsider (non-Moravian)[30] Dr. George Wilson of Bethania, thought the proliferation of such organizations stifling, but many citizens thought them essential.[31]

The various tract and Sunday School writings, as we have noted, were particularly prolific in advancing the state of morality in children and adults. The earliest so-called Christmas books for children were usually filled with stories about naughty boys and girls who learned valuable lessons to improve and the good children who became better by example.

A poem (right) appeared in 1821 in *The Children's Friend*, a little illustrated volume in which "Santeclaus" arrived on Christmas Eve. It taught a number of lessons and warned of punishment for transgressions: the "birch, logic, and religion"[32] aspects sometimes delineated by well-meaning but autocratic adults.

This poem was only one in what proved to be an increasing abundance of Christmas material. In the 1820s, New Yorkers John Pintard, Washington Irving, and Clement Moore (responding to unseemly public rowdiness as well as the need for American traditions) had begun to lay the groundwork for the new American Christmas, and, in the 1840s, Charles Dickens's redemptive story of Scrooge's change into a model of charity was very influential.[35] Pintard and Irving concentrated on Nicholas, the Dutch bringer of gifts, and Moore, of course, wrote the now immortal poem "An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas,"[36] which may have had as one of its sources the poem from *The Children's Friend*, although Moore portrayed the gift-bringer as a genial and non-threatening character.

A Pennsylvania-published Christmas book said to have an enormous impact on the developing Christmas in America, according to that state's Christmas historian Alfred Shoemaker, was *Kriss Kringle's Christmas Tree*, published in 1845 and widely distributed. It validated Kriss Kringle as one of the gift bringers, including the names of Santa Claus and St. Nicholas, and even the antecedent of Kriss Kringle, *Christ-Kindlein* (the Christ Child who brought presents to Protestant children in Germany and in America).[37] This little book had on the cover the picture of an elfin gift-bringer in the act of placing toys on a small tabletop Christmas tree, thus introducing many American children who saw the book to some of the symbols associated with the secular Christmas.

One entry in the Kriss Kringle book is a poem called "The Christmas Gift" in which a boy is offered by a charitable lady his choice of one item from an array of "baubles and toys."[38] He is greatly attracted by a toy white horse, a warrior's accoutrements, and some books, but ultimately settles on a Bible, which he knows his mother loves most and that he can share with his siblings. Along with the obvious lesson of choosing the Bible over temporal objects, this story represents the charitable giving to underlings and the less privileged that became so prevalent as a theme in literature and in life of the nineteenth century. Chapter Three will explore some of the Moravian instances of youthful giving.

Emphasizing the good will towards children long expressed by the Moravian Church, Mr. Moravian wrote affectionately to his young readers on Christmas Day, 1857: "We haven't forgotten the delight with which we used to look forward to Christmas Eve and morning; and whilst the feeling has become deepened and hallowed, it is as joyous as ever... . It does us good to see your smiles, and to hear your merry, ringing laughter. It wakes up the memory of early days, when we used to run to our stockings, and tables, and Christmas trees, to see whether

Old SANTECLAUS with much delight
His reindeer drives this frosty night,
O'er chimneytops, and tracks of snow,
To bring his yearly gifts to you.

The steady friend of virtuous youth,
The friend of duty, and of truth,
Each Christmas eve he joys to come
Where love and peace have made their home.

Through many houses he has been,
And various beds and stockings seen,
Some, white as snow, and neatly mended,
Others, that seem'd for pigs intended.

Where e'er I found good girls or boys,
That hated quarrels, strife and noise,
I left an apple, or a tart,
Or wooden gun, or painted cart;

To some I gave a pretty doll.
To some a peg-top, or a ball;
No crackers, cannons, squibs, or rockets,[33]
To blow their eyes up, or their pockets.

No drums to stun their Mother's ear,
Nor swords to make their sisters fear;
But pretty books to store their mind.
With Knowledge of each various kind.

But where I found the children naughty,
In manners rude, in temper haughty,
Thankless to parents, liars, swearers,
Boxers, or cheats, or base tale-bearers,

I left a long, black, birchen rod,
Such, as the dread command of God
Directs a Parent's hand to use
When virtue's path his sons refuse.[34]

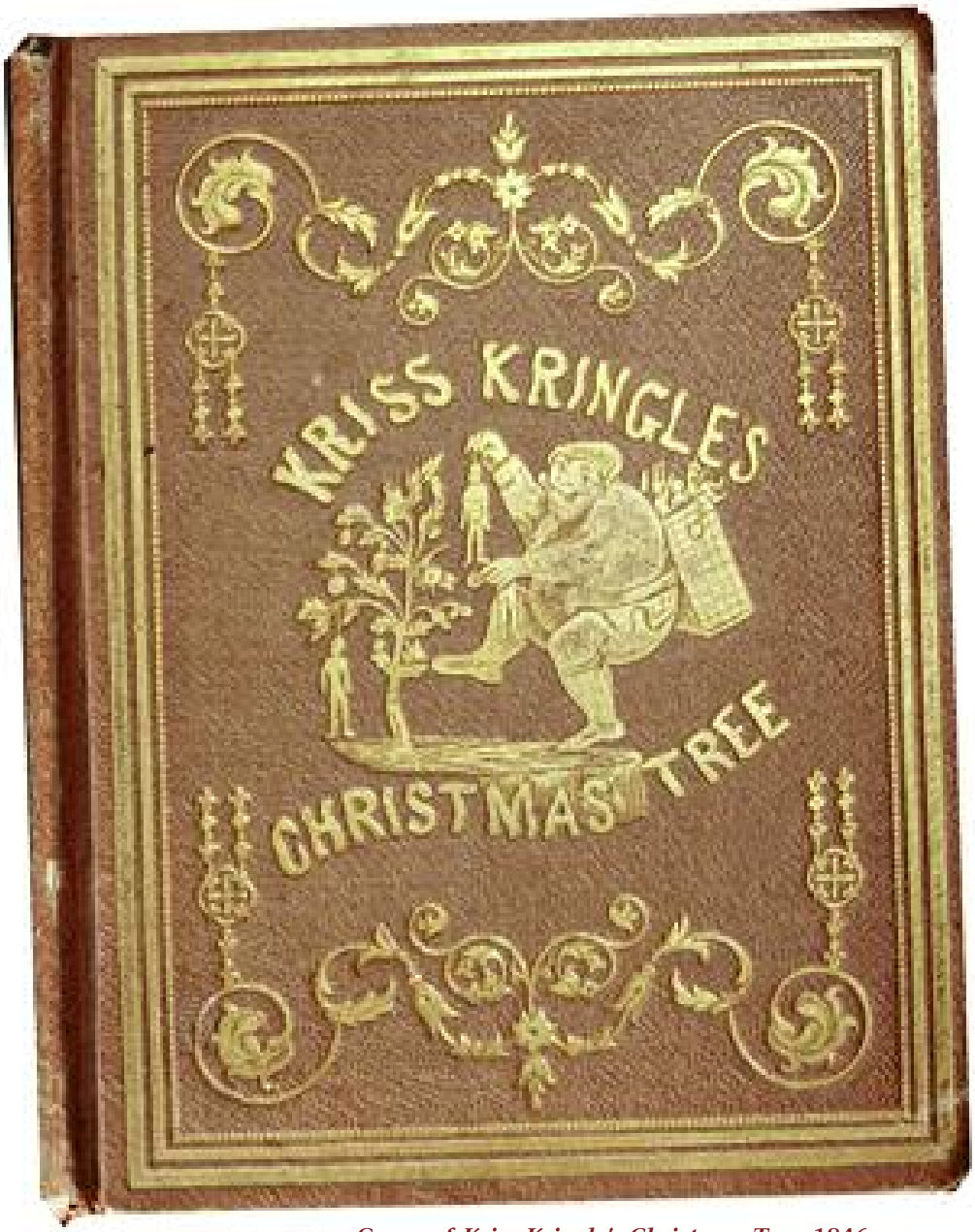
Mr. Santa Claus had remembered us or not. He was sure to do it. Candies, cakes, nuts, fruits, wax-candles, books and gifts of all sorts for juveniles were there; and though we don't care quite as much for some of these things now, as we did then, we are glad to see you enjoy them, and are happy if you are happy."[39] In the middle of the Civil War in 1863, Mr. Moravian again reiterated, "It is a season rightly devoted to childish joy. Blessed are the children who are spending a happy Christmas... [as] they sported around the Christmas-tree... . The holiest associations of childhood cluster around this Christmas festival and influences proceed from it which are never lost."[40]

The development of the American Christmas is epitomized by what many such writers as Mr. Moravian were promoting. One of them said it thusly:

Never deny the babies their Christmas! It is the shining seal set upon a year of happiness. If the preparations for it—the delicious mystery with which these are invested; the solemn parade of clean, whole stockings in the chimney corner; or the tree, decked in secret, to be revealed in glad pomp upon the festal day-if these and many other features of the anniversary are tedious or contemptible in your sight, you are an object of pity; but do not defraud your children of joys which are their right, merely because you have never tasted them. Let them believe in Santa Claus, or St. Nicholas, or Kriss Kringle, or whatever the name the jolly Dutch saint bears in your region. Some latter-day zealots, more puritanical than wise, have felt themselves called upon, in schools, and before other juvenile audiences, to deny the claims of the patron of merry Christmas to popular love and gratitude. Theirs is a thankless office; both parents and children feeling themselves to be aggrieved by the gratuitous disclosure, and this is as it should be. If it be wicked to encourage such a delusion in infant minds, it must be a transgression that leans very far indeed to virtue's side.

All honor and love to dear old Santa Claus! May his stay in our land be long, and his pack grow every year more plethoric! And when, throughout the broad earth, he shall find, on Christmas night, an entrance into every home, and every heart throbbing with joyful gratitude at the return of the blessed day that gave the Christ-child to a sinful world, the reign of the Prince of Peace shall have begun below; everywhere there shall be rendered, 'Glory to God in the highest,' and 'Good-will to men' shall be the universal law—we shall all have become as little children.[41]

This thought brings us back to the Moravian bishop Comenius's statement "The Lord himself declares 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.' Since God thus wills that children be our preceptors, we owe them the most diligent attention."[42] In addi-



Cover of *Kriss Kringle's Christmas Tree*, 1846. *Author's collection.*

tion, Comenius made another statement which the Moravians may well have taken to heart in regard to Christmas: "Parents ought to be especially careful never to allow their children to be without delights," for "the joy of the heart is the very lifespring of man."[43]

As a result of this recognition of children there was the development of a new kind of Christmas, one which centered on the family, the home, and the gifts that began to be offered as tokens of friendship and love. If happiness did not reign supreme at the hearth, which was the symbol of family bonding and togetherness, mothers were told how to achieve domestic bliss through the aforementioned religious tracts, advice books, magazines, and other publications. As the nineteenth century progressed and as fewer fathers worked at home, the mother found herself as one of the cornerstones of family life, who came to be largely responsible for the religion, culture, behavior and manners, education, clothing, food, household furnishings, and management of her children. In essence, in the burgeoning middle class she was the managing partner, as her spouse was the financial partner.[44] Expansion of education in childhood would ultimately allow adults to be better equipped to act responsibly, a desirable goal in this growing republic. Carefully molding children with positive religious principles would assure success in our democracy. Just such a foundation was exemplified in a familiar classic of the period, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, written in 1868 and set in New England during the Civil War. On Christmas, the four sisters were asked by their mother to give up their presents in recognition of the war and to take their holiday breakfast to a poor family, a type of charitable offering, which became increasingly popular in the new society. They did, in fact, each receive a gift of a small Bible tucked under their pillows, the colored covers carefully selected by their mother (beloved "Marmee") to correspond to their tastes, with a few inscribed personal words. The girls gave no gifts to each other but took their bit of money to buy or make some small tokens for their mother, which they planned to put in a basket on the table in the parlor.

Thus melds the sacred and the secular in our path to the modern day Christmas, and we

Engraved illustration from an American Tract Society publication, 1820s. ***Author's collection.***

Frolicks and Other Christmas Temptations

Succumbing to the exhilaration of hunting and other such temptations was a continual problem in Wachovia through the years. On 21 May 1806, the Elders in Salem recorded, "A public warning shall be given in all our congregations, reminding our Brethren not to go to horse races, musters, shooting matches, or frolics, with notice that failure to observe our rules will not pass unnoticed."[iv] "Frolick" (a period spelling) was a commonly used word during this period. An 1828 dictionary with a provenance from Salem described it as a wild prank, a flight of whim or gayety.[v] Frolicks took place during Christmas, as well as other times, and the mere fact that the Moravians were warning against them meant that they were being held by the outsiders all around. Examples of local frolicks included harvest corn huskings and other such farm-related activities, as well as country weddings, planned during the winter months when more leisure existed. Putting up Christmas decorations at church could even be construed as such an occasion, especially if accomplished by a group of young people of both sexes not properly chaperoned.[vi]

Consequences of participating in a frolick could be momentous for a Moravian. The Bethania Committee reported in 1816, "that the single Anton Hauser here in the village, on the second Christmas Day of the past year, took part in a Negro-frolick in this neighborhood. Hauser was excluded from the community." [vii]

MESDA's Cherry Grove Parlor.

can begin to see why a Charleston woman in 1912 called the holiday the "great domestic festival."[45] Back in Salem in the 1920s, Winifred Kirkland's book *Where the Star Still Shines*, sponsored by the Woman's Auxiliary of Home Moravian Church, invited adults to drop the "crippling pack of maturity and become once again a little child stepping along a Christmas road."[46] As a writer in the *Wachovia Moravian* stated in December 1895, "The Moravians know how to keep Christmos [*sic*]", but "the simple secret" of such a Christmas is "that the Lord Jesus Christ must have the first place in it."[47] Now, let us, too, step on the path to discover even more of the Christmas roots of the Moravian past, particularly in the South, but also to some extent in America and even Europe. During the journey we will explore some of the most loved and recognized traditions, which bring to us all "the mysterious quickening to life of...[our] buried childhood."[48]

Salem's Home Moravian Church.

Chapter 2

The Christmas Tree and the Pyramid

"a treat for our young ones with a little decorated tree"

— John and Anna Rosina Gambold,
Springplace, Georgia, Moravian Indian Mission, 24 December 1814

Moravian sister Anna Rosina Gambold recorded the first written documentation of the Christmas tree in the South on 21 December 1805, at the Moravian Indian Mission in Springplace, Georgia. She wrote: "Soon after breakfast we drove with our pupils in our cart to the Connasaga River, about 3 miles from here, to fetch a small green tree for Christmas... ." [*grune Baumchen fur Weynachten*].[1] That same year, at the beginning of Advent on December 1, Missionary Gambold remarked that the children had been asking for a long time how many Sundays there would be until Christmas and smilingly rejoiced that the number was dwindling. On Sunday the 8th there was a *Singstunde*, a song service, at the conclusion of the regular service. Then, on the 24th, "a happy lovefeast" was held at which "burning wax candles were distributed" and selected verses were sung. Spruce branches had been strewn on the floor[2] and a wreath hung in the window. Soon after breakfast on Christmas Day the children received small presents and "verses with colorful borders." On the 26th they presented to the Cherokee chief's wife, Mrs. Vann,[3] "a little painted wreath" with a text inside that read, "Unto You is born a Saviour!" During the week after Christmas "many Indians" came to look at the "Christmas decorations."[4]

The next year, again on 21 December, Sister Gambold wrote, "In the afternoon Brother Byhan went with our children on horse to fetch shrubs and little trees for the Christmas decorations. This was a delight to the children... ."[5] These shrubs would have been part of the frequently erected Moravian *Putz*[6] decoration,which included assorted greenery and the Nativity at Christmas; "the little trees" were probably intended as Christmas trees.

One wonders about the appearance of those early Christmas trees. To enhance our imagination we may consider one of the earliest pictorial depictions of an American Christmas tree created by Lewis Miller (1796-1882). Miller, a German carpenter and chronicler of people and events by his folk drawings in York, Pennsylvania, sketched a picture of Seifert, a blue dyer, with his family, and in the background was a Christmas tree, which appears to be decorated with springerle cookies and fruit, perhaps apples.[7] The date on the drawing is 1809, which would make Miller sixteen years old when he made the picture. However, he was a neighbor of Seifert at that time, and the curator of the collection of the Historical Society in York believes it to be an accurate date, although the possibility exists that Miller may have drawn the picture later, as part of his reminiscing collection of "a looking glass for the mind."[8]

Another source sets the date for the Miller drawing between 1819 and 1821.[9] Regardless of the exact date, it does afford a visual rendering of an early American Christmas tree, such as the Gambolds might have put up at Springplace.

