



Dhammapada.

Let none find fault with others.
Let none see the omissions and
commissions of others.



But let one see one's own acts,
done and undone.
- The Buddha.

Holiday Traditions around the Globe

Over the nine nights leading up to Christmas, Filipinos attend *Simbang Gabi*, a festive and colorful series of Masses that includes Tagalog hymns, processions with bamboo star lanterns and Filipino foods.

In Bulgaria, Christmas is celebrated on December 25 and includes a popular tradition in which carolers (*koledari*) visit homes beginning late on the night of Christmas Eve. The carolers, typically boys, each carry a stick called a *gega*, and wish their neighbors and relatives health, wealth and happiness. Each group of carolers is usually led by an older man called a *stanenik*.

Christmas *posadas* are most popular in Mexico, Guatemala and parts of the United States with significant Mexican and Guatemalan populations. Children and adults dress up as Mary and Joseph in small processions that are held during the nine days before Christmas Eve. The *posadas* are supposed to be a reenactment of Joseph and Mary's - "The Pilgrims"-- search for lodging on their way to Bethlehem.

Christmas Eve, according to the Orthodox calendar, falls on January 6 in Ethiopia. On that night, priests lead processions throughout cities and villages in which they carry elaborately decorated umbrellas and wear their best traditional clothing. The processions end at churches for Mass. On the morning of Christmas, which is called *Ganna*, presents are exchanged, people feast and some also take part in sports.

In the Eastern European nation of Georgia, Christmas is celebrated on January 7, according to the Orthodox calendar. One of the most traditional observations is the *alilo*, where mostly kids dress in special costumes and gather for mass walks on the streets and sing carols.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/22/christmas-traditions-around-the-world_n_1160787.html#s565713&title=Georgia_Alilo



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Resources: Google Images

Dear Readers,

As we count down to another New Year ahead, I would like to wish all the MGCAANA members and their families a happy and a prosperous 2013 and a joyous holiday season. Many of us like to reflect on accomplishments, challenges and experiences we have gained during the past year that we are about to say good bye to, and also build new hopes and dreams, make New Year resolutions and look forward to new beginnings. I would like to accept the yearend as neither an end nor a beginning but is a continuation of the wisdom that instilled within us with all the year long knowledge, challenges and blessings which we have encountered.

As a thriving association MGCAANA completed year 2012 with giving back to the community in numerous ways. In general, giving back process starts with a moment of inspiration within each one of us. A desire to help others is a human nature and the best way to start giving back is within your own community. In 2005, a small group of Mayans got together in Seattle, WA and brainstormed about making connections with our own Maya community and over the past several years MGCAANA has succeeded in giving back and supporting and broadening its strengths as an association.

During this holiday season I count my blessings and thankful for the life and home I have built in the West, away from my motherland. One of the main obstacles I face in the West is finding some time to spare while trying to raise a family and having a career. However, once I find the drive to give, time is not an obstacle and the end result is life changing and rewarding. When I reflect on the times and situations how I have being helped and supported by someone else, those thoughts give me the motivation and a feeling of responsibility to give back for others especially for the less fortunate and contribute to the common good.

For MGCAANA to reach its goal to become a strong organization was accomplished by many dedicated members who are working together directly or indirectly giving their expertise, knowledge, time and monetary contributions. As a community the members were able to build acquaintances among each other creating new friendships while giving back to the fellow Mayans with scholarships, financial aid for needed and being supportive in many other ways.

As we are stepping into 2013, let's continue to give back and show our appreciation which instill a greater rewarding sense and a positive attitude within us which is essential to reach our own goals in life while giving back to the community.

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give" - Winston Churchill

By Priyanka Jayakody



Happy New Year!
Subha Aluth Avuruddhak Veva!

MGCAANA ANNOUNCEMENTS & NOTICES



With the view of providing helpful information, MGCAANA web site is now enhanced with our new Resource Page.

By visiting the webpage you may be able to access federal and state resources for:

immigration and traveling
equal opportunity at work
women rights and empowerment

We have also included a list of organizations that cater to south Asian women.

The link to the page is : <http://www.mahamayaalumnina.org/MGCAANA-resources.html>

We also warmly welcome your valuable comments, suggestions, additions, that you might think that enhance the Resource Page.

Please forward all your suggestions , comments to mahamaya_alumnae@yahoo.com

MGCAANA BUMPER STICKERS !!!



3" circle shaped exclusive MGCAANA Bumper Stickers can be now purchased.

Price : \$5 (Both US &Canadian) per sticker, including shipping

Place your order by mailing us to mahamaya_alumnae@yahoo.com with your :

name

Number of stickers you need

Payment Method (Check / Pay pal)

your postal address

e-mail address

We accept payments both via Checks and Pay Pal. Please make the **checks payable to MGCAANA**, and mail them to
Treasurer-MGCAANA, 1612, 24th Street, Ames, IA 50010.

For Pay Pal payments please go to MGCAANA website (<http://www.mahamayaalumnina.org/>)

and to "News and Events" Page (which is on the left panel) and click on the link "Make a Donation On Line Now".

In the "Enter description" field please make sure to indicate "Bumper Stickers".

Also, if you your address in the credit card /debit card is different from your actual address please indicate so on your mail to us.

The funds raised will be used for the benefit of MGCAANA and its ongoing projects

SAVE THE DATE

SUNDAY, MAY 26TH, 2013

(Memorial Day Weekend)

for the

9TH AGM OF MGCAANA

that will be hosted by

MRS. GEETHANJALIE SELVENDRAN

[NEE WIJAYAPALA] &

MR. SELVA SELVENDRAN

in

Palm Beach County, Florida

FORMAL INVITATION TO FOLLOW

Boren Scholarships and Fellowships

Boren Awards provide unique funding opportunities for U.S. undergraduate and graduate students to study in Africa, Asia, Central & Eastern Europe, Eurasia, Latin America, and the Middle East, where they can add important international and language components to their educations.

The applications for the 2013-2014 David L. Boren Scholarships and Fellowships are now available at www.borenawards.org

National Application Deadlines

Boren Fellowship: January 31, 2013

Boren Scholarship: February 13, 2013

South Asian languages for which this fellowship can be used include Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Sinhala, Pashto, Persian, Tamil, Telegu, Urdu.

USAID Donald M. Payne International Development Graduate Fellowship

The USAID Donald M. Payne International Development Graduate Fellowship seeks outstanding young people interested in careers in international development as USAID Foreign Service Officers. The Payne Fellowship Program provides benefits valued at up to \$90,000 over two years to fund a two-year master's degree, arranges internships on Capitol Hill and at USAID missions overseas, and provides professional development and support activities. Fellows who successfully complete the program become USAID Foreign Service Officers. Fellows may use the fellowship to attend a two-year master's program in a U.S. institution to study an area of relevance to the USAID Foreign Service, including international development, international relations, public policy, business administration, foreign languages, economics, agriculture, environmental sciences, health, or urban planning at a graduate or professional school approved by the Payne Program. At the end of the two-year fellowship, Fellows enter the USAID Foreign Service. Applicants must be college seniors or graduates looking to start graduate school in the fall of the year they apply, have GPAs of at least 3.2 and be U.S. citizens. The program welcomes applications from those with any undergraduate major and encourages applications from members of minority groups historically underrepresented in the USAID Foreign Service and those with financial need. Information and application materials for the program are available at www.paynefellows.org.

The application deadline is January 23, 2013. The Program is funded by USAID and managed by Howard University.

"The direction in which education starts a man
will determine his future life."

- Plato



33 and counting - Part2- Bingham Copper Mines and Arches National Park, UT

We were trying to catch some sleep in cold last time when I stopped the part 1 of my article. When we woke up in the following morning, the hood of our tent was damped with layers and layers of snow. It was heavy and we had to kick the roof from the inside to get rid of them. Our day began with cooking breakfast and preparing the lunch for the day. Saku and I made a dhal curry and fried sausages while a pot of rice is cooked. We had a hot tea and a meal and packed our stuff again to start the journey.

Our goal was to watch as many eruptions and geysers as we could. The times of the eruption and the names of the geysers were displayed in many places; hence it was easy to plan our route. If you plan to visit Yellow stone national park, make sure you won't miss the Morning Glory Pool, Old Faithful Geyser, Opal Pool, Sapphire Pool, Splendid Geyser, Grand Prismatic Spring and Grand Geyser because they are colorful and eruptions are beautiful to watch. The color formation done by Mother Nature is unbelievable and no modern camera can get the real beauty of those color mixtures.

After driving around the park while visiting those geysers and counting bison, we decided to have our lunch near the yellow stone lake. I do not have words to explain the view of the lake. It was frozen and what we could see was a layer of ice which made the lake a huge ice crust. We heated our curries using our gas cooker but the cold wind made our lunch colder within minutes. Since the lake was frozen, we had to melt snow and ice on a hot saucepan to wash dishes and hands. It was another new experience we gained during our trip. Our next camp site was located near the lake and since the lake was frozen, the park decided to close the camp site for that day. Unfortunately we couldn't camp that night in the park, so we changed our plans and determined to drive all the way to Salt Lake City. We were able to change our reservations of the motel for another night. Saying good bye to the park, we started our journey towards Utah and reached Salt Lake City after a long drive in heavy rain. We enjoyed a hot shower and a good hot dinner and slept like babies under those warm blankets sweeping away our memories of the previous cold night.

It was a gloomy day next day and our plan was to visit Bingham copper mines. We had to wait few hours until the mist fades away to open the gates for public. It is also known as the **Kennecott Copper Mine** and is an open-pit mining operation extracting large copper deposits. It has a creation of a pit over 0.75 miles (1.21 km) deep, 2.5 miles (4 km) wide, and covering 1,900 acres (770 ha). When we look down to this great pit, we could see the roads running round and round like strings and the tractors which transport the deposit looked like small boxes of matches. But when you get a chance to stand near these trucks they are huge and their tires are several feet higher than a grown human. Bingham Canyon Mine is the largest man-made excavation in the world, and is visible with the naked eye from space.

After watching an informative video about the beginning of the mine and how they process copper, we headed back to Salt Lake City town area to visit the famous temple square. It is packed with several temples with beautiful architecture and the center piece temple made it unique. We felt like we were in a different world. Huge roofs and beautiful statues added a historic look to the place. Each church had different themes and we were allowed to visit only selected churches. We waited until dark to enjoy the amazing view of lighted temples. After exploring the temple square, we walked around the city here and there and came back to our motel.

Priyantha was so excited about the Winter Olympic City in Salt Lake City because he watched the whole Winter Olympic program in 2002. So our next day visit was to the Winter Olympic City. Though there was not much to look, we had a good guided tour around the place. We found a famous Nepal restaurant in the city and had a decent Indian meal that evening. The funny part of this lunch was we had to use our GPS to track the place while we walk around the streets. Pedestrians passing us were looking around when they hear the lady of the GPS gives the directions to the location. That was the last night in our motel and we packed our stuff, so we can leave the place earlier next day.

That was the last day of our trip or the seventh day. On our way back we visited the Arches National Park which is famous for the "Delicate Arch", the picture you see on Utah number plates. We had a long walk to the arch while enjoying the different formations of the rocks created by wind and rain. It was hot and we were burning from dry wind. But the journey felt worth when we reached the destination. The formation of the Delicate Arch is astonishing and we couldn't believe that huge rocks can form into such designs by themselves. Finally we covered all the places we planned and started our drive back to home. While stopping at couple of places to eat and to rest, we drove the whole night and reached Lubbock at the dawn of 1st of June. With all the excitements we had in the trip and the experiences we gained, we knew this trip is going to be a one long story to sit back and remember with a great pleasure.



Next! ... will be our road trip to beautiful Vancouver and Washington, the "Ever Green State".....

