

CINCINNATI
Christmas

HISTORY • TRADITION • FOOD

Jinny Powers Berten

ORANGE *frazer* PRESS
Wilmington, Ohio



Fort Washington, drawn in 1790 by Captain Jonathan Heart, who was killed in the Battle of the Wabash the next year. Published in Charles Cist's *Sketches and Statistics of Cincinnati* in 1851.



The Early Years

1 8 2 6 – 1 8 5 0

Cincinnati 1800, from the program for the celebration of Nicholas and Susan Howell Longworth's fiftieth wedding anniversary, 1857.

From the collection of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County



Christmas and the City Expand

1 8 5 0 – 1 8 6 0

Cincinnati 1857, from the program for the celebration of Nicholas and Susan Howell Longworth's fiftieth wedding anniversary, 1857.

From the collection of the Public Library of Cincinnati
and Hamilton County





Left: Program from Nicholas and Susan Howell Longworth's fiftieth-anniversary celebration.

From the collection of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County

Below: Poem from Longworths' anniversary celebration program.

From the collection of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County





Above: Shillito's Christmas catalogue, 1878.
 Courtesy Cincinnati Museum Center/Cincinnati Historical Society Library

CHRISTMAS!

CINCINNATI

ORPHAN ASYLUM!

SCENE I.
THE GOOD PEOPLES HOUSE.

Enter Bag this and my Sherry.
Tan.—"Just popped in, hope I don't intrude!"
Queen Finetta.—"The very year before we were looking for to take a Christmas box!"
Enter Bag as full as brass bell.

SCENE II.
ORPHAN ASYLUM.

Enter Bag looking quite pretty.
Children.—"O, welcome Bag and bring us these who fill and seek you to set!"

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!

From the Children of the Orphan Asylum
 WHO WILL JOYFULLY RECEIVE ANYTHING YOU CAN THINK OF TO EAT, WEAR OR USE.

- WINE
- TEA
- COFFEE
- EGG
- APPLES
- PEARS
- ORANGES
- LIMES
- MILK
- EGGS
- BREADS
- CROCKERY
- GLASS
- CUTLERY
- TOYS
- GAMES
- BOOKS
- PAPER
- INK
- PEN
- RUBBER
- STATIONERY
- FANCY GOODS
- HATS
- COATS
- DRESS
- SHOES
- GLOVES
- HOSIERY
- LINENS
- CLOTHING

HOPE.

- WINE
- TEA
- COFFEE
- EGG
- APPLES
- PEARS
- ORANGES
- LIMES
- MILK
- EGGS
- BREADS
- CROCKERY
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- STATIONERY
- FANCY GOODS
- HATS
- COATS
- DRESS
- SHOES
- GLOVES
- HOSIERY
- LINENS
- CLOTHING

SEND TO OUR CHRISTMAS TREE.

Handkerchiefs, Hats, Candy, Sweets, Trinkets, Shoes, Socks, Work Boxes, Sashes, Bonnets, Hoods, Scarfs, Mittens, Mitts, Gloves, Hair Ribbons, Lead Pencils, Drawing Paper, Color Boxes, Drawing Games, Dolls, Toys, Bookkeepers, Games of Authors, Games of History, and whatever else you please.

Send this Bag on or before Dec. 23rd to any of the following Managers.

- Mrs. CATHERINE HATES, Walnut Hills.
- JOHN D. JOYIN, Glendale.
- ELIZA J. FURN, 51 West Eighth Street.
- HENRY PROHARO, Chino.
- AARON F. PECKY, Mt. Auburn.
- N. W. HENDALE, 104 West Seventh Street.
- JOHN DAVIS, 323 Elm Street.
- N. J. BROADWELL, 60 Lawrence Street.
- A. D. BELLOCK, Mt. Auburn.
- J. H. CHEEVER, Mt. Auburn.

- Mrs. G. H. BARBOUR, 99 East Fourth Street.
- JOHN R. WRIGHT, Walnut Hills.
- A. S. WYNSLOW, Carney Broadway and Fourth St.
- WILLIAM JUDGEN, Co. Race and Center Sts.
- N. F. FORCE, 59 West Eighth Street.
- L. E. VOSE, Chino.
- G. T. H. SELLER, 83 Broadway.
- Mrs. JANE C. SHOWN, 123 West Seventh Street.
- PROCTOR & GARDNER, No. 29 West Second Street.
- BARBOUR, GARDNER & HOBBS, 77 West Pearl St.

