

Welcome to the 2025 William C Goodridge Freedom Center & Underground Railroad Museum Festival of Trees. We hope you enjoy your visit, and it leaves you with a little Christmas spirit in your heart.



#1 ~ Santa Simpson: Decorated by Gabriella Messenger, Crispus Attucks York History & Culture Center Curator

In 2000 and 2001, Crispus Attucks York CEO, Bobby Simpson, dressed up as Santa Claus and sat for pictures with children. These ornaments let us step back in time to experience the joy these children had around Christmas time at Crispus Attucks. See if you can recognize any of the people in these photos today!

#2 ~ A Victorian Christmas: Decorated by Jane Heidlebaugh

Mr. Goodridge invited York citizens to come see his Christmas tree, supposedly York's first one. It was decorated with Victorian Christmas images and candles. Can you find the Christmas pickle on the tree? Tradition says whoever finds it will have good fortune in the coming year.

#3 ~ The Fruits of Christmas: Decorated by Jane Heidlebaugh

In the 1800s, ornaments were often made from natural materials such as fruit, nuts, and berries. Strings of popcorn and cranberries were popular as garland. During the Christmas evening celebration, the children waited with excitement for the fruits and other treats to be given to them. Families often added other ornaments including bells, handmade paper cutouts, and wax figurines.

#4 ~ Sew it Goes: Decorated by Barbara Graver, with contributions from Susan Hamberger

This tree is an homage to the craft of sewing, displaying tools and supplies used in making not only practical needs, but beautiful gifts as well. In the 1800s, sewing needles were crafted from materials such as bone and antler; threads were made from natural plant fibers. All were used to create hand sewn garments and gifts. At Christmas, girls may have received a handmade doll, sewn from scraps of fabric left over after making garments. Small intricately sewn pouches were created to hide little gifts and treats inside, while women may have received beautifully hand sewn handkerchiefs. Hand sewing skills were highly valued, whether done by a seamstress, tailor, or sewn at home. Home sewing eventually declined with the introduction of the sewing machine by Isaac Singer, and the ability to make mass produced items.

#5 ~ Explore York: Decorated by Andrea Ryan and Katie Kline

Explore York, York County's Tourism Promotion Agency, created its America 250th themed tree to celebrate our county's powerful connection to the nation's founding, and to energize excitement for the upcoming semi quincentennial. Inspired by York's role in the adoption of the Articles of Confederation, the concept and decorations were developed by Katie Kline and Andrea Ryan from Explore York's Marketing Team. The tree also highlights Explore York's custom commemorative ornaments, now in their second year and quickly becoming a tradition. As the place where key decisions of the Continental Congress helped shape a new nation, York is an ideal destination to celebrate America's 250th anniversary of independence. Explore York is proud to be part of the William C Goodridge Festival of Trees, honoring the lasting impact of one of our region's most influential historical leaders.

#6 ~ The Meaning of Christmas: Decorated by Nancy Westbury

In many people's minds, Christmas is one of the happiest and holiest times of year. While the word "Christmas" is not found in the Bible, we can find the story of Christmas, or the birth of Jesus, in the New Testament. On this tree, look for the delicate ornaments of the nativity, angels, and crosses, representing the holiness of this special season. The most popular colors of Christmas are red, green, gold, and silver. These colors are steeped in symbolism from ancient folk beliefs, legends, Christian imagery throughout the ages, and pop culture. Do you remember the Coca-Cola Santa in his red coat that was created in the 1930s? Red represents the blood of Jesus, spiritual awakening, and fire. Evergreens had a special meaning to ancient peoples because they stayed vibrant through winter, and were believed to keep away evil and sickness. The color green caught on as a symbol of the season because evergreens were used to decorate doorways and other areas of the home. Gold and silver make our Christmas celebrations sparkly and bright. Gold is associated with one of the gifts given to Baby Jesus by the Three Wise Men. Silver is another precious metal that's long been valued by cultures around the world. It is also symbolic for the divinity in the Christian faith, again referring to the birth of Jesus.

#7 ~ Evalina Welcomes You: Decorated by Mark and Debbie DeBowes

Evalina was a hostess, a businesswoman, wife of a successful entrepreneur, and mother of talented daguerreotype artists. She and her daughter took an interest in special services and products for women. This tree honors Evalina. Mrs. Goodridge enjoyed the holidays and decorated a tree that was so beautiful that the family charged admission for the public to come in and see it. How appropriate that this festive and sophisticated dress-form tree represents her. Her sons became excellent and popular African American photographers and daguerreotypists from 1847 to 1922.

#8 ~ Cookie Cutter Delight: Decorated by Beth Gross, with contributions from Susan Hamberger, and Susan Liebegott

Did you know that National Cookie Cutter Day is December 1? And that December 1st to the 7th is recognized as National Cookie Cutter Week? Even though people think of cookie cutters as being used mostly at Christmas, there are cookie cutter designs that can be used throughout the year. On this tree, can you find cookie cutters that represent Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Halloween? Can you find a boat, plane, truck, and the four suits of a deck of cards? Whatever the shape, the best part of using cookie cutters is the baking of the cookies, whether they're sugar cookies, gingerbread cookies, or traditional Pennsylvania Dutch sand tarts. Can't you just smell them baking?! Who doesn't love a warm, fresh baked cookie?

#9 ~ The March of the Nutcrackers: Decorated by Beth Gross, with contributions from Hope & Adrienne Williams, Stephany Sechrist, Barb Graver, and Heather McCaffrey

In 1892, Tchaikovsky's famous ballet, The Nutcracker, debuted. Because the ballet is set on Christmas Eve, and the hero is a nutcracker-come-to-life, nutcrackers quickly became associated with Christmas décor. Nutcrackers are a symbol of strength and protection. According to German folklore, they were given as keepsakes to bring luck to the family and protect the home because they resemble soldiers. You can place a nut into the mouth of an actual nutcracker, lift the lever on his back to move the mouth, and crack the nut.

#10 ~ Whimsical Wonderland: Decorated by Debra W. Eberly, d.w.designs

This one is just for fun and for the kiddos! Unexpected colors, fun childlike ornaments, snowballs, pompoms, and different ribbons are tossed together to create this fun, whimsical winter Christmas wonderland!

#11 ~ Up Among the Clouds: Decorated by Stephany Sechrist

Peru is a South American nation consisting of 509,768 square miles. The Andes Mountains form its "backbone." The climate ranges from tropical to "polar." Ancient peoples regarded these mountains as gods and worshiped them. At altitudes as high as 22,000 feet, the Huari, Ayacucho, and Inca people resided, farming terraced hillsides, shepherding llamas, alpaca, and vicuna, harvesting and spinning their wool. Inca women were always busy herding, knitting, embroidering hats, skirts, sweaters, and ponchos. They are famous for brilliantly hued textiles. The Ayacucho province is known for retablos, wooden boxes with papier mâché scenes, like creches. The ceremonial headpiece at the top of the tree would be used during community celebrations, especially Carnival in February, Holy Week, and Easter. In cities like Cusco and Machu Picchu (discovered by Hiram Bingham in 1911), solstice phenomena can be observed. Summer brings fog, winter brings snow. The paper chains are patterns made by an Indigenous artist, who lives in the Peruvian rainforest and whose work was featured in a recent issue of The Smithsonian.

#12 ~ Showers of Blessing: Decorated by Stephany Sechrist

A colorful parasol from India tops this tree highlighting the vibrant colors of India, royal peacocks, and sisal angels made in the province of Bangladesh.

#13 ~ Celebrate! Fiesta!: Decorated by Nancy Westbury

This tree celebrates Hispanic culture with a vibrant “Fiesta” theme. There are ornaments in bold and bright colors using traditional elements like straw, metal, and paper. Many iconic celebration items of the Southwest are also featured, such as cacti, sombreros, pinatas, and religious figurines. This wonderful collection was assembled over the course of many years while I was living in Texas. A few of the treasured handmade ornaments were lovingly passed on to me from a family member in San Antonio. I visualize joy in this tree and hope you see it, too! Feliz Navidad!

#14 ~ Christmas Spirit: Decorated by Carol Kauffman and Jane Heidlebaugh

Beautiful and bright, this tree will have you thinking of Christmas, with its gold stars, red ornaments, and white, sparkly snowflakes. Each one reflects various traditions and beliefs associated with Christmas around the world. Stars represent guidance and hope, reminiscent of the Star of Bethlehem that guided the Wise Men. Snowflakes remind us of the peace and beauty of winter. And red symbolizes love and the spirit of giving throughout the holiday. Together, they bring us a feeling of warmth, joy, and celebration. Merry Christmas!

#15 ~ Happy 250th Anniversary: Decorated by Debra W. Eberly, d.w.designs

This patriotic tree celebrates and honors the 250th anniversary of the adoption of the Articles of Confederation, and the birth of our nation.

#16 ~ An Orange for Christmas: Decorated by Debbie and Mark DeBowes

Goodridge’s store was unique in that he had citrus fruit for sale in December. Both tree and wreath feature citrus treats.

#17 ~ Kwanzaa: Decorated by Stephany Sechrist

This tree honors Kwanzaa, an annual celebration of African American culture and heritage, celebrated Dec. 26th to Jan. 1st, and culminating in gift giving and a Feast of Faith. It honors the seven principles of African heritage; unity, self-determination, collective responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by former York resident, Ronald Everett, who graduated from William Penn High School in 1958. He later changed his name to Maulana Karenga to reflect his desire to incorporate his African heritage, with Maulana meaning “master teacher” in Swahili.