

## German Christmas Traditions

By Thomas G. Mueller, Jamestown, North Dakota, November 2009

O Tannenbaum! O Tannenbaum!  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, thy candles shine so brightly!  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, thy leaves are so unchanging!  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, how lovely are your branches!

Christmas 2005 introduced to me another old German Christmas tradition. Our daughter, Sara gave me a hand blown glass pickle Christmas tree ornament, about 4 inches long and bright green in color, thinking it was appropriate. I am the self-proclaimed “King of the hot German pickle makers”, canning over 100 quarts of them the summer of 2004. The recipe I use was used on my paternal side and goes back to the time pickle spices were introduced in Germany, and then passed down generation after generation. Grandpa Salomon Mueller had Grandma Maria put lots of red peppers, 2 tablespoons, in some of her pickles. My dad made his own hot pepper garlic pickles and taught me how when I was a teenager, and Dad explained that this was Grandpa’s recipe.

Sara explained to me that it’s an old German custom, the glass pickle is the last ornament hung and is hidden on the Christmas tree and the child that finds it gets an extra present and starts the present opening. Parents prepare for one of the children finding it with an extra present. Another version is that when the children are grown, the gift is one year of good luck.

The custom of Christmas trees and later decorating them started 1200 years ago in Germany. It seems like the Germans started a lot of customs that were used to celebrate Christmas. In 2009, Christmas is being attacked and it has become politically correct to celebrate the Holidays rather than Christmas. In my heart I know that celebrating Christmas will be here for a long time, but this tradition has to be kept alive by families and in churches that want to celebrate Christ’s birth.

I know that a lot of the German customs have been forgotten here in North Dakota. As each generation assimilates into the American lifestyle we lose a few more traditions. It’s not that it’s wrong to assimilate, but if a conscious effort is made to remember our forefather’s traditions, we honor their lives and keep their memory.

This year in our house the grandchildren and I are going to look for the hidden glass pickle ornament and after finding it, I will tell the story. They are only 3 and 5 now but each year they celebrate at our house I will repeat this German tradition with them. Letting them know they aren’t just Americans.

Here in North Dakota celebrating Christmas this year will include a little bit of our German Christmas traditions. My ancestors left Germany in the 1700’s, Grandpa Salomon came to America in 1905 from Russia, a “German from Russia” bringing with him a taste for a good canned hot pepper garlic German pickle.

Christmas comes but once a year bringing lots and lots of cheer.