

Christmas Trees, the Bible Student Movement, and Jehovah's Witnesses

Union of Saints

A Historical Timeline

Christmas Trees in American Culture

The Christmas tree tradition originated in German speaking Europe, where evergreen trees and Christmas trees became established customs centuries before they appeared in the United States.

16th century

The modern Christmas tree tradition developed in German speaking regions of Europe.

Late 1700s to early 1800s

German immigrants brought Christmas customs, including the Christmas tree, to North America.

1830s

Christmas trees became increasingly documented in American culture.

1836

One of the earliest significant American literary and visual references to a Christmas tree appeared. This makes 1836 an important documented milestone in the American history of the Christmas tree.

1840s–1850s

The Christmas tree became increasingly popular in American and British society. The widely circulated image of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert with their Christmas tree in 1848 helped popularize the custom throughout the English speaking world.

Important Distinction

It is therefore more accurate to say that German immigrants introduced and helped establish the Christmas tree tradition in American culture during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, rather than assigning one exact introduction year.

The Origins of the Jehovah's Witness Movement

The organization now known as Jehovah's Witnesses developed from the 19th century Bible Student movement associated with Charles Taze Russell.

1870

Charles Taze Russell began a small Bible study group in the Pittsburgh/Allegheny, Pennsylvania, area. Jehovah's Witnesses identify this period as the beginning of their modern religious history.

1879

Russell began publishing *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, which later became *The Watchtower*.

1881

The organization that eventually developed into the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society was organized.

1884

The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society was incorporated.

The Name "Jehovah's Witnesses"

The movement was not originally called Jehovah's Witnesses.

July 26, 1931

At a convention in Columbus, Ohio, Joseph F. Rutherford proposed the name *Jehovah's Witnesses*. The convention adopted the name.

Therefore:

- Bible Student movement: approximately 1870
 - *Zion's Watch Tower* publication: 1879
 - Watch Tower organization: 1881/1884
 - Name "Jehovah's Witnesses": 1931
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When Did the Movement Reject Christmas and Other Holidays?

This is an important distinction because the rejection of holidays developed gradually rather than beginning on one specific date.

Charles Taze Russell Period

During Russell's lifetime, the Bible Students increasingly questioned traditional Christian holidays and their origins.

1870s–1880s

The movement began examining traditional Christian practices and questioning whether they were supported by Scripture.

1880s–1890s

Watch Tower publications increasingly discussed Christmas, Easter, and other traditional celebrations in terms of their historical and non Biblical origins.

However, it would be misleading to say that Russell simply issued one declaration in 1870 banning all holidays.

The position developed over time.

Joseph Rutherford Period

The rejection became considerably more pronounced under Joseph F. Rutherford, who assumed leadership after Russell's death in 1916.

1920s

The Watch Tower movement increasingly rejected traditional Christian holidays, including Christmas and Easter.

1926

Watch Tower publications strongly criticized Christmas and its historical origins.

Late 1920s–1930s

Christmas celebrations were abandoned within the organization, along with other practices that were increasingly viewed as having non Biblical or pagan origins.

1931

The organization adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses.

By the 1930s, the rejection of Christmas, Easter, birthdays, and other traditional celebrations had become firmly established as part of Jehovah's Witness practice.

Side by Side Historical Timeline

Year	Event
16th century	Christmas tree tradition develops in German speaking Europe
Late 1700s–early 1800s	German immigrants bring Christmas customs to America
1836	Important early American documentation of Christmas trees
1848	Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's Christmas tree image helps popularize the custom
1870	Russell's Bible study movement begins
1879	<i>Zion's Watch Tower</i> begins publication
1881	Watch Tower organization formed
1884	Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society incorporated
1880s–1890s	Increasing criticism of traditional Christian holidays
1916	Russell dies; Rutherford becomes the movement's principal leader
1920s	Rejection of Christmas and other traditional holidays becomes increasingly explicit
1926	Strong Watch Tower criticism of Christmas
1931	Name "Jehovah's Witnesses" adopted
1930s	Rejection of Christmas, Easter, birthdays, and other holidays becomes firmly established

The Key Historical Point

The Christmas tree tradition predates the Jehovah's Witness movement by centuries.

The German Christmas tree tradition developed in Europe long before the 19th century Bible Student movement. German immigrants helped bring the custom to America during the late 1700s and early 1800s, with significant American documentation appearing by 1836.

The religious movement that eventually became Jehovah's Witnesses began around 1870, approximately 34 years after the 1836 American documentation of Christmas trees.

The name *Jehovah's Witnesses* itself did not appear until 1931, approximately 95 years after 1836.

The rejection of Christmas was not established at the beginning of the movement in 1870. It developed progressively and became firmly established during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly under Joseph F. Rutherford.

In Simplest Terms

- Christmas tree tradition in America: late 1700s–early 1800s
 - Early documented American Christmas tree: 1836
 - Bible Student movement: 1870
 - Name "Jehovah's Witnesses": 1931
 - Firm rejection of Christmas and other holidays: primarily 1920s–1930s
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Christmas Trees in American Culture

- **16th century:** The modern Christmas tree tradition developed in German speaking Europe.
- **Late 1700s to early 1800s:** German immigrants brought the Christmas tree tradition to America.
- **1830s:** There is clear American documentation of Christmas trees. One of the earliest published American images of a Christmas tree appeared in 1836, and an American literary reference also appeared that year.
- **1840s–1850s:** The practice became much more popular in American and British culture, helped by the famous 1848 image of Queen Victoria and her German husband, Prince Albert, around a Christmas tree.

If you are asking, "When did Germans introduce the Christmas tree to American culture?" the most accurate answer is the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with 1836 serving as an important documented American milestone.

Jehovah's Witnesses

The name *Jehovah's Witnesses* did not exist as the name of the organization during the 1800s.

- **1870s:** Charles Taze Russell and his associates began the Bible Student movement in Pennsylvania.
- **1879:** *Zion's Watch Tower* began publication.
- **1881:** The Watch Tower Society was organized.
- **1884:** The Society was incorporated.
- **July 26, 1931:** At a convention in Columbus, Ohio, Joseph F. Rutherford proposed the name *Jehovah's Witnesses*. The convention approved it.
- **July 28, 1931:** The name appeared in print in *The Messenger*.

The Simple Timeline

- German Christmas tree tradition arrives in America: late 1700s–early 1800s
- Early documented American Christmas tree: 1836
- Bible Student movement: 1870s
- Watch Tower Society: 1881/1884
- Name "Jehovah's Witnesses": 1931

There is approximately a 95 year gap between the documented 1836 American Christmas tree and the adoption of the name *Jehovah's Witnesses* in 1931.

Midnight Mass in Traditional Acadