



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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Holidays Reflect Our Heritage as a Nation of Immigrants

By State Representative Don Vruwink

As a teacher of United States history, I have always been intrigued by learning new details of the evolution of our nation. The history of the Christmas holiday is one example.

The earliest white settlers in America did not observe Christmas, and one group – the New England Puritans – specifically banned Christmas celebrations because they resembled non-Christian traditions. The Quakers and Presbyterians held similar views.

Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Lutherans were among the first settlers who brought Christmas observances to America. As more and more immigrants came to the “New World,” Christmas celebrations became more widespread and incorporated traditions from around the world.

German immigrants brought the Christmas tree. Londoners brought their tradition of sending Christmas cards. Santa Claus evolved from a combination of the Turkish Monk St. Nicholas and the English Father Christmas. St. Nicholas was known for giving away his inherited wealth to help the poor, sick, and downtrodden. In Germany and Switzerland, the mythic figure Kris Kringle delivered gifts to well-behaved children.

It is accepted among some historians that Hessian soldiers from Germany who fought alongside the British in the Revolutionary War first introduced the Christmas tree to the American colonies. Others believe German immigrants who settled in Eastern Pennsylvania started the tradition.

Many ethnicities and nationalities contributed to all of our nation's holidays. The United States has been called a melting pot that mixes together numerous cultures. And yet many of us still strongly identify with our ancestry, and take pride in the heritage of our immigrant parents.

One tradition very close to home is the Wisconsin State Capitol Christmas tree. This year's theme is "America's Dairyland." Schoolchildren across the state have contributed hand-made ornaments reflecting that theme. I always enjoy seeing families using some of their holiday time to visit the Capitol to see the tree.

As we move into this holiday season, I hope that we all remember the contributions our immigrant ancestors made to this great nation. Wishing you joy and peace.

State Representative Don Vruwink represents parts of Rock, Walworth, Jefferson, and Dane counties. These include the communities of Whitewater, Milton, Edgerton, Footville, the Town of Janesville, part of the Village of Oregon, and surrounding townships. He can be reached at 608-266-3790, Rep.Vruwink@legis.wisconsin.gov, and P.O. Box 8953, Madison WI 53708.

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