

Holiday Traditions

Make Liberty Hall your ghost of Christmases past, with its enchanting rooms decorated for the holidays of years gone by ...

by Irene Maslowski • photography by Dan Muro

Liberty Hall Museum, located in Union, is one of New Jersey's historic treasures. Built in 1772 by William Livingston, a prominent New York City lawyer, member of the Constitutional Convention, and New Jersey's first elected governor, it has been home to both the Livingston and Kean families for more than 200 years.

Each generation of these families has left a piece of their legacy behind and their presence can still be felt in the vast collection of American furniture, decorative arts, ceramics, textiles, toys, books, memorabilia — and celebrations.

The family traditions celebrated in its rooms have left a strong mark on Liberty Hall, so during the holiday season the museum hosts its annual Candlelight Tours. The tours celebrate

Opposite: The dining room table at Liberty Hall is set in "Twas the Night Before Christmas" tradition. It was around this time that Santa Claus began to take on the form of a jolly old man with a white beard and red suit.

Right: A tabletop Christmas tree displayed in the parlor is decorated in the traditional Victorian style, which combines the joy of the season and the soberness of the World War II era.

five styles of Christmas: The Dutch tradition of St. Nicholas (1774), the English tradition of Twelfth Night (1800), and three American styles of Christmas: The Night Before Christmas (1848), a Victorian Christmas (1898), and a World War II Christmas (1942). Each of the latter three reflects the evolution of Christmas in America.

Livingston, who grew up in the Hudson Valley region, brought the Dutch tradition to his home, thus the celebration of St. Nicholas Day, which is recognized on December 6 and 7. On those days, children would hang their stockings believing Saint Nick and his servant would visit, riding in on

