



# Crane House & Historic YWCA Holiday Decorating

Garden Club of Montclair



## A Brief History of the Crane House

- Israel Crane, his wife, Fanny, their seven children, house servants, and at least four enslaved workers
- Son James took ownership in 1840
- James, his wife, Phebe, and six children
- Phebe lived in the home until her death in early 20th century
- 1900 census shows Phebe living with three unmarried daughters



ISRAEL CRANE

# YWCA Years

- purchased by the segregated YWCA in 1920
- used for offices, dormitories, and as a social center for African American women until 1965
- domestic workers boarded there looking for employment
- civic and social hub for African American women

The Israel Crane House was home to the YWCA for 45 years.



# Preservation

- saved from demolition by local preservationists
- moved to its present location in 1965
- Montclair Historical Society established same year
- historical restoration of house began
- recreated a hearth kitchen



# How Should the Garden Club Decorate to Honor the Historical Periods Represented?

## Parlor, Entry Hall, Upstairs, and Exterior 1796-1840

- In 1700s, didn't decorate for Christmas
- in the 1600s, Puritans punished anyone found to be "celebrating" Christmas
- immigrants practiced the customs of their motherlands
- Colonial Americans decorated sparingly with fruits, greens, cones, seed pods, and nuts
- Christmas Day in the 1700s included going to church, dancing, visiting family, and feasting
- St. Nicolas was introduced 1823, in the poem, "The Night Before Christmas"
- immigrant populations used trees but not broadly until mid 1800s.
- servants and children received small gifts
- no fresh flowers
- honor these historic traditions by keeping decorations simple,
- using natural materials





# Historical Materials

Native and Commonly Imported

## Fruits

Apples  
Lemons  
Limes  
Oranges  
Pineapples  
Pears  
Pomegranates  
Kumquats  
Grapes  
Osage Orange

## Dried Plants

Dried Okra Pods  
Magnolia Pods  
Milkweed Pods  
Sweet Gum Balls  
Bayberry  
Chinaberry  
Cotton bolls  
Mistletoe  
Pine cones

## Nuts

Black Walnuts  
Chestnuts  
Pecans  
Hickory  
Almonds



## Plant Material

Holly  
Nandina  
Pyracantha berries  
Ivy  
Cedar  
Balsam  
White Pine  
Boxwood  
Aucuba  
Camellia  
Magnolia  
Inkberry

Rhododendron  
Hemlock  
Andromeda  
Scrub pine  
Bittersweet  
English yew  
Arborvitae  
Juniper  
Heather  
Scotch Broom  
Cherry Laurel  
Mountain Laurel  
Scarlet Firethorn  
Spring Heath  
Norway Spruce





Printed for K. Salt in DOWNING STREET, near the Horse Guards.

SETTLING the AFFAIRS of the NATION.

From Waterhouse, 30, 31, & 32, in St. Paul's Church Yard, London.





1836



1803



- create a holiday experience
- limit materials to natural ones
- incorporate authentic-looking artificial components

Most of the following photographs are from Historic Williamsburg, and demonstrate a modern interpretation of decorating to represent the time period.



## Wreaths



Using fruits such as apples, oranges, pomegranates, and pineapples demonstrates their availability during this period and allows us to create visually exciting designs.









# Mantles







## Staircase Garlands







# Window Decorations









Plaques





# Holiday Tables















# Table Centerpiece Trees



# The Hearth Kitchen and Dining Room 1840-1900

- Christmas trees were brought to America by German immigrants
- Queen Victoria adopted this tradition. Erecting a Christmas tree became in 1840s
- custom caught on in America
- Cranes might have had a tabletop tree during the earlier period of the Crane dining room and hearth kitchen, or perhaps a full-sized floor tree by the end of the period
- adorned with fruit, candy, candles, and paper decorations
- glass blown ornaments appeared in the 1870s
- wax candles
- ribbons and bows more common



Queen Victoria and Prince Albert with their children in 1842.



# Tree Ornaments







# Goose Feather Tree

- made from dyed goose or turkey feathers
- adorned with a red berry bead on branch tips
- first artificial Christmas tree



# The Boarders' Dining Room

## 1920-1940

- Roaring Twenties through the Great Depression
- Goose Feather Trees remained popular
- Christmas tree were common, decorated with glass spheres and figurative ornaments, and electric lights made in Japan
- production of tree ornaments taken over by Corning Glass Company in late 30s
- decorating became popular
- strings of popcorn as garland.
- cardboard stars and bells, covered with tin foil
- honeycomb decorations
- lead tinsel







# Christmas Trees







# Putz Scenes









Laurence T. Gieringer, who builds his model towns of odd pieces of lumber, tin cans, cigar boxes and other scraps,



# Tinsel



# Foil Decorations





# The YWCA Club Room

## 1940-1965

- Period spans entering WW II through post-war prosperity
- war shortages inspired creativity
- War's end issued an era of science, mass production, space exploration, and gadgets
- post-war boom years transformed Americans' thoughts about house and home
- Christmas developed a decidedly modern feel