There is a lapse of some years before the mention by Gambold of the next reference to a decorated tree in Georgia, which appeared on 24 December 1814. The translation from the old German script of this document reads as follows: "Soon after the service [which was held in the evening] the party left Brother and Sister Gambold's to go to our Brother's house where Gonstadi had prepared a treat for our young ones with a little decorated tree, [*mit einem gepuzten Baumchen*] and we sang as if with one heart and mouth, 'I will rejoice in God my Saviour!'"[10] Gonstadi was a young boy of about five who had been brought by his father to be educated at the mission. A child of this age would probably have been guided in such a decorating project by his teacher. The "Brother" was probably John Gambold's brother Joseph, and the reason that they went to his house was to keep the tree a complete surprise in order to heighten the drama until the moment of revelation. The dramatic unveiling of Christmas trees was common behavior at that time.

One may well ask why the Gambolds instituted the use of Christmas trees at the Georgia Moravian mission. The Reverend John Gambold (1760-1827) and his wife Anna Rosina Kliest (1762-1821) were the couple in charge of the mission at Springplace beginning in 1805 and were devoted to service in God's kingdom. They had both been part of the Moravian community of Bethlehem, and he maintained close connections as well in Nazareth, Lititz, Salem, and Wachovia. The founders of these communities had ties to Germany where the birth and death of Jesus had long been honored with visual images. The upper Rhineland is thought to be the source of the first European Christmas trees.[11] The Moravians in Bethlehem may have had the first Christmas tree in America. For a synod in 1748 the church minutes described a lovefeast for the children in October, which included what appeared to be a Christmas-like tree. At that church meeting in the Saal (meeting hall and chapel) of the Single Brothers' House there was a green tree from which hung gifts of apples and Bible verses for the boys and girls of the congregation.[12] If such decorations were used for a synod lovefeast in October, then they were undoubtedly used for Christmas as well. The Gambolds were simply following such beloved traditions for festive occasions at Springplace.

Embellished wreath from Springplace Moravian Indian Mission, 1807-13. *OSMG*.

The Gambolds of Springplace

To better understand the undertaking of the Gambolds at the Springplace Moravian Indian Mission, one may read the comments of distinguished scholar Henry Steinhauer who was head of the Fulneck school in England to train the ministry and was then principal of the Young Ladies' Seminary in Bethlehem. Steinhauer wrote:

The indefatigable exertions of Brother Gambold and his wife are almost beyond credit. Besides providing food, raiment, shelter and fuel for themselves and their scholars, attending to the school daily, acting as advisers and physicians to the whole neighborhood, entertaining every visitor—and they are numerous who draw on their hospitality—writing letters, and on Sundays teaching, admonishing, etc., they find time, even, to oblige their friends in various ways.[i]

Steinhauer went on to marvel at the ability of Sister Gambold to reply to his request for "botanical products" by sending "between twelve and fourteen hundred specimens of dried plants, besides near a hundred packets of seeds, several minerals, specimens of all the Indian manufactures of cane, etc. and a number of other curiosities," with apologies for not having done more.[ii] His opinion was that it represented at least a half year's work "for one person's undivided attention, under the most favorable circumstances. And yet this person, banished as she is from civilized society, cheerfully laboring year after year with scarcely any promise of success, yet undauntedly persevering was the first teacher in the Bethlehem Young Ladies' Seminary, and seemed its main support... ."[iii]

Anna Rosina took her study of natural history seriously and valued her collection. After her death, Reverend J. R. Schmidt wrote to Salem from Springplace to say that "Anna Rosel" (an endearing moniker) had given him her botanical collection, and he intended to apportion it along with some of his own additions to three people: Von Schweiniz (a noted botanist) and Van Vleck in Salem and Huffel in Bethlehem.[iv]

In a similar testimonial, Correa de Serra, Portuguese minister to the United States and a "distinguished naturalist and linguist" himself, spent a day and night in Springplace and wrote in a letter:

Judge of my surprise, in the midst of the wilderness, to find a botanic garden, not indeed like that at Paris, or yours at Kew; but a botanic garden, containing many exotic and medicinal plants, the professor, Mrs. Gambold, describing them by their Linnean[v] *names... . I there saw the sons of a Cherokee Regulus learning their lesson, and reading their New Testament in the morning and drawing and painting in the afternoon, though to be sure, in a very Cherokee style; and assisting Mrs. Gambold in her household work or Mr. Gambold in planting corn.*[vi]

Embellished wreath from Springplace Moravian Indian Mission, 1807-13. *OSMG*.

John Gambold had written after his wife's death, "We could hardly do without her and a Sister will never be found again who works with such engagement for the salvation of the poor Indians. I love the Indians sincerely. She too."[vii] He was never able to write her *Lebenslauf* (Memoir),[viii] although former pupils like John Ridge wrote from Connecticut to ask about a published testimonial of her life.[ix]

Watercolor of girls and teachers at the Bethlehem Girls' School presenting a program, 1801. *Courtesy of the Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.*

Anna Rosina Gambold, a rare person for any era and truly a woman for all seasons, was a gifted teacher who enjoyed using imaginative, inventive tools in her roles as innovative leader, linguist, naturalist, and botanist, so it is not surprising that she would choose the Christmas tree for the pleasure of her students in Georgia. While "principal tutoress" at the girls' boarding school in Bethlehem, Sister Gambold was "willing at all times to vary the monotony of its routine by the offerings of her fertile inventions."[13] She was described as having a "superior facility in oral instruction,"[14] and was "sprightly...in fancy and imagination."[15] Leaving the comforts of Bethlehem for the wilderness, she married late in life, at the age of 43, greatly attracted by the idea of being a missionary to the Cherokees with her new husband.

Sister Gambold brought considerable talent to the mission all year long but most particularly at Christmas. One of her specialities was the creation of little painted flower wreaths into which she printed verses from the Bible, a task in which her husband sometimes assisted. Indeed, they were unique, as Brother Gambold referred once in a letter to the "verses with the Springplace borders."[16] However, the idea of creating small paintings as gifts and tokens of remembrance was not unique to Springplace. Old Salem Museums & Gardens' Paula Locklair wrote that there was "a distinctive body of work...produced in Salem in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."[17] Such paintings also existed in Pennsylvania. Did Anna Gambold teach the children to create these little wreath-encircled verses as gifts to their parents and friends? Certainly, drawing and writing were part of a child's education. Henry Steinhauer from Bethlehem remarked once after a visit to

Springplace that he saw the Cherokee boys studying and reading the New Testament in the morning, and "drawing and painting in the afternoon, though to be sure, in a very Cherokee style."[18] That the wreaths were produced with certain identifiable characteristics such as distinctive borders is testified by Anna's husband John in 1813 when he remarked on the gifts to the children of "the Christmas wreaths painted by a well-known hand with verses written on them... ."[19] The little paintings were given as gifts and as reminders of the Savior's love for His children, and they were treasured by the recipients, old and young, who kept them from one year to the next, often bringing them back to the Christmas service and reciting them from memory. As incentive, the wreaths were withheld from those who showed apathy to God's word.[20] Thus, rewards for good behavior helped in producing tangible results.

Christmas at the mission at this time included "a public examination in Bible and Christian Doctrine"[21] and awards, which probably included these delicate paper treasures. Whether the children executed wreaths or other designs of their own imagination, some were obviously well done, as the Gambolds sent samples of artwork of a boy named Darcheechy to the Superintendent of Indian Trade, in Washington, D.C. in 1817.[22] To their gratification, Superintendent Thomas McKenney responded with a gift to the mission of $100 and to the boy "a box of crayons [pastels] and brushes and a very elegant penknife."[23]

Such wreaths could have been used to decorate the Springplace Christmas trees. This speculation is based on a letter from the Gambolds to Christian Benzien in Salem about a birthday party at the mission on 15 August 1810, where water-colored wreaths were fastened on a white cloth on a wall as part of the festive decoration, along with greens and flowers. The honoree had received the painted wreaths "for her Christmas and birthdays since our being here... ."[24] Although we do not know exactly how the Springplace Christmas trees were decorated, Anna Gambold's mention of flowers as decorations on 25 December 1807 provides another possibility. She wrote that in the children's house they had "made a putz from pine branches and had tied little flowers onto it."[25] As a botanist, Anna had collected hundreds of specimens from the area, so even if nothing was blooming in December she may have had dried specimens. Flowers were often used as Christmas decorations.[26] See Chapter Three for other related references to their use.

The beautifully executed wreaths combined the words of the Gospel with small flowers and apples from God's own hands along with perhaps a few candles to represent Christ as the light of the world—what better decorations could the devout sister have desired for the little trees!

After Anna's death of dropsy of the chest (heart edema) in 1821, the new mission leader, the Reverend J. R. Schmidt, wrote to Salem to reiterate the importance of the little decorated wreaths. He emphasized this pressing matter well ahead of time in anticipation of Christmas that year.

I almost forgot an important request. It is customary here [illegible]...Christmas Eve for the people [illegible]...are distributed. Now dear Anna Rosel, who made the [wreaths] is not here any more. Perhaps our dear Brother Van Vleck would be so good as to make a request for us in the boarding school. Perhaps the pupils will feel moved and make us about 150 wreaths for here and Oochgelogee [a nearby newly created mission where widower John Gambold had moved]. The Savior will bless them for this, and it brings great joy to our dear ones here.[27]

There is a possibility that a Christmas tree existed in Salem as early as 1786, nineteen years before Anna Rosina Gambold erected the Springplace Mission Christmas tree. A brotherly dispute reported in the church records in Salem on 27 December 1786, reads: "Br. Schnepff complained that last Sunday, during preaching, John Tesch, the apprentice of Charles Holder, cut a small pine tree in his field which he [Schnepff] had been taking special care of. John Tesch shall be asked whether he was told to cut this particular tree, for Holder has said he had sent for one from the woods."[28] This complaint was registered on a Wednesday, two days after Christmas, and referred to an incident taking place on Sunday (Christmas Eve), which was when Christmas trees were generally put up at that time. Dr. Adelaide Fries, editor of the Moravian *Records* and a church archivist who translated more material from Wachovia church records than any other person, append-

ed a footnote to this quote, stating that the cutting of a tree on Christmas Eve produced the assumption that it was a Christmas tree, and therefore "the first mentioned in the Salem records."[29] The statement is hard to dispute, because with all the trees available at the time, it is peculiarly relevant that this one was of such great importance to these two men on that particular day, unless they both recognized it as a perfect specimen for a Christmas tree. Unfortunately, nowhere does anyone refer to the tree specifically as a Christmas tree.

Strongly related to Christmas trees were conical-shaped decorations known as pyramids. Some scholars have cited pyramids erected on 25 December 1747 and 1748, by the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Moravians as the "first Christmas trees" in America.[30] However, those pyramids were not actual trees, but triangular structures probably created with sticks of wood and greenery. Nevertheless, their appearance was quite similar to a Christmas tree. A more detailed discussion of the pyramid is given later in this chapter.

In contrast to the Moravian pyramid citations by some scholars and the circumstantial evidence for southern Christmas trees already presented, noted Christmas historian Alfred Shoemaker established the date of 1821 in Pennsylvania as the earliest mention of a Christmas tree in this country. His reference is from the diary of Lancaster resident Matthew Zahm, who recorded that on 20 December three young people were "out for Christmas trees" on a nearby hill.[31]

Although apparently unaware of the Springplace references, Shoemaker did, nevertheless, acknowledge that there had been "no greater celebrators of Christmas...than the Moravians" in Pennsylvania...who "were among the very first to put up Christmas trees."[32] He cited an article of 1855 in an Easton newspaper in which "the inhabitants of Bethlehem...are chiefly noted for their great taste they display in arranging Christmas trees."[33] His validation continued with the statement that "The Moravians made more of Christmas than any other religious denomination in this country—from colonial times on."[34] It is important to reiterate that Anna Rosina Gambold, who put up the first Christmas tree in Springplace, Georgia, in 1805, came out of the Bethlehem environment.

Undoubtedly, trees were in some Salem homes as early as they were in Bethlehem. However, to date, the following is the earliest written specific domestic

"Christmas Eve" by John Lewis Krimmel, 1812-13. ***Courtesy of The Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.***

"Christmas Tree, 1809," from the Journal of Lewis Miller, vol. I, p. 16. *Collection of the York County Heritage Trust, York, PA.*

reference so far found to a Christmas tree in Wachovia. In Salem in 1861, Caroline "Carrie" Fries noted in her diary on 24 December: "We fitted the tree tonight."[35] The next day Carrie wrote: "Loula [her two-year-old sister Louise Sarah] went down stairs for the first time to see the tree...Mother and I went to the Christmas dialogue and were quite well pleased."[36] This is a very matter-of-fact reference alluding to what appears to be a commonplace custom in Salem by 1861, which is as one would expect, given the close connection to Pennsylvania where trees were widely used in the 1840s.

Caroline noted on 24 December 1862: "Mary John and I went to church, and afterwards we filled the tree."[37] The choice of the word "filling" the tree indicates placement of the gifts on the tree in the German manner. "Filling" is synonymous with other commonly used period terms of "dressing," "fitting," or "fixing" the tree.[38]

Another lengthy reference to a Christmas tree in the Fries family was in 1864 in a letter from Mary Fries Patterson at Palmyra Plantation on the Yadkin River to her sister Carrie in Salem.

We moved the little bed away from the window, in Mother's room, & put the tree in its place... . A large white pine stands in front of the window, which tips over at the ceiling 'in German style' & extends to the bureaus on either side.—At its base is a large hill with a spring & pond & covered with most beautiful mountain moss... . You know I gave out no presents when I came up, but hung them all on the tree. It is quite loaded for wartimes & looks very pretty.[39]

The implication here appears to be that before "wartimes" the tree was decorated more extravagently. As to the "tipping over at the ceiling," there is a colored ink drawing of Zinzendorf's coffin in the salon of the Herrnhut manor house in 1760 in which two evergreen trees droop gracefully from the top to form almost an arch as the background.[40] The landscape "decoration" at the base of the Patterson tree is the *Putz*, so frequently mentioned in Moravian descriptions of Christmas and one that usually includes the Nativity. In an article on "Moravian Customs," written in 1936 by Adelaide Fries,[41] she noted that the *Putz*, sometimes called "a Christmas garden," was arranged around the bottom or beside the Christmas tree in Moravian homes, thus uniting two binding symbols of the holy day. This

concept of a "garden" may explain the frequent placement of a fence around the tree, as depicted in John Lewis Krimmel's drawings and elsewhere.[42]

Other historians have recognized the lavishness of German settlers in "providing Christmas trees for the amusement of the young folks."[43] In so doing, the celebration gradually moved from public to private and by the mid-nineteenth century focused on the children in the home as the primary theme within the family.[44]

European Roots of the Christmas Tree

The European roots of the Christmas tree are not easy to identify, but most certainly the trails lead to the Germans. Folk legends intermingle with the facts, and there are many conflicting speculations. An eighth-century legend of the Christmas tree's origins concerns St. Boniface, who was an English missionary to the Germans. The story, which in different sources varies in the details, tells of his coming upon a group of pagans ready to make a human sacrifice in front of an oak tree. He struck the huge tree with such force that it fell with one blow, impressing and instantly converting the pagans to Christianity. Then pointing to a small evergreen fir tree, the saint suggested it as a fitting symbol of their new faith.[45]

According to another source the use of fir trees supposedly helped make the custom more acceptable for Christianity. The story is set in the Garden of Eden when Eve bit into the apple, at which time the leaves of Christmas trees became sharp needles and the fruit hard cones. On the night of Christ's birth, however, fir trees bloomed and produced fruit and flowers together—clearly a miraculous event.[46]

In the tenth century other stories were told of trees miraculously blooming at Christmas. One was the Glastonbury hawthorn, which was said to have been brought to England in the first century by Joseph of Arimathea.[47]

The custom of cutting branches of flower- and fruit-bearing trees to bring indoors and force into bloom for Christmas became widespread in Europe by the late Middle Ages. Some people brought into the house cherry tree branches on St. Barbara's Day (4 December) to force blooms by Christmas. These were then sometimes decorated. The cherry thus connected to this saint's day is still one of the folk symbols used to decorate springerle cookies.[48] These anise-flavored cakes were impressed with motifs from a mold or a carved rolling pin and then enhanced with colored icings. They made excellent Christmas tree decorations. The reader will find further mention of cookies in Chapter Five.

