

First reference of Christmas came on Dec. 2, 1753



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Bouley

The celebration of Christmas with gifts and decorations is a relatively recent phenomenon and was viewed negatively by the Puritans for several reasons.

The observance of Christmas as a holy day was associated with the Catholic Church. A day of idleness was not encouraged by the Puritans. They believed that designating certain days as holy meant other days were less so. One New England cleric stated "they for whom all days are holy can have no holiday." Puritans simply did not condone excessive behavior or frivolity. Most of the colonies banned celebrating Christmas by law and violators were fined. The Pilgrims worked in the fields on their first December 25 in this country and until the 19th century, work was performed as usual unless the day fell on a Sunday.

In Branford, David Driessens reports that the first mention of Christmas in the church records is December 2, 1753 when "Liberty was granted to ye professors of ye Church of England as they call them-

selves (members of the Episcopal Church), to meet in ye Meetinghouse on the 25 of December which they call Christmas." It is not until 1867 that the First Church has an entry in their budget for Christmas trees.

The diaries of Malachi Linsley of Branford from 1821 until 1834 can be found at the Blackstone Memorial Library. He makes the following entries for December 25.

1821 - Christmas, church, Coan & famerly (family) over to dine with us.

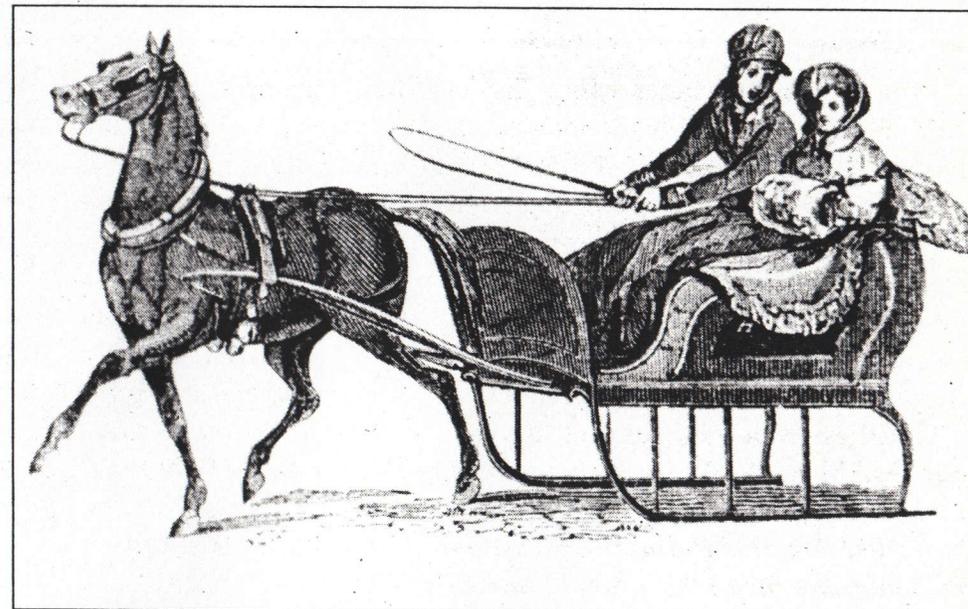
1822 - Christmas Day, cold, I cut and salted my pork, no church.

1825 - Sunday and Christmas, rainy, Mr. Garfield (a minister) here, Sacrament Day, Ebenezer with us, ate supper.

1827 - Christmas, we all at Church but my wife, went to Singing Meeting at night.

1831 - Sunday and Christmas, no service in our church (Trinity Church), Capt. James Palmer and his son James was buried at Damascus this day, thay was shipracked and drownd on bord the Schooner Lottery at Grate Eggharbor beach (off New Jersey).

The diaries of Louisa Downs Corey of New Haven and Short Beach, from 1861 until 1901, can be found in the Branford Historical Archives. She describes some of the food preparation for Christmas' dinner but in particular gives much detail to the presents which were exchanged on



The Puritan colonists did not celebrate Christmas. They worked in the fields as usual or attended church if it fell on a Sunday. From American and Her Almanacs.

Christmas Eve. There is little discussion of decorations, a tree or other activities except church and visiting family. In these diaries, New Years appears to be a more exciting holiday with several days devoted to the preparation of different foods for a large gathering. Some years she gives very little detail on December 25th.

1862 - Christmas not as cheery with Will way down in Dixie.

1863 - Had an oyster dinner.

1867 - Christmas day. Got up at 4 o'clock and moulded over the bread and made an apple pie and pudding.

The celebration of Christmas, with its grand decorations, greeting cards and gifts is largely a product of the 20th century and the blossoming of the advertising industry.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is the historian for the Town of Branford.