

Oakville Historical  
Society  
since 1953

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# Historical Society News

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[www.oakvillehistory.org](http://www.oakvillehistory.org)



## *Victorian Christmas Customs and Celebrations*

**Volume 59 Number 4**

**Christmas 2025**

# A Victorian Christmas

Brenda Chisholm

Our recent Victorian tea fundraiser had me researching customs of that era. It was most interesting to discover how many of our present traditions are courtesy of the Victorian time. For example, it is widely known that Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's beloved husband, brought his tradition of decorating an evergreen tree with candles and trinkets to England from Germany. The royals sat down to a multi-course family dinner with mince pies, turkey with all the trimmings and a plum pudding for dessert. Gifts were exchanged on Christmas Eve, and in the royal household, servants were included in the custom. This idea of giving to the less fortunate gave rise to the idea of being charitable to those in need.

And, did you know, the first Christmas card was introduced in 1843 by Sir Henry Cole? Finding himself too busy to write letters to his family and friends, he commissioned an artist to create a festive card to send instead. The message on the front stated "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You" with an illustrated scene. He printed 1,000 copies and sold the ones he did not need to the public. In the latter part of the century, advanced printing processes made buying and sending Christmas cards affordable for most people and the practice grew.

At the beginning of the 1800s, December 25<sup>th</sup> was just another working day for the lower classes. During the Victorian era, the second Industrial Revolution meant new technology produced goods faster and in greater quantities for less cost. The Factory Act of 1833 set out a number of statutory holidays for workers each year, including Christmas. For many, not



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accustomed to having any days off, this became reason to celebrate on the new holiday.

Industrialization also meant that sweets and candies became more accessible and affordable. Faster modes of transportation allowed for more exotic raw ingredients. Specialty shops which sold only candy and sweets opened offering new flavours and creations. Christmastime became accepted as an occasion to indulge and enjoy special luxuries. As production methods improved, sweet treats which had previously been unaffordable to many were now within the reach of everyone.

Although religious Christmas carols had been around for centuries, the Victorians popularized singing at Christmas and wrote many new songs that focused on feasting and cheer rather than the Christmas story. Collections of carols, both new and old, were gathered and published in books. These became very desirable collectables during this era. In December, lyrics to carols were published in newspapers and magazines to encourage the practice of caroling. To this day, people gather to sing carols with family and friends, printed songsheets in hand.

Our Victorian-themed Christmas tea was a resounding success and we plan to make it an annual event. My sincerest thanks to everyone for your support; in particular the fundraising committee members: Sheena Curran; Mary Ellen McClure; Carly Moum; Janie Fischbacher and Lois Munz. Marci MacDonald, Susan Bowen and Donna Endres acted as very charming costumed servers and hostess. George Chisholm, Mark Verlinden and Chris Curran moved furniture and did the heavy lifting. Two new volunteers, Sophia and Emma, assisted with set up and decorating. Sheena Curran spent hours creating a large variety of appropriate Christmas decorations, not only for the tea, but also for the Festive Gathering.

These events require a lot of planning and effort, but feedback received indicates they are very much appreciated by our guests.

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# Happy Holidays to all!

*Burns' Supper*  
*Friday January 16, 2026*  
*6:30 - 9:30 pm*

Poetry, music, Highland dancing, bagpipes  
and a traditional dinner of  
Steak pie, Neeps, Tatties, Haggis,  
Trifle and Shortbread

Cash Bar

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Location:  
St. John's United Church hall  
262 Randall St  
Oakville  
[oakvillehistory.org](http://oakvillehistory.org)

Closed Dec 19 - Jan 5

**Office hours:** Jan 6 onward: Tuesday, Thursday and 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Sunday from 1-4:30

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