A related German legend about the Christmas tree was that of a poor, ill-clothed child

Rolling pin for springerle cookies by John Vogler, nineteenth century. *OSMG*.

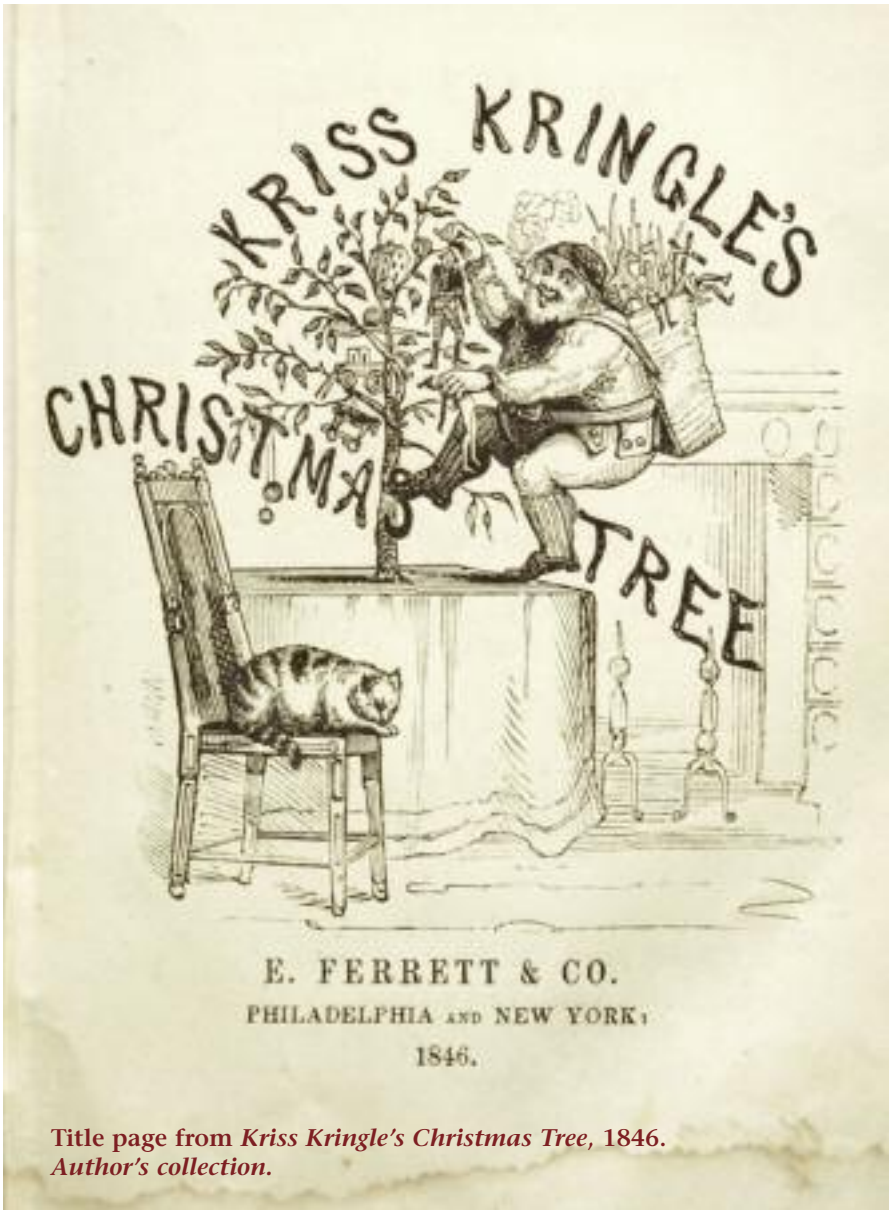
appearing at the door of a woodcutter and his wife to ask for help one bone-chilling night. The next morning their little guest revealed himself as the Christ child and presented them with a twig from a fir tree to plant and blossom yearly thereafter. To their amazement it took root and grew into a splendid fir tree adorned with gold and silver apples and nuts. Each year thereafter it miraculously bloomed at Christmas.[49]

A mid-nineteenth-century legend, particularly popular with Lutherans, concerned Martin Luther. This story was fostered by a fictional painting depicting the Luther family with a Christmas tree in the sixteenth century. Luther was said to have been walking out under the stars on Christmas Eve when he had the idea of affixing candles to a little fir tree that he brought into the parlor to provide a symbol to his children of Christ as the light of the world.[50]

The most plausible explanation of the origin of the early Christmas tree dates from the late Middle Ages (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) when the Catholic Church used enactments called miracle plays or "Moralities" to teach the mostly illiterate parishioners certain Bible stories.[51] A popular scene depicted the Garden of Eden in which a fir tree hung with apples as a symbol of human sin was used to present the story of Adam and Eve driven from paradise, but always with the promise of redemption at the end. On the Church calendar, 24 December was the special saints' day for Adam and Eve. Thus, long after the plays ceased to be performed, the symbolism of the paradise tree and eternal life remained in the minds of certain people at this time of year, and they began to erect similar trees in their homes. As late as the nineteenth century in some sections of Germany "figures of Adam and Eve and the serpent" were sometimes placed under the "Tree of Life," or *Christbaum* (Christ Tree), as it often came to be called.[52]

An ancient Celtic custom of tree worship manifested in the custom of maypoles as the forerunner of a Christmas "May Pole," was used particularly by Germans from the Palatinate and Alsace. Many American Moravians came from the Palatinate. This Christmas maypole evolved into a limb set in a tub and decorated with such items as apples, wafers, honey cakes, and perhaps marzipan or other sugary treats.[53]

Many scholars believe that the lavish use of greenery by the Romans in the celebrations of Saturnalia, Kalends, and such rites as the winter solstice at the end of the year established a precedent for the Christmas tree. Greenery represented eternal life and the promise of rebirth in the midst of a seemingly endless, cold, and lifeless season. Thus, magical properties were attributed to the greens, and they also helped to dispel the gloom of winter when days were short and sunshine minimal. Branches and then trees were hung upside down from the ceiling beams. This centuries-old folk custom of hang-



Title page from *Kriss Kringle's Christmas Tree*, 1846. *Author's collection.*

ing decorated trees upside down continued in Germany into the nineteenth century.

Christmas scholars do not agree on what is the first documented reference to a Christmas tree. Phillip Snyder notes that the earliest historical references to Christmas trees appeared in Latvia and Estonia where in two different towns, one in 1510 and the other in 1514, it was recorded "on Christmas Eve, after a festive dinner, black-hatted...merchants carried an evergreen tree decorated with artificial roses to the marketplace" where they danced around it and then set fire to it.[54] Whether this scene describes a pagan rite or a celebration with the revered tree burned as a sign of respect, we will never know.

Twentieth-century Thanksgiving postcard. ***Author's collection.***

Whatever its exact origin, the tree is widely accepted as a German-developed tradition. In 1531 in Alsace, Christmas trees were purchased at the market in Strasbourg to be set up in homes undecorated. Curiously, in the same area in 1561, an ordinance was passed that no individual "shall have for Christmas more than one bush of more than eight shoe lengths."[55] Whether this was to encourage conservation or limit iconic representations for the solemn holy day is unknown.

There is a citation of a decorated tree (*Dattelbaumchen*) in a guild hall in Protestant Germany in 1570. The custom may have spread and become popular from such municipal celebrations. The decorations on that tree consisted of dates (*datteln*), apples, pretzels, nuts, and paper flowers. The tree was shaken by children on Christmas Day or Twelfth Night in order to obtain the goodies.[56] Twelfth Night, also called Epiphany, celebrated the coming of the Magi to Bethlehem.