Or to the CINCINNATI ORPHAN ASYLUM, Mt. Auburn.

Right: Cincinnati Orphan Asylum Christmas appeal, 1876.
 Courtesy Cincinnati Museum Center/Cincinnati Historical Society Library



Fountain Square Pantomime was painted by Cincinnati artist Joseph Henry Sharp in 1892.

Cincinnati Art Museum. Gift of the CAM Docent Organization in celebration of its fortieth anniversary and The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial. 2000.68.

Fountain



stores put on small holiday plays. Mabley & Carew presented pantomimes on a large glass-covered balcony facing Fountain Square. In an age before radio, TV, text messaging, or video games, this was the biggest show in town. Most children came at least once. On Christmas Eve, Mabley & Carew gave a box of candy to every child who came to the store. What a treat!

In 1892, local artist Joseph Henry Sharp painted a picture of children watching the pantomime. For many years, it was displayed on the third floor of the store; currently it hangs in the Cincinnati Wing of the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Square

Twentieth Century Christmas

1 9 0 0 — 1 9 9 9



hibition legislation was passed and “the wettest city” became bone dry. The bars were closed and to give a Christmas toast a bootlegger had to be found. Cincinnati had many of those.

In those postwar years, Cincinnati grew and expanded. By 1930, the population had increased to 451,000. The tallest building in the city, the Carew Tower, now took its place in the city skyline. WLW and the Opera at the Zoo lent renown to the city. The Great Depression and the flood of 1937 brought tragedy to the area, and yet there was still Christmas. In 1924, the first municipal Christmas tree was erected on Fountain Square and there has been one there ever since. Folks still shopped downtown, enjoyed the Christmas windows, and saw Laurel and Hardy in *Babes in Toyland* at the Albee theater that had opened on Christmas Eve in 1927. They could also wander into the Netherland Plaza in the Carew Tower to see the city’s largest indoor decoration. The Christmas tree in the lobby held five hundred lights and ten thousand ornaments. It was a spectacular sight for the hotel guests, the people who came to the dances in the Hall of Mirrors, and the downtown shoppers.

The Midnight Mass (1911) by E. T. Hurley.
Cincinnati Art Museum. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Simon Hubig. 1911.1372.





Soldier opening Christmas package from his wife while his buddies share the treats, 1944.

There was still singing on Fountain Square, but folks sang with heavy hearts as they thought about the boys fighting all over the world. They packed Christmas boxes for their boys so that wherever they were, they would know they were not forgotten.

And the boys wrote home. PFC Ralph C. Lewis, Jr., inducted at Fort Thomas, Kentucky, in 1942, sent the following to his parents from “somewhere in Africa” in 1943:

Africa, 1943

Due to all my holiday activities I haven't written a line to anyone since the first of the month but I just couldn't let Christmas Day pass by without at least a short note to wish you both the very best of the season and join with you in the prayer that we may all be united once more to celebrate next Christmas in a peaceful world. My thoughts are with you and the old homestead today more so than on any other day and in my heart I'm so very lonely and blue on this the happiest of days. Sure, I admit I'm homesick and lonesome but what soldier isn't who is thousands of miles from his loved ones in a strange land? Doubtless both of you feel the same way but all of us can find cheer in the fact that we can share our thoughts and prayers and that all of us are enjoying the best of health this Christmas Day. When compared to those families whose sons will never return then our own family has been singularly fortunate and I thank God that I still enjoy the best of health despite my better than two years on foreign soil.

During the last thirty years, Cincinnati has felt the repercussions of world events. The end of the Cold War brought momentary relief from constant vigilance and the hope that a lasting peace was at hand. When the World Trade Center was attacked on September 11, 2001, all those hopes were dashed. Now places whose names Cincinnati's forefathers would not recognize have made changes in the river city. Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan are part of everyday experience. Yet the city founded on the shores of the Ohio River at Christmastime has retained its Christmas spirit. Old traditions such as mechanical window displays, pantomimes, and bonfires have been replaced with new ones. Skating on Fountain Square, rappelling Santas, and carriage rides have become part of the holiday scene. Folks still sing about Christmas, go to see the trains, put a tree up on Fountain Square, visit the stable in Eden Park, and watch *The Nutcracker*, *A Christmas Carol*, and the Boar's Head Festival. The spirit of hospitality, peace, goodwill, and generosity binds the community together as Tiny Tim's words resonate across the seven hills,

"God bless us everyone."