1940 Christmas Card



1954



1958



# Aluminum Christmas Trees





① 10.97  
4 1/2 ft. size

② 6.97  
4 1/2 ft. size

③ 24.87  
6-ft. 57 3/4" branches (17 lbs.)  
M36 J 6280 4 1/2 ft. 101 27" branches (8 lbs.)  
M36 J 6282 6-ft. 57 3/4" branches (17 lbs.)  
M36 J 6284 4 1/2 ft. 41 20" branches (14 lbs.)  
6 in. Glass Ornaments. Modern tear drop shape.  
35 J 6238. State Red or Blue. (3 for 4 ea.) . . . 9 for 1.37

④ 17.44  
W36 J 6278 3 1/2 ft. 121 35" branches . . .  
236 J 6277 6 1/2 ft. 101 27" branches (8 lbs.)  
236 J 6278 4 1/2 ft. 57 20" branches (7 lbs.)

⑤ 4.94  
4 in. 1 1/2 in. trunk, 25 lbs. Electric motor turns tree, steel construction. UL app.  
236 J 6254. Metalize. (4 lbs.)

⑥ 7.97  
150 W Bulb for items 5, 8, and 11.  
236 J 6279. (1 lb. 6 oz.) . . . 1.24

⑦ 17.87  
236 J 6260. Mail. (10 lbs.)

⑧ 9.77  
236 J 6292. Shop, wt. 4 lbs.

⑨ 1.24  
236 J 6294. Mail. (6 lbs.)

① FLOCKED ALL-WHITE ALUMINUM TREE. Snowy look adds sparkle to your home. Branches fit in wood trunk. Stand incl. frt. or exp.  
M36 J 6280 4 1/2 ft. 101 27" branches (8 lbs.)  
M36 J 6282 6-ft. 57 3/4" branches (17 lbs.)  
M36 J 6284 4 1/2 ft. 41 20" branches (14 lbs.)  
6 in. Glass Ornaments. Modern tear drop shape.  
35 J 6238. State Red or Blue. (3 for 4 ea.) . . . 9 for 1.37

② SPARKLING SPRUCE STYLE aluminum tree. Add a fairyland of color to your Christmas with an economical, reusable tree. Branches fit pre-drilled wood trunk. Shores easily, neatly. Crush resistant, high quality aluminum needles. Lock stand (not shown). Metalize. (1 lb.)  
W36 J 6278 3 1/2 ft. 121 35" branches . . . 17.44  
236 J 6277 6 1/2 ft. 101 27" branches (8 lbs.) . . . 12.94  
236 J 6278 4 1/2 ft. 57 20" branches (7 lbs.) . . . 6.97

③ SANTA COSTUME. Red cotton flannel, white trim. Large size allows padding. Elastic waist, cuffs, neck, beard, eye brows.  
35 J 6255. (2 lb. 12 oz.) . . . 4.94

④ GOOD REVOLVING STAND adds a bright accent to your decorations. White enamel with "glitter" accents. Holds artificial trees up to 12 feet high. 1 1/2 in. trunk, 25 lbs. Electric motor turns tree, steel construction. UL app.  
236 J 6254. Metalize. (4 lbs.) 4.94

⑤ SIX-COLOR WHEEL rotates slowly, adds dashing color beauty to your Christmas display. All steel and plastic construction. Non-drip, plastic base and positive lock adjustment to hold light firmly. Low line electric motor turns wheel. Uses 150W bulb sold under item 5, 8, 9, 11. cord. Metalize. (5 lbs.)  
236 J 6257. Shop, wt. 5 lbs. 7.97

⑥ REVOLVING COLOR BALL. Modern ball-shaped lamp has eight-inch red, blue and amber panels hidden in body. Steel body, enameled finish. Til adjustable. Uses regular bulb (included). With 6 foot cord incl. Metalize.  
236 J 6292. Shop, wt. 4 lbs. 5.97

⑦ BEST MUSICAL STAND. Revolves trees to 12 ft. 4-in. trunk, 100 lbs. Plays 2 tunes or turns silently. Base has revolving light outlet, 2 spotlight plugs. Chrome plated. UL app.  
236 J 6260. Mail. (10 lbs.) 17.87

⑧ BEST MUSICAL WHEEL. Four large color plates revolve slowly. Runs silently or plays music. Order 150W bulb below. UL app.  
236 J 6294. Mail. (6 lbs.) . . . 9.77