Hemalika Abeysundara (Karunaratne)

Going to Spain and buying an adapter - Part 1

In the month of November 2012, I was invited to an international conference in Spain, ICERI. ICERI stands for Education, Research and Innovation all around the world. After becoming an educator I started paying more attention to pedagogical research and the presentation that I was invited for was about the use of Wikispaces (Wikis) and Group Problem Solving (GPS) in physics classrooms.

Both my husband Sanjeewa and son Ravindu were able to join me for the trip. It was pretty convenient for all of us as the conference fell on Thanksgiving break. The beginning of the expedition was bit bumpy; we had few days to get ready and both Sanjeewa and I had to get the Schengen visa. There were no slots available for the visa interview and had to make a special request to the Spanish Consulate General to get one. Even after everything went through, we were informed that those who carry Sri Lankan passports must be verified by an Informatics Central System in France before stamping the visa - meaning ten additional days for the process. We had only four days before the departure. I was sad for the impression they have toward Sri Lanka and Sanjeewa was mad for the same reason. Later on, after a lengthy discussion, Sanjeewa was able to convince them the reality and the visa was granted to us in two days!

We started the trip on Saturday before the Thanksgiving break; the flight was scheduled to transit Frankfurt, Germany. The total time we spent including the transit was less than 12 hours, so it wasn't bad at all. We landed in Spain on Sunday early morning; port of entry was Barajas airport in Madrid. It was a lovely morning and the weather was perfect (don't forget that we were beaten by Sandy and the Nor'easter snow storm back to back - just before we left). The airport was well organized, some authorities managed the cab service and we were assigned a cab. The word "cab" was not popular there and they used the word "Taxi" instead. The driver didn't speak a word of English but knew the hotel we wanted to go. Along the way he explained several things - in Spanish- we both nodded not to be rude but to this date what he told us remains unknown. Ravindu on the other hand was very excited and wanted to communicate with the driver. As he always does with the white-skinned people, started with English, not being satisfied with the feedback he switched to Sinhalese. They were talking - all along the way for about 25 minutes.

We were greeted at the hotel first in Spanish and then in English. Only the manager was fluent in English her two assistants could manage but used sign language often. We were assigned to a triple suite for a cheaper prize than we agreed on - not quite sure how it happened - I wasn't interested for details. It was a pretty good place, very spacious. Ravindu fell in love with the place immediately, and started to explore. I, on the other hand wanted to work on the talk, my presentation was scheduled for Tuesday and I didn't have a single slide ready at that point. I switched on the laptop and reached out to plug it - the very strange looking plug didn't want to power the computer. That was when we realized we left our adapter home and needed one to continue the next couple of days of our lives in Spain. As anyone would do, we ran to the reception - alas! the manger has stepped out. The receptionist was there and we asked for an adapter. I haven't seen such a confusing look in any ones' face before. Sanjeewa explained the use of the device. She was more confused. Then Sanjeewa explained the shape of the pinholes of the plug - she understood (or pretended) what we were looking for and directed us to a Chinese shop nearby. We went out of the hotel toward the direction she pointed out - ended up in a gas station. For the rest of the time we spent in the hotel, we didn't come across a Chinese shop around the area and never bothered to get directions from the receptionist again. No one in the gas station spoke English, some customers understood a word or two but didn't communicate well. They however wanted to help us and gave a map. Sanjeewa was in a futile effort explaining what an "adapter" is to them. At one point he took the iPhone out and showed them the power slot and extended two of his fingers trying to explain the pins. I was trying my best not to laugh and Ravindu as usual was exploring the shop (he saved me from bursting out). Storekeeper understood something and with confidence directed us to Sol city and gave direction to an electronic shop. We walked to the nearest subway station to go to Sol - the distance was about 15 km from where we were (Castilla). We purchased the tickets and got into the train to go to Sol city. At this point, reader must realize how desperate I was for an adapter.