An English visitor to Strasbourg in 1605 spoke of "fir trees set up and hung with paper roses of many different colors and with apples, flat wafers, gilded candies, and sugar."[57] The flat wafers were related to the communion host, a symbol of the body of Christ, and so a wafer-decorated tree was termed a *Christbaum,* or Christ Tree. A tree with edible ornaments, such as cookies and candies, was sometimes also called a "sugartree."[58] The rose was a symbol of beauty and love and in Christian art represented the Virgin Mary.[59] Gilded decorations, including fruit, nuts, cakes, and even on one occasion potatoes, were popular for centuries.[60]

As Christianity replaced pagan religions, people, especially in northern Europe, continued to use evergreens for special occasions, although the Catholic

Church in particular sought to discourage this carryover practice before finally embracing it by reinterpreting it as a Christian custom. Eventually the tree, so ensconced in German culture, became transformed into a Christian symbol, but not with the approval of everyone. In about the middle of the seventeenth century, a Strasbourg theologian spoke of "the Christmas- or fir-tree, which people set up in their houses, hang with dolls and sweets, and afterwards shake and deflower." He did not approve and thought they were "far better...to point the children to the spiritual cedar-tree, Jesus Christ."[61]

At about the same time the English Puritans who came to America did not approve of Christmas pageantry either. They were reacting to the carnival-like atmosphere of sometimes sinful and lewd behavior, a significant degeneracy that had developed at Christmas in England, which was represented by the verse, "Let's dance and sing, and make good chear, For Christmas comes but once a year."[62] An English almanac publication called *Poor Robin* in 1702 wrote of the change there in Christmas celebrations during the Reformation, which ultimately limited the festivities and decorations in New England for a longer period than in the rest of the country.

Although Prince Albert, the German husband of Queen Victoria, is credited with bringing the Christmas tree to England and making it fashionable, a member of the court recalled a tree in 1800 in the lodge of Queen Charlotte, who was also German.[64] He wrote, "In the middle of the room stood an immense tub with a yew tree placed in it, from the branches of which hung bunches of sweetmeats, almonds, and raisins in papers, fruits, and toys, most tastefully arranged, and the whole illuminated by small wax candles."[65]

But now landlords and tenants too
In making feasts are very slow;
One in an age, or near so far,
Or one perhaps each blazing star;
The cook now and the butler too,
Have little or nothing for to do;
And fiddlers who used to get scraps,
Now cannot fill their hungry chaps;
Yet some true English blood still lives,
Who gifts to the poor at Christmas gives,
And to their neighbors make a feast,
I wish their number were increast,
And that their stock may never decay,
Christmas may come again in play,
And poor man keep it holyday.[63]

Prince Albert's trees were decorated with small containers of expensive sweets of all kinds, including gilded gingerbread and sugared fruits. In 1848 an engraving appeared in the *Illustrated London News* of the royal family around the tree. Two years later the same engraving, but without the royal trappings, appeared in America in *Godey's Lady's Book*. Its influence was unmistakable. Sarah Josepha Hale, the publication's energetic editor, had long campaigned for the recognition of Thanksgiving as a national holiday, and a Christmas holiday was another of her top priorities for American families. Using her influence she published stories on the Christmas tree in 1853, 1855, and 1860.[66] In the latter, for the first time in print, "a floor tree in a domestic setting" appeared.[67]

The redemptive story of Scrooge and Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), created by the popular English writer Charles Dickens, had a profound effect on the development of Christmas. Some years later in 1850, Dickens described a laden tree, which he called a "pretty German toy," for a magazine article:

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 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, wardrobes, eight-day clocks and various other articles of domestic furniture (wonderfully made in tin) 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 sugarplums; there were fiddles and drums; there were tambourines, books, work boxes, paint boxes; there were trinkets for the elder girls, far brighter than any grown-up gold and jewels; there were baskets and pin cushions in all devices; there were guns, swords and banners; there were witches standing in enchanted rings of pasteboard, to tell fortunes; there were teetotums [a child's toy similar to a top but spun by the fingers instead of string], humming tops, needle cases, pen wipers, smelling bottles, conversation cards, bouquet holders, real fruit, made artificially dazzling with gold leaf; imitation apples, pears, walnuts, crammed with surprises; in short...everything, and more.[68]

Although Dickens's stories attracted much attention to the spirit of Christmas and to the Christmas tree, the Moravians, as we have already observed, made use of Christmas symbolism much earlier. Former Salem schoolteacher Peter Wolle, living in Lititz, Pennsylvania in 1828, wrote: "Our little Christmas tree

Cover of *The Christmas Tree* by Hans Christian Andersen, nineteenth century. *Author's collection.*

draws considerable attention and was visited by a good many friends."[69]

The Christmas Tree In Early America

The novelty of a "famous Christmas tree"[70] attracted attention, as Peter Wolle observed, and some enterprising people began to exhibit one to raise money for charity. One such group was the Dorcas Society of York, Pennsylvania, in 1830. This association of charity-minded women, also organized later in Salem, may have displayed the first public tree in this country. The profits from the sale of a ticket for six and 1/4 cents would provide clothing for "the poor widow and the friendless orphan."[71] Similarly, later in Salem in 1885, the Reverend Edward Rondthaler made an observation on "...the poor children's Christmas tree, for which as an experiment very poor children were gathered from far and near."[72]

Christmas scholar, Dr. Alfred Shoemaker, portrayed Pennsylvania as richly decorated with trees by the 1840s:

In the 1840s the Christmas tree began to become more or less commonplace. Literary pieces, alluding to the custom of putting up trees at Christmas, began to appear with some regularity each returning Christmas season. The very popular, and widely advertised children's book, Kriss Kringle's Christmas Tree, *published in 1845 in Philadelphia, brought a pictorial representation and knowledge of the Christmas tree and Kriss Kringle to children all over the nation. Trees started going up everywhere in the state, from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh.*[73]

The editor of the *Kriss Kringle* book prefaced the 1846 edition with what is curiously called an "Advertisement," which it certainly was! He wrote:

Fashions change, and of late Christmas Trees are becoming more common than in former times. The practice of hanging up stockings in the chimney corner for Kriss Kringle to fill with toys, pretty books, bonbons, &c., for good children, and rods for naughty children, is being superseded by that of placing a Christmas tree on the table to await the annual visit of the worthy Santa Klaus. He has, with his usual good nature, accommodated himself to this change in the popular taste; and having desired a literary gentleman to prepare his favourite Christmas present in accordance with this state of things, the following volume is the result of the new arrangement, and all parents, guardians, uncles, aunts, and cousins, who are desirous to conform to the most approved fashion, will take care to hang one, two, or a dozen copies of the book on their Christmas Tree for 1846.[74]

Most people, particularly in rural areas cut their own trees. It is interesting to note for those who did not cut their own, Christmas trees were on sale in Philadelphia markets as early as 1848.[75] In 1851, entrepreneur Mark Carr from the Catskill Mountains brought the first trees to Washington Market in New York City and thus created instant success and the beginning of that city's ongoing holiday tradition.[76]

In Charleston, South Carolina, in 1850, a lighted tree was arranged for Jenny Lind, the famous singer called the "Swedish Nightingale," who toured the country sponsored by P. T. Barnum.[77] Some ladies of the city

saw to it that the tree under her window was illuminated on Christmas Eve.[78] One of Jenny Lind's friends was Hans Christian Andersen, a Dane who became known as the father of the modern fairy tale. Five years before Lind was in South Carolina, Andersen had produced a story, translated variously as "The Christmas Tree," or "The Little Fir Tree," which became very popular in the moralistic literature of the times and was included in numerous children's publications, along with another of his poignant Christmas tales, "The Little Match Girl." Andersen's fairy tales often depicted characters who find happiness in life (or at the end of it) only after adversity. In "The Christmas Tree," the little fir tree longs for recognition and fame reaching far beyond its tranquil forest home. Sadly, the moment of glory and adornment for which it had yearned soon passes, and its final humiliation is to be burned to ashes, leaving only the overlooked gold star that crowned its peak on the happiest day of its life.[79]

Along with stories like Andersen's, American newspapers and magazines such as *Harper's Weekly, Godey's Lady's Book, Good Housekeeping, Ladies Home Journal*, and *Peterson's National Ladies Magazine* all helped to spread knowledge of the custom of erecting and decorating a Christmas tree. As a telling example, Mahala Eggleston, a niece of Jefferson Davis who had married James Roach and lived in the Vicksburg, Mississippi, area, wrote in her diary of Christmas in 1851: "The children had such a number of gifts that I made a Christmas tree for them; Mother, Aunt and Liz came down to see it; all said it was something new to them. I never saw one *but learned from some of the German stories I had been reading*" [author's emphasis].[80]

Many other Americans learned from newspaper and magazine articles about important citizens' Christmas celebrations. Former

Although decorations called the Putz *along with green trees had long been used in the Moravians' Springplace Indian Mission, in Bethlehem, and in Wachovia, the official Moravian* Records *first began to mention Christmas trees at church in Wachovia in the 1870s.*

President Andrew Jackson, who is said to have loved Christmas, had a pine tree frosted and encircled with little flavored ice animals in 1835.[81] In 1856, President Franklin Pierce (1853-57) from New Hampshire had the first Christmas tree set up in the White House.[82] During his presidency, Teddy Roosevelt (1858-1919) banned a tree at the White House for reasons of ecological conservation, but his determined son Archie revealed to the family a little Christmas tree secreted in a closet on one Christmas, thus embarrassing his father and prompting a lecture, but not changing the presidential mind.[83] Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) was the first president to preside over a "national Christmas tree ceremony" on 24 December 1913, and Calvin Coolidge (1872-1933) initiated the first official lighting of such a tree in 1923.[84] During the Second World War from 1942 to 1945 there were no official trees in Washington. A "Pageant of Peace" was attached to the ceremony "after the Korean War"[85] and has since then been introduced sometime each year well before the traditional Christmas Eve. In recent years, Old Salem Museum & Gardens has joined in the national celebration by contributing handmade ornaments to be placed on one of the outdoor trees for this pageant.