⑨ 150 W Bulb for items 5, 8, and 11.  
236 J 6279. (1 lb. 6 oz.) . . . 1.24





# Wreaths



Late 1940s

# Electric Lights

Noma Bubble Lights from 1947





# Ornaments





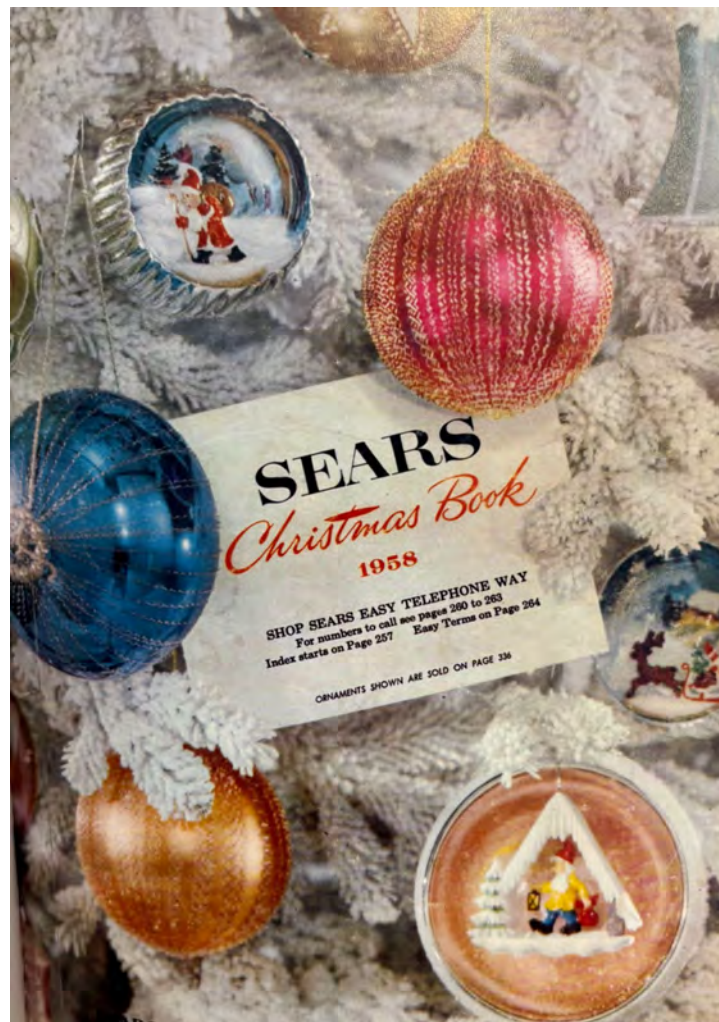












**SEARS**  
*Christmas Book*  
**1958**

SHOP SEARS EASY TELEPHONE WAY  
For numbers to call see pages 260 to 263  
Index starts on Page 257 Easy Terms on Page 264

ORNAMENTS SHOWN ARE SOLD ON PAGE 314









## Tinsel and Spun Glass





1955





## Ceramic Bric-a-Brac



Ceramic decorations from the 1950s

## Ceramic Christmas Trees





## Wax Figures



Wax ornaments and candles were also popular

# Bottlebrush Christmas Trees



1940-1955



# Stockings



Stockings 1940-1955

# Wrapping Paper & Greeting Cards



1950s





## **How does the Garden Club stay true to the historical periods represented in the Crane House and Historic YWCA?**

- **Use materials we know were available during the time period even if we use them in a manner that is not completely historically accurate**
- **Try to use actual period decorations**
- **Avoid using anything not selected based on these criteria**
- **Lead decorator in each room or area assigned task of ensuring conformity**
- **Welcome the opportunity the constraints of historical accuracy**



# Some House Rules

**Goal: Protect the historic artifacts by preventing damage via water, oils, accidental breakage, or pests that are attracted by the water/food and will damage the artifacts**

- Please put plastic wrap down underneath all displays (table, mantle, etc)
- If artifacts need moving, please ask a MHC staff member to move them on your behalf
- Historically accurate real plants/food vs artificial
- Usage of food (i.e. cookies) in displays - please use artificial (such as gingerbread cookie ornament recipes) or have them in a manner than can be removed at the end of each day. Ideally items that do not crumble (crumbles = harder to clean up = pests more likely to be attracted)



# Sources

- *A WILLIAMSBURG CHRISTMAS* by Frank J. Davis and Robert Llewellyn. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1980.
- *CHRISTMAS: 1940-1959* by Robert Brenner. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2007
- *CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS FROM WILLIAMSBURG* by Susan Hight Rountree. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2000.
- *CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS FROM WILLIAMSBURG'S FOLK ART COLLECTION* by the staff of the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1976.
- *CHRISTMAS IN WILLIAMSBURG* by K.M. Kostyal with The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. National Geographic Society, 2011.
- *CHRISTMAS REVISITED* by Robert Brenner. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2004.
- *CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE DECADES* by Robert Brenner. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1993.
- *COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG DECORATES FOR CHRISTMAS* by Libbey Hodges Oliver. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1981.
- *MERRY CHRISTMAS!* by Karal Ann Marling. Harvard University Press, 2000.
- *MIDCENTURY CHRISTMAS: HOLIDAY FADS, FANCIES AND FUN FROM 1945 TO 1970* by Sarah Archer. The Countryman Press, 2016.
- *WILLIAMSBURG CHRISTMAS* by Libbey Hodges Oliver and Mary Miley Theobald. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1999.

Compiled by Karen Fricke, 2024, for use by The Garden Club of Montclair