Madrid is the Capital of Spain, yet English was the least popular language! I wasn't ready to believe that - thought we were in a wrong part of the Capital. At the same time some form of insecurity started lingering into me. What if I break away from the rest, how would they find me or the other way around? What if Ravindu, the little explorer, walks out of our sight and gets lost in the crowd. While I was sinking in my thoughts, the train reached the Sol city. We followed the direction of the shopkeeper and ended up in an Apple Store, they were selling apple products, not the adapters. I had this suspicion all along as Sanjeewa showed his iPhone to the shopkeeper. What else to expect in a country that doesn't speak any of the languages we spoke? Frustrated? Yes, but at the same time, we found Sol city to be a very lively with a warm environment. People were eating, drinking, smoking, dancing talking and singing - all in one place. We moved from one shop to another enjoying the crowd around us. At one point, we came across a group of street performers, they were singing, dancing and acting. We absolutely had no clue what they sang about, but the facial expressions of them and the reaction from the crowd, made it pretty obvious. The lead actress was doing something hilarious. We both thought that she is very talented for a street performer.

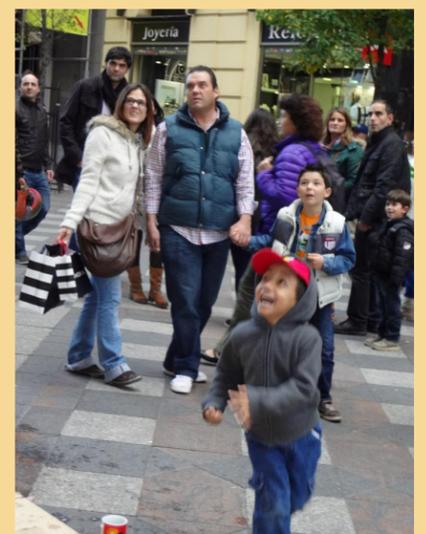
We still had no luck with an adapter. No one around spoke English and it was a Sunday - not all the shops were opened. All the signs in the boards, including directions were in Spanish. I was about to walk into a bakery to ask for an adapter. Situation was that bad. By the end of the city square, there was a small newspaper stall - Sanjeewa had a hunch he could get help there. The guy in the stall was one of us, an Asian descendent - brown skin. Sanjeewa reached to the stall "Hi" he greeted "do you know where I can find an adapter? You know a device used to" Sanjeewa didn't get to finish the sentence; the guy reached out for an adapter and put it on his hand! I felt like giving him a big hug for saving the day - my talk and the whole trip. We bought two of them 7 EUR each.

Our next task was finding a bookstore and buying a dictionary that can translate the most essential words to Spanish. We won one challenge and started walking back to the city square. Locals and tourists, old and young, men and women - all looked very happy. They were sitting around a fountain eating and drinking and watching those who pass by. This time we aimed foreigners for help to find a bookstore. A young Chinese girl walked toward us with a big smile - her friend was a local. I asked if she speaks English, she answered "yes". We asked directions for a bookstore. She gave us directions; in fact we were standing right in front of one - librería - the sign read. The sweet friendly girl explained why people didn't know or care for English. We thanked her so much and left to get the translation booklet. Thereafter we felt more confident.

We thought food was reasonably cheap. Almost all the restaurants were selling liquor in public. As I came to know, the age limit for drinking in Spain is 14. Even young children were allowed in those restaurants/pubs. Instead of taking Ravindu in, I decided to take a walk in the city square with Ravindu and the booklet. Sanjeewa went inside the restaurant to get food. Our estimate for food was about 11.25 EUR (according to the display board). In the mean time, Ravindu found few little friends who were chasing after soap bubbles - they did communicate with few different languages. Language wasn't a barrier for them at all. All what I heard was their giggles. After about half an hour, still no show of Sanjeewa, I grabbed Ravindu and returned to the restaurant. At this point I had no other choice but going in. I found Sanjeewa surrounded by many boxes full of food. Obviously the waiter - chef - and Sanjeewa have had issues communicating with each other. We ended up paying 35 EUR for the dinner. Three large boxes full of cheese and some more boxes of seafood. I was laughing again - "What happened to the menu we picked before going in?" I didn't even want to go there. We wanted bread to eat Cheese and seafood.

How did we find Bread? - To be continued with the next issue.

By Hashini Mohottala



MOTHER NATURE

We live in Windsor, Ontario, Canada across the border from Michigan USA. Windsor is the southern most point in Canada known for warm summers and mild winters. In the summer we grow a lot of tropical flowers and vegetables.