A Christian newsletter speculates that American culture was so influenced by the Puritans' negativity towards the desecration of the holy day of Christmas that there were only eighteen states that officially recognized Christmas by the 1860s.[86] When that happened, the first states to legally acknowledge the day were southern—Alabama in 1836, followed by Arkansas and Louisiana in 1838. Surprisingly, Pennsylvania waited until 1848, perhaps due to its many Quaker citizens. North Carolina adopted the official holiday in 1881.

It was sometimes at a Sunday School gathering that American children had their first introduction to the Christmas tree. Although Sunday Schools, a nineteenth-century phenomena in America, embraced the Christmas tree, it was not without heated opposition. The earliest schools to adopt the custom in the 1840s and 1850s usually charged admission to the festivals and used the money for supplies. In 1840, a newspaper reported at a German Protestant Church in Rochester, New York, that on Christmas evening the children celebrated "according to the custom of the Old Country"[87] with a religious exercise and an evergreen tree of ten to twelve feet high, "brilliantly illuminated and adorned with a great variety of toys and sweetmeats suspended from the branches."[88] However, in Puritan-influenced New England, as a carry-over from the Reformation, Christmas was still a workday for the common man in

Young people sledding in Salem's God's Acre, c. 1885. *OSHPC.*

1855, and in Boston in 1870 school children were in class on December 25.[89]

Although decorations called the *Putz* along with green trees had long been used in the Moravians' Springplace Indian Mission, in Bethlehem, and in Wachovia, the official Moravian *Records* first began to mention Christmas trees at church in Wachovia in the 1870s. This does not necessarily mean that there were no local Christmas trees earlier. It could be that either certain diarists did not consider such decorations worthy of mention in the records or that perhaps they were so commonplace as to need no mention. In Salem in 1871, there was a Christmas concert given by the Sunday School, and Albert Oerter described the sanctuary: "A large Christmas tree had been erected on the platform, the pulpit having been removed. It reached up to the keystone of the arch behind the pulpit, and was decorated and hung with numerous ornaments and beautifully illuminated with wax candles."[90] In 1874, the Bethania decoration included "finely proportioned" pine trees decorated "with bright gilt and other coloured paper and illuminated with wax tapers as Christmas trees."[91]

In Salem at the African American Church, St. Philips, a tree was noted on 25 December 1874: "A Christmas tree occupied the platform before the pulpit."[92] Trees were also mentioned in 1872, 1873, 1875, and 1876; on the fourth occasion "it was lit up."[93] On Christmas Day in 1879, "the church had a large [illegible: tree?] which was [illegible: laden?] with gifts for the children."[94]

By the 1870s, many American Sunday Schools had joined the Moravians in celebrating Christmas with gifts and trees as the centerpiece of the event. Mississippian Mahala Roach noted as early as 1860 that her family went "to the Episcopal Church to see the Christmas tree for the Sunday School (both white and black)."[95]

By the late 1800s, descriptions proliferated of trees for the children at Moravian churches. In 1897, in Friedland near Salem at the close of the Sunday School exercises, "the Christmas tree was made bare of its contents."[96] In other years, trees were mentioned in Bethania, at Mt. Bethel, and at Carmel where "a beautiful Christmas tree graced the occasion heavily laden with candies, apples and many other presents which were distributed."[97] In 1898 at Wachovia's

Christ Church for the Sunday School entertainment, volunteers created a vignette of a room in readiness for Christmas. Curtains were drawn from across the platform at the front where was revealed the "interior of an old fashioned room on Christmas night. Over the fireplace hung the filled stockings; near by was a cradle with its sleeping dolls; and in the opposite corner stood a lighted Christmas tree."[98]

The students at the Salem Girls' School were not overlooked at Christmas, as the following description attests:

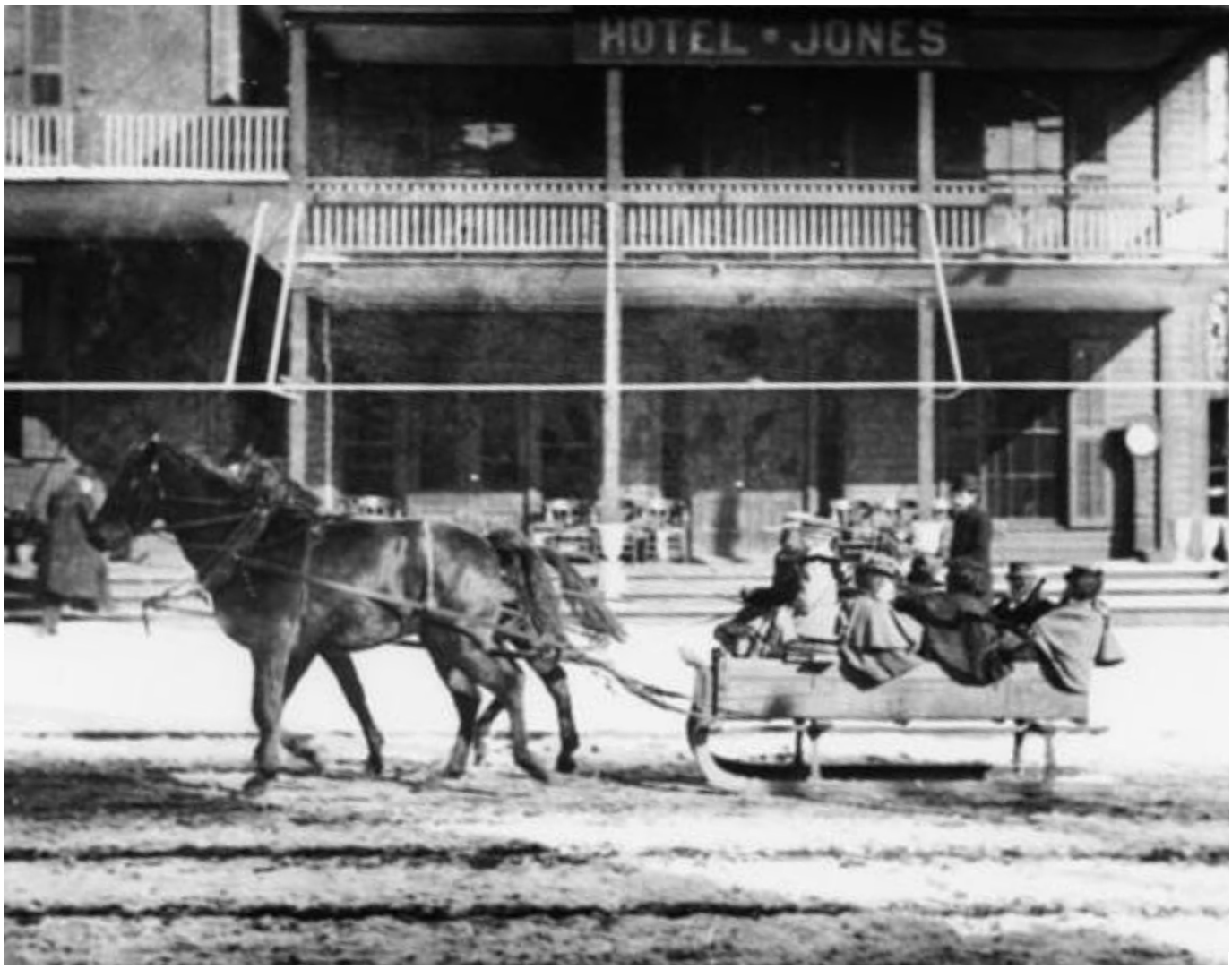
On Christmas morning we girls, usually so sleepy, needed no second warning to make us quit our comfortable beds, but were up and dressed in a twinkling. We made our way down stairs in the grey dawn of the early morning, to find our rooms resplendent. The Christmas trees, which had been placed in every room, were brilliantly illuminated, and on all of our desks were lighted tapers and curious looking bundles. [99]

