

## The Christmas tree custom

*Gannett News Service*

The Christmas tree is a tradition older than Christianity. Here are some historical facts, compiled by the National Christmas Tree Growers Association:

Long before there was Christmas, Egyptians brought green palm branches into their homes on the shortest day of the year in December as a symbol of life's triumph over death.

Romans adorned their homes with evergreens during Saturnalia, a winter festival in honor of Saturnus, their god of agriculture. Druid priests decorated oak trees with golden apples for their winter solstice activities.

In the Middle Ages, the Paradise

tree, an evergreen hung with red apples, was the symbol of the feast of Adam and Eve held Dec. 24.

The first recorded reference to the Christmas tree dates to the 16th century. In Strasbourg, France, families both rich and poor decorated fir trees with colored paper, fruits and sweets. The retail Christmas tree lot also dates back that far — women would sell trees harvested from nearby forests in the marketplace.

Charles Minnegrode introduced the custom of decorating trees in Williamsburg, Va., in 1842. In 1851, Mark Carr hauled two ox sleds loaded with trees from the Catskill Mountains to the streets of New York City and opened the first retail lot in the United States.

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