We have grown giant sunflowers each year and they need lots of TLC to overcome threats from slugs in the initial stages followed by storms etc. We were surprised to find a plant growing from our patio likely from a bird dropping last year and was skeptical whether it will survive. However it grew about 8 ft tall with such beautiful flowers, proving again the amazing power of mother nature.

Sent By Nayana Fernando



Book Review : **Tale of a Mud Hut: The Musaeus Saga** By Mrs. N.K. Pilapitiya

(Principal of Musaeus College, 1995-2008)
(Alumna - Musaeus College)
(Principal of Mahamaya Girls' College, 1981-1990)
(Principal of St. Anthony's Convent 1973-1980)

First Edition:	2012
Published by:	Musaeus College Past Pupils Association, Colombo
ISBN:	9789554502000
Physical description:	xviii, 274 pages, photographs ; 21 cm
Languages in book:	English and Sinhalese
Price:	Rs. 800.00
Where to buy:	Vijitha Yapa Online Book Store

"**Tale of a Mud Hut: The Musaeus Saga**" written by Mrs. N.K. Pilapitiya unfolds not only the story of Musaeus Buddhist Girls' College, that started 120 years ago in 1891 with 12 students, but the Buddhist revival of Sri Lanka in the late 19th century and first half of the 20th century.. Under the British rule, Christian missionary schools had been set up in major cities with comprehensive European standards, and showed little respect for Buddhism. Tale of a Mud Hut is a story of socio-economic, and cultural challenges that the Buddhists faced under colonial rulers, and how they struggled to overcome the difficulties to reach their country's educational and cultural needs. This is the story of the history of Buddhist women's education, a dawn of a new era for Buddhist women, and setting up the first Buddhist educational institute for women in the country.

With the help of the Theosophical Society, and its leaders such as Col. Henry Steel Olcott, Madame Blavatsky, Most Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala, Ven. Migettuwatte Gunananda, Anagarika Dharmapala, William de Abrew, Peter de Abrew, and many other prominent pioneers, the country's religious, national and cultural revival emerged. Their perseverance for the upliftment of national heritage and Buddhist culture, played a major role in the founding of Musaeus College. Peter de Abrew, who was a prominent member of the Theosophical Society, Ceylon, and Mrs. Marie Musaeus Higgins were founders of Musaeus College. The author has made quite an effort to trace the original sources related to all those events, which makes this book so special. It is in fact a social and cultural history of the colonial period written from the perspective of a prominent educationist of our time. I enjoyed reading about the Sri Lankan society during those trying times, seeing the rich collection of related pictures and articles from old newspapers and other publications, and abstracts of handwritten documents in that era, that were included in the book.

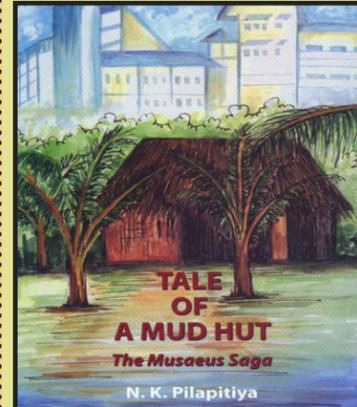
Tale of a Mud Hut reveals the stories of several pioneering people who were engaged in the history of Musaeus College. Founding Principal, Mrs. Marie Musaeus Higgins was one of them. Coming from a German Jewish and Irish American background, Mrs. Higgins realized that the girls from Buddhist families did not have access to English education in a Buddhist cultural environment. Her pioneering work in giving that background to our young Buddhist women was remarkable. William de Abrew and Peter de Abrew were pillars of strength to her. She served as the Principal for 35 years from 1891-1926, and brought the school to an unprecedented level. In many ways she can be called as the pioneer in the Buddhist women's education in Sri Lanka. She also authored historical books for the use of school children to teach the history of their culture. Mrs. Higgins won the hearts of the people. She had been a great leader to the Buddhist society and the country as a whole. "Tale of a Mud Hut" shows how the society grieved her untimely death in 1926 at the age of 71. Today, Musaeus Buddhist Girls' College is a premier Buddhist school in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which started as a modest "mud hut" that both served as a living and teaching quarters for 12 students.

Tale of a Mud Hut is a most fitting tribute to Musaeus College, and its courageous pioneers who made history. No other book is available with such detailed information. It is a great resource for those who like to read about Sri Lanka's cultural journey during the colonial times.

The author Mrs. N.K. Pilapitiya, has been an educationist par excellence who served the children of our country from 1956-2008, a total of 52 years. She is spending her retirement between her ancestral home at Pihilladeniya, Ukuwela, Matale and Colombo.

Buddhist Revival during the British Colonial Era: Establishment of Buddhist Schools in 19th and 20th centuries:

Ananda College, Colombo.....	1886	Established by Theosophical Society
Dharmaraja College, Kandy.....	1887	Established by Theosophical Society
Maliyadeva College, Kurunegala	1888	Established by Theosophical Society
Sri Rahula College, Katugastota	1890	Established by Theosophical Society
Musaeus College, Colombo.....	1891	Co-founders: Marie Musaeus Higgins, Peter de Abrew
Mahinda College, Galle.....	1892	Established by Theosophical Society
Ananda Sastralaya, Kotte.....	1893	Took over the admin. by Theo. Soc.
Sri Sumangala College, Panadura	1909	Founders: two Buddhist monks
Dharmasoka College, Ambalangoda.....	1913	Founder: Mudliar S. Thomas de Silva
Visakha Vidyalaya , Colombo	1917	Est. by Mrs. Jeremias Dias
Sanghamitta Girls' College, Galle	1919	Founder: Hon. Francis Amarasiri Wickremasinghe Muhandiram
Rahula College, Matara.....	1923	Established by Matara Buddhists Society
Nalanda College, Colombo.....	1925	Established by Theosophical Society
Sujatha Vidyalaya, Matara	1929	Established by Matara Buddhists Society
Mahamaya Girls' College, Kandy.....	1932	Est. by Sadachara Kulangana Samithiya
Dharmapala Vidyalaya, Pannipitiya	1940	Established by Theosophical Society
Vidyarthi College, Kandy	1942	Founded by Vidyarthi Society
Pushpadana Girls' College	1942	Founded by Sri Pushpadana Samithiya
Buddhist Ladies' College, Colombo	1954	Founder: Mohandas de Mel



By Sujatha Werake

HOW IT ALL GOT STARTED

Long before the advent of Christianity, plants and trees that remained green all year had a special meaning for people in the winter. Just as people today decorate their homes during the festive season with pine, spruce, and fir trees, ancient peoples hung evergreen boughs over their doors and windows. In many countries it was believed that evergreens would keep away witches, ghosts, evil spirits, and illness.

In the Northern hemisphere, the shortest day and longest night of the year falls on December 21 or December 22 and is called the winter solstice. Many ancient people believed that the sun was a god and that winter came every year because the sun god had become sick and weak. They celebrated the solstice because it meant that at last the sun god would begin to get well. Evergreen boughs reminded them of all the green plants that would grow again when the sun god was strong and summer would return.

The ancient Egyptians worshipped a god called Ra, who had the head of a hawk and wore the sun as a blazing disk in his crown. At the solstice, when Ra began to recover from the illness, the Egyptians filled their homes with green palm rushes which symbolized for them the triumph of life over death.

Early Romans marked the solstice with a feast called the Saturnalia in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture. The Romans knew that the solstice meant that soon farms and orchards would be green and fruitful. To mark the occasion, they decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs. In Northern Europe the mysterious Druids, the priests of the ancient Celts, also decorated their temples with evergreen boughs as a symbol of everlasting life. The fierce Vikings in Scandinavia thought that evergreens were the special plant of the sun god, Balder.

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we now know it in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. Some built Christmas pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles if wood was scarce. It is a widely held belief that Martin Luther, the 16th-century Protestant reformer, first added lighted candles to a tree. Walking toward his home one winter evening, composing a sermon, he was awed by the brilliance of stars twinkling amidst evergreens. To recapture the scene for his family, he erected a tree in the main room and wired its branches with lighted candles.

Most 19th-century Americans found Christmas trees an oddity. The first record of one being on display was in the 1830s by the German settlers of Pennsylvania, although trees had been a tradition in many German homes much earlier. The Pennsylvania German settlements had community trees as early as 1747. But, as late as the 1840s Christmas trees were seen as pagan symbols and not accepted by most Americans.

It is not surprising that, like many other festive Christmas customs, the tree was adopted so late in America. To the New England Puritans, Christmas was sacred. The pilgrims' second governor, William Bradford, wrote that he tried hard to stamp out "pagan mockery" of the observance, penalizing any frivolity. The influential Oliver Cromwell preached against "the heathen traditions" of Christmas carols, decorated trees, and any joyful expression that desecrated "that sacred event." In 1659, the General Court of Massachusetts enacted a law making any observance of December 25 (other than a church service) a penal offense; people were fined for hanging decorations. That stern solemnity continued until the 19th century, when the influx of German and Irish immigrants undermined the Puritan legacy.

In 1846, the popular royals, Queen Victoria and her German Prince, Albert, were sketched in the Illustrated London News standing with their children around a Christmas tree. Unlike the previous royal family, Victoria was very popular with her subjects, and what was done at court immediately became fashionable—not only in Britain, but with fashion-conscious East Coast American Society. The Christmas tree had arrived.

By the 1890s Christmas ornaments were arriving from Germany and Christmas tree popularity was on the rise around the U.S. It was noted that Europeans used small trees about four feet in height, while Americans liked their Christmas trees to reach from floor to ceiling.

The early 20th century saw Americans decorating their trees mainly with homemade ornaments, while the German-American sect continued to use apples, nuts, and marzipan cookies. Popcorn joined in after being dyed bright colors and interlaced with berries and nuts. Electricity brought about Christmas lights, making it possible for Christmas trees to glow for days on end. With this, Christmas trees began to appear in town squares across the country and having a Christmas tree in the home became an American tradition.

Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree

The Rockefeller Center tree is located at Rockefeller Center, west of Fifth Avenue from 47th through 51st Streets in New York City.

The Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree dates back to the Depression Era days. The tallest tree displayed at Rockefeller Center came in 1948 and was a Norway Spruce that measured in at 100 feet tall and hailed from Killingworth, Connecticut.

The first tree at Rockefeller Center was placed in 1931. It was a small unadorned tree placed by construction workers at the center of the construction site. Two years later, another tree was placed there, this time with lights. These days, the giant Rockefeller Center tree is laden with over 25,000 Christmas lights.

<http://www.history.com/topics/history-of-Christmas-trees>

Sent by Priyanka Jayakody



Kids' Corner



Drawing By Ravindu Karunaratne

Age: 4 years 9 months

School: Bright Horizon, West Hartford, Connecticut



Daddy, mommy and I planting flowers by Tarika Harini Waters

Age: 4- Montessori School of Beaverton, Portland, Oregon

Favorite Children's books about holidays

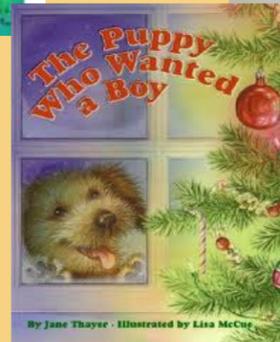
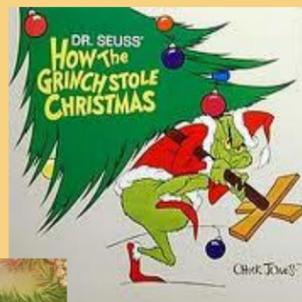
How the Grinch Stole Christmas by Dr. Seuss

The Puppy Who Wanted a Boy by Jane Thayer

Pete the Cat Saves Christmas by Eric Litwin

The Polar Express by Chris Van Allsburg

The Gingerbread Man by Catherine McCafferty



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