By 1885, for those who remained at school, there were sleigh rides while covered with buffalo robes, and "richly filled boxes, Christmas trees, surprises given and received".[100] In 1886, there was a Christmas tree flanked by "two pyramidal transparencies" in the church for the Sunday School cantata.[101] "Most of the dwelling-rooms had trees, and evergreens wreathed around the pictures, nothing more."[102]

A Salem resident spent Christmas Eve of 1936 in Herrnhut, Germany, and described the evening service at the church with "two large fir trees... adorned with lights" flanking the pulpit. Afterwards the minister's family celebrated with "a large tree all alight with candles." They sang Christmas carols, opened their presents, and had refreshments.[103] In Germany the typical pattern was, and to some extent still is, to gather on the night of Christmas Eve for the opening of presents around a candlelit tree.[104]

The Pyramid

Earlier in this chapter the pyramid, described in both 1747 and 1748 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was mentioned as



Salem Girls' School students riding in a sleigh, c. 1894. *OSHPC*.

Four-tiered pyramid from Erzgebirge, Germany, 1910-20. *Collection of the Old Salem Toy Museum (hereafter OSTM).*

a brushwood creation used by the Moravians as a decoration at Christmas and was even called a Christmas tree by some scholars.

A 1747 quote from Bethlehem reports:

For this occasion several small pyramids and one large pyramid of green brushwood had been prepared, all decorated with candles and the large one with apples and pretty verses. On either side were pictures drawn in perspective and, also, illuminated with candles. One represented the angels and their care of the children. The other represented the Child Jesus in the arms of his mother. Close by were to be seen the Bethlehem stable, with the oxen and the asses, as also, the shepherds, to whom, first, the joyous tidings of the Savior's birth had been brought. Below all of this the word Children!"[105]

In a similar vein, it was recorded in the Bethlehem Diary on 25 December 1748:

Quite early, the little children enjoyed a delightful festal occasion. Their brethren had decorated various pyramids with candles, apples, and hymn stanzas and, also, drawn a picture in which the children were represented as presenting their Ave to the Christ-child all of which Brother Johannes [von Watteville] explained to them in a child-like manner, so that the love-feast conducted for them at the same time had a very blessed effect upon them as well as upon all the brethren and sisters present.[106]

The candles as ornaments are thought by some to be the most important element of the pyramid, and one German name for it is the *Lichtstock,* or light stick. Traditionally the nativity was placed on the broadest shelf along with other adornments such as apples, gingerbread cakes, greenery, and illuminated Bible verses. If the decoration was in the church, the items on it would later be distributed to the children in the congregation. By the seventeenth century, the pyramid was a popular tradition at Christmas in Germany. Sometimes it was garnished and suspended from the ceiling.[107]

Although not a Christmas reference, the following quote contributes to the lavishness of celebratory Moravian decorations. In an eighteenth-century description of a use of a pyramid by the Moravians in Germany for the consecration of the dormitory of the Brethrens' House in Herrnhut on 31 October 1745 included what was remarked as "an incomparable sight," as the entire house "resembled a sea of flames from top to bottom. Pyramids and individual candles turned... . These lights and the illumination of the other two Brethrens' Houses were probably the most beautiful thing we have had in Herrnhut... ."[108]

A variation of the pyramid held a propeller at the top, which by heat of the lighted candles turned the revolving shelves on an axis. This type is still made today, sometimes by Germans in the same area of Saxony where building pyramids became a thriving cottage industry by the mid-nineteenth century. The specialized craft was an outgrowth of the construction of full-size wooden structures like ventilating windmills in the local salt mines.[109] Saxony continues to be known for its diminutive, wooden Christmas folk items, such as pyramids, nutcrackers, "smokers,"[110] and ornaments. One scholar believes that a tree and a pyramid, the first unlighted, the second lighted, stood side by side in many German homes by the late-eighteenth century.[111] Another scholar believes that the pyramid became a "common substitute"[112] for the tree in Saxony and other country places during the nineteenth century, and that a gradual shift of the candles from the pyramid to the Christmas tree took place.

A paucity of quotes concerning pyramids in Salem exists, although they were almost certainly there at an early date, since they were mentioned in Pennsylvania in 1747. In describing the Jubilee Festival of 19 February 1816, Peter Wolle wrote that there was an elaborate pyramid with fifty burning tapers along with twenty-five other candlesticks.[113] On 1 January 1818, Wolle wrote, "This afternoon Herman took apart and put away his beautiful pyramidal Christmas Putz with 8 inscriptions."[114] After his move to Lititz, Pennsylvania, Wolle recorded fixing a frame for a pyramid and purchasing greens on 23 December 1829.[115] Susanna Kramsch wrote of decorating a pyramid on 22 December 1822 in Salem.[116] Also in Salem, on Epiphany (6 January) in 1872 at the church, "A pyramid had been made and placed on the upper platform of the pulpit... ." The text "Go ye into all the world...appeared on the pyramid in illuminated letters." Four long festoons of greenery and artificial flowers were draped with the number fifty at the top in white.[117] In 1874 at the Bethania church "a pyramidal four-sided transparent inscription with three representative scenes occupied a place before the pulpit, and on each side of this a finely proportioned pine tree was placed, decorated with bright gilt and other coloured paper and illuminated with wax tapers as Christmas trees."[118] Cedar garlands in festoons completed the display.

No early Christmas pyramid structures exist locally, understandably so, since if they were constructed from brushwood they were simply discarded or burned for kindling after the intended use. However, as Wolle observed, Brother Herman's structure was special enough to be packed away, at least for some period of time.

Christmas feather tree, nineteenth-century. *OSTM.*

Other Types of Trees

One type of artificial Christmas tree from Germany that became very popular in the last third of the nineteenth century was the feather tree. These were patterned after the widely spaced limbs of the German fir tree or white pine tree and provided ideal display space for ornaments. Again, the industry was a German cottage-based one with some basic parts factory made, such as wire, wood, and berries. Feathers most commonly used were from turkeys and geese and sometimes swans. They were dyed and stripped from the quills and attached to the trunk with wire. Red berries on the tips of the branches and a sturdy wooden base completed the ensemble. A variety of sizes and colors was made. The trees were easily collapsed for storage and brought out year after year, thus making them convenient and economical.[119]

Another somewhat unique regional tree was created by wrapping the branches of a bare tree with cotton batting to simulate a snow-covering and was documented in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in 1897. Shoemaker calls it "a not uncommon practice in Berks County since at least 1900."[120] Snyder ascribes the custom to "thrifty German farmers in Pennsylvania [who] stripped Christmas trees of their needles after they were dried out and placed the skeleton in the attic. The following year the tree was brought down again and wrapped in cotton, so that it resembled a tree in the forest after a snow storm, and then it was decorated. After Christmas the tree was returned to the attic, where it was covered with old newspapers to keep the cotton clean."[121]

Twentieth-century Christmas postcard. *Author's collection.*

Early-twentieth-century photograph of a Christmas tree in the home of the Petersens of Salem. *OSHPC*.

A cotton-covered Christmas tree was reported to be the cause of a domestic fire in Indiana.[122] Fires have long been a hazard for Christmas trees, but few who used candles seemed deterred by that fact. Some took precautions, such as having on hand a wet sponge tied on a long stick, or several buckets or cups of water in readiness,[123] but whatever the case, Christmas trees continued to escalate in popularity.

By 1900, one family in five had a Christmas tree in America,[124] although most children knew about them from Sunday School, school, or a neighbor's house. The custom continued to spread, and by 1910 in most parts of the country "nearly all children had a tree at home... . By 1930 the tree had become nearly a universal part of the American Christmas."[125] Harkening back to those Cherokee pupils at the Moravian Springplace Indian Mission, on Christmas Eve of 1805, countless children in the last two centuries have experienced the same awe of the magical tree that those few must have felt in that simple room in the Georgia wilderness so long ago.

The sanctuary of Salem's Home Moravian Church decorated for Christmas.
Courtesy of Home Moravian Church.