

Many facets to the history of ornaments

BY SALLY D. KETCHUM
Special to the Record-Eagle

In the mid-19th century, a large German population arrived on the shores of America and among the customs brought from the old country was ornamented Christmas trees.

While the first trees in Germany were decorated with sweets — cookies, candies, and small cakes — soon the German glass artisans added their talents, and tree ornaments called “kugels” — hollow glass globes — to the edible decorations. So a new industry, Christmas tree decorations, was born.

The Germans were expert in glass work, especially near Thuringia, and their work and their intricate glass molds became famous. The finest glass ornaments even today are still made from those early molds. Such ornaments are mouth-blown, each one separately. The molten glass is blown into the mold, then cooled and lacquered, finally silvered inside for the beautiful reflective qualities.

One of the most famous modern ornament designers

is Christopher Radko. His line is made from traditional molds like frogs, animals and Santas and also from new ones, like a champagne bottle or the Time Square clock.

Many families have strong traditions connected with their holiday trees, trimming them with collections of ornaments that have been handed down, generation to generation.

Anthropologists note that the ongoing popularity of Christmas trees is remarkable, considering the changes in culture over the years. This season, traditions aside, ornament style seems to be headed in three different directions: opulence, Toyland and natural materials and motifs.

Opulence in ornaments shows this year in luxurious fabrics in tree skirts or in faux watermarked taffeta patterns on glass ornaments.

The range of Toyland ornaments is huge, but there is a trend toward the classic fairy tale and Disney characters, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Pluto, along with some newer characters, like

Sponge Bob. Work is also celebrated, with toy farm equipment, John Deere facsimiles, trucks and workers, in ornaments that will appeal to children.

American ornaments also reflect both environmental concerns and the desire for simplicity during complex times. Berries of various sorts appear in garlands and ornaments as do dried (or faux) fruits, twigs and greens. There are scented potpourris to place under the tree and natural colors — gold, bronze and brown in everything from the ornaments on the tree to its lights and skirt.

From simple beginnings to today's elaborate decorations, lights, tinsel and ornaments deck holiday trees across the globe. In the United States, the National Tree stands majestically in Rockefeller Center, as does the Michigan State Tree in Lansing and The Traverse City Tree on Front Street, right down to the trees in nearly every family room in northern lower Michigan.

Sally D. Ketchum is a local freelance writer.

Get software savvy before you buy for video games for kids

Do some homework before you walk into a store and buy the video game your child has been begging for.

Some games look innocent but actually contain violence and cursing. To avoid bringing home an inappropriate game, a recent Parents magazine suggests you research first.

1. Read reviews on the Web and in magazines, and talk to other parents to see if they are familiar with the game.

2. Many video games feature a recommended age range. Don't buy a game for teens or adults unless you've tried it first.

3. The Entertainment Software Rating Board

indicates why the game is or is not appropriate for children. Kmart and other stores often post this information for shoppers to peruse.

On DVD: Give the gift of Beatles

BY RICHARD HARRINGTON
The Washington Post

“Ed Sullivan Presents the Beatles” \$29.95. The Beatles' first Sullivan appearance on Feb. 9, 1964, was a seminal moment in rock history and pop culture. Watched by a record 73 million people, it ignited Beatlemania in America and changed ... just about everything. The group did two more shows that February and another in September of 1965. Now, those 20 black-and-white performances are available in their entirety for the first time since the shows originally aired. You get seven different No. 1 hits (including “I Want to Hold Your Hand” three times) and an artistic growth indicator from the 1965 show (where

they performed “Ticket to Ride,” “Help” and “Michelle”), but no extras in the four hour-long shows.

“Concert for George.” \$29.99. A two-disc version of the Eric Clapton-organized tribute concert at London's Royal Albert Hall in November 2002, one year after George Harrison's passing. One disc contains the recent theatrical release, which mixed performances with interviews and backstage scenes; the second disc contains the full concert, composed mostly of Harrison songs presented in the order they were originally performed, giving them greater emotional resonance.

“Lennon Legend.” \$24.98. Sharing the title of a 1998

greatest hits package, this 20-track companion work features 15 new videos that draw extensively from previously unseen private film in the Lennon/Ono archive. Among the more poignant moments are “Imagine” from a 1975 London gala was John Lennon's final live performance before his murder five years later, and “Love,” a two-way valentine, parts of which were filmed just weeks before Lennon's death. There are powerful videos for “Working Class Hero,” “Just Like Starting Over,” “Happy Xmas (War Is Over)” and “Give Peace a Chance,” mixing Bed-In footage from 1969 with somber images from a number of vigils following his death.

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