

The first reference of a fir tree decorated for Christmas is at Riga in Latvia in 1510. In 1521, the Princess Hlne de Mecklembourg introduced the Christmas tree to Paris after marrying the Duke of Orleans. There also is a printed reference to Christmas trees in Germany, dated 1531.

Another famous reference, to 1601, is about a visitor to Strasbourg, Germany (now part of France) who noticed a family decorating a tree with “wafers and golden sugar-twists (barley sugar) and paper flowers of all colors.”

The Christmas tree was introduced to the United States by German settlers and by Hessian mercenaries paid to fight in the Revolutionary War. In 1804, US soldiers stationed at Fort Dearborn (Chicago) hauled trees from surrounding woods to their barracks.

Britain was introduced to the Christmas tree in 1841, when Queen Victoria’s German husband, Prince Albert brought a Christmas tree to Windsor Castle for the Royal family. The custom of the Christmas tree spread quickly to the middle class, to working people, and throughout the colonies (where the Empire’s flag would sometimes top the tree).

Christmas tree decorations

Trees were decorated with apples, cakes and candies for many centuries. Martin Luther was the first to use candles on trees in the late 16th Century. In 1842, Charles Minnegrode introduced the custom of decorating trees to the US in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) is said to be the first to have decorated a Christmas tree with candles to show children how the stars twinkled through the dark night.