The cast of *A Christmas Carol* at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park.
Photo by Sandy Underwood.



Window Displays

It used to be that it was not Christmas until the window displays appeared in the downtown stores. In 1928, John Shillito presented a window display that showed how Cincinnati looked ninety-nine years earlier, in 1827. The windows were so popular that Shillito's treated its customers and Cincinnati to more and more elaborate displays. The other department stores, Pogue's, Mabley & Carew, Rollman's, and McAlpin's joined the competition; all drew people to their stores with their window displays. Many Cincinnati families had a Christmas tradition of going to see the windows and then out to dinner at Wiggins or the Cricket.

In 1959, the theme for Shillito's window was Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Thirty-eight characters with four thousand moving parts were custom-made in Germany and shipped in sixteen crates. Six display personnel spent five days assembling the imports while five others wired the characters for animation. The window was a tremendous draw and people came from all over to see it.

One of Shillito's most memorable displays was Santa's workshop, usually set up in the window at Seventh and Elm. Mechanical elves were shown in the mailroom collecting letters to Santa, making toys, packing toys, painting toys, talking to Santa, and sometimes being mischievous. At times there were even live deer in the window. In the course of Shillito's being sold to Lazarus and then to Macy's, the elves were sold

The Crib of the Nativity







Cincinnati Times-Star, December 22, 1948.





Fifth Street Market House

By the mid-nineteenth century, Cincinnati had many market houses that were patronized by the growing population. The following description of the Fifth Street Market on Christmas Day appears in *Sketches and Statistics of Cincinnati* in 1851 published that year by local journalist Charles Cist. The market was open on Christmas because Christmas was not yet a legal holiday and would not be until 1870.

Markets and Market-Houses

Christmas day is the great gala day of the butchers of Cincinnati. The parade of stall-fed meat on that day, for several years past, has been such as to excite the admiration and astonishment of every stranger in Cincinnati—a class of persons always here in great numbers. The exhibition, this last year, has, however, greatly surpassed every previous display in this line.

A few days prior to the return of this day of festivity, the noble animals which are to grace the stalls on Christmas eve, are paraded through the streets, decorated in fine style, and escorted through the principal streets with bands of music and attendant crowds, especially of the infantry. They are then taken to slaughter-houses, to be seen no more by the public, until cut up and distributed along the stalls of one of our principal markets.

Christmas falling last year on Tuesday, the exhibition was made at what is termed our middle or Fifth Street market-house. This is three hundred and eighty feet long, and of breadth and height proportionate—wider and higher, in fact, in proportion to length, than the eastern market-houses. It comprehends sixty stalls, which, on this occasion, were filled with steaks and ribs alone, so crowded, as to do little more than display half the breadth of the meat, by the pieces overlapping each other, and affording only the platforms beneath the stall and the table, behind which the butcher stands, for the display of the rounds and other parts of the carcass. One hundred and fifty stalls would not have been too many to have been fully occupied by the meat exhibited on that day, in the manner beef is usually hung up here and in the eastern markets.

Sixty-six bullocks, of which probably three-fourths were raised and fed in Kentucky, and the residue in our own State; one hundred and twenty-five sheep, hung up whole at the edges of the stalls; three hundred and fifty pigs, displayed in rows on platforms; ten of the finest and fattest bears Missouri could produce; and a buffalo calf, weighing five hundred pounds, caught at Santa Fe, constituted the materials for this Christmas pageant. The whole of the beef was stall-fed, some of it since the cattle had been calves, their average age being four years, and average weight sixteen hundred pounds, ranging from 1,388, the lightest, to 1,896, the heaviest. This last was four years old, and had taken the premium every year at exhibitions in Kentucky, since it was a calf. The sheep

were Bakewell and Southdown, and ranged from ninety to one hundred and ninety pounds to the carcass, dressed and divested of the head, &c. The roasters or pigs would have been considered extraordinary anywhere but at Porkopolis, the grand emporium of hogs. Suffice to say, they did no discredit to the rest of the show. Bear meat is a luxury unknown at the East, and is comparatively rare here. It is the ne plus ultra of table enjoyment.

The extraordinary weight of the sheep will afford an idea of their condition for fat. As to the beef, the fat on the flanks measured seven and one-quarter inches, and that on the rump, six and one half inches through. A more distinct idea may be formed by the general reader, as to the thickness of the fat upon the beef, when he learns that two of the loins, on which were five and a half inches of fat, became tainted, because the meat could not cool through in time; and this, when the thermometer had been at no period higher than thirty-six degrees, and ranging, the principal part of the time, from ten to eighteen degrees above zero. This fact, extraordinary as it appears, can be amply substantiated by proof.

Specimens of these articles were sent by our citizens to friends abroad. The largest sheep was purchased by F. Ringgold, of the St. Charles, and forwarded whole to Philadelphia. Coleman of the Burnet House, forwarded to his brother of the Astor House, New York, nine ribs of beef, weighing one hundred and twenty pounds; and Richard Bates, a roasting piece of sixty-six pounds, by way of New Year's gift, to David

T. Disney, our representative in Congress.

The Philadelphians and New Yorkers confessed that they never had seen anything in the line to compare with the specimens sent to those points.

The beef, &c., was hung up on the stalls early upon Christmas eve, and by twelve o'clock next day, the whole stock of beef—weighing 99,000 pounds—was sold out; two-thirds of it at that hour being either preparing for the Christmas dinner, or already consumed at the Christmas breakfast. It may surprise an eastern epicure to learn that such beef could be afforded to customers for eight cents per pound, the price at which it was retailed, as an average.

No expense was spared by our butchers to give effect to this great pageant. The arches of the market-house were illuminated by chandeliers and torches, and lights of various descriptions were spread along the stalls. Over the stalls were oil portraits—in gilt frames—of Washington, Jackson, Taylor, Clay, and other public characters, together with landscape scenes. Most of these were originals, or copies by our best artists. The decorations and other items of special expense these public-spirited men were at, reached in cost one thousand dollars. The open space of the market-house was crowded early and late by the coming and going throng of the thousands whose interest in such an exhibition overcame the discouragement of being in the open air at unseasonable hours, as late as midnight, and before day-light in the morning, and the thermometer at fifteen degrees.

Favorite Christmas Recipes of Cincinnati Chefs

Cincinnati has always loved to eat, and the city has been blessed with many fine chefs who work hard to please and satisfy.

Marilyn's Pecan Pie by Marilyn Harris

“A restaurant in town served this pie with great success after I had done some consulting work for them, and I actually had the temerity to serve it to Albert Roux when he came to my house for dinner,” Marilyn recalls. “He said he liked it. I do, too, and so I have attached my name to it. Having grown up in the South, I have tasted more than my share of pecan pies and have experimented with many recipes over the years—this is my favorite. My first attempt at making a pecan pie was instructive, if a bit embarrassing. In graduate school I was trying to impress my husband-to-be, who loved pecan pies. I pierced the pastry as I was accustomed to do for ‘icebox’ pies, put the pecan filling in, and baked it. The final product was very strange: the liquid filling ran through the crust. There was filling on the bottom, crust in the middle, and pecans on top. He married me anyway, but the moral is: Never pierce the pastry for a liquid-filling pie. This pie has both light and dark corn syrup for just the right balance of flavor and four

*extra-large eggs to yield a lighter custard rather than one with a heavy, sticky texture. The pastry is a French derivation of a *pâte brisée*, the same type of pastry used in French tarts. Since it takes this dense mixture so long to cool, make this pie several hours ahead.”*

9-inch unbaked pastry shell (recipe follows)

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

1 cup sugar

1 tablespoon flour

1 cup light corn syrup

1 cup dark corn syrup

Pinch salt

4 extra-large eggs

1¼ cups pecan halves

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Make pastry shell.

Cream butter with electric mixer. Add sugar and flour and cream until fluffy. Add both syrups and the pinch of salt. Beat