

Creating Lasting Traditions

During the holidays we tend to use the word ‘tradition’, or variations of the word. “It’s tradition that we put the tree up Christmas Eve”. “Traditionally we have ham for Christmas dinner”. A tradition is a belief or behavior that is passed down from generation to generation. Growing up in Gettysburg it was a tradition to watch the parade and see the town Christmas Tree on the square come to life with lights. Traditionally, Santa’s Shanty always sat in the corner of the square by the Blue & Gray Bar. In more recent years it moved to where it sits now, by the grand ACNB building. So how did some of our holiday traditions get started and what do they mean?

The tradition of Mistletoe at Christmas – This goes back to the ancient Druids. It is supposed to possess mystical powers which bring good luck to the household and wards off evil spirits. Norse mythology used it as a sign of love and friendship. The custom of kissing under the Mistletoe comes from England. The original custom was that a berry was picked from the sprig of Mistletoe before the person could be kissed and when all the berries had gone, there could be no more kissing.

The laying or placing of a Wreath – Its circular shape represents eternity, as it has no beginning and no end. From a Christian religious perspective, it represents an unending circle of life. The evergreen, which is most often used in making holiday wreaths, symbolizes growth and everlasting life.

Leaving Milk and Cookies for Santa – Another tradition that dates back to ancient Norse mythology. According to legend, Odin had an eight-legged horse named Sleipnir. Kids would leave treats for Sleipnir hoping that Odin would favor them with gifts in return. The practice of leaving cookies on a plate for Santa, accompanied by a cold glass of milk, became popular again during the Great Depression. Parents tried to impress upon their children the importance of being grateful for anything they were lucky enough to receive for Christmas.

There are so many things to do in Gettysburg throughout the month of December that can surely become new memories and traditions. The first Saturday in December is the annual ‘Breakfast with Santa’ at The Gettysburg Hotel. From 7am-11am you can have breakfast in the Grand Ballroom with Santa and have your picture taken with Santa and his star reindeer, Rudolph. There is no registration required. The event is \$5 per person, kids under 5 eat free. Proceeds from this event benefit the United Way of Adams County. If you aren’t able to have breakfast with Santa then visit Santa at his Shanty on the square. Santa is there every weekend waiting to hear the wants of every little boy and girl. Have fun creating a wish list with the kids to present to Santa. He can’t guarantee they’ll get everything on their list, but he loves to listen.

If you appreciate good holiday music, then come to the Annual Holiday Tuba Carol Fest. Held this year on December 13 you can hear tuba players from around the country join together to play Christmas carols. Crowds gather on Lincoln Square to hear young and old playing all the familiar Christmas songs. Hot chocolate is served to keep you toasty while outside (rain site will be Prince of Peace Episcopal Church). For even more music, you can experience A Christmas Offering held December 15 at the United Lutheran Seminary Chapel. This is part of a series of

performances called Music, Gettysburg! It is a premier concert series that features international, regional and local musical artists for the greater South Central PA region. Both events are free of charge.

It's not about the amount of money you spend. You can certainly create holiday traditions that don't cost a thing. Whether it's passing on Grandma's chocolate chip cookie recipe to the next generation or hunkering down on the floor with the kids with paper and crayons to create a Christmas list, it's all what you make it to be. It should be fun, memorable and everlasting. Traditions that will endure through the years.

For Santa's Shanty hours, visit www.gettysburgretailmerchants.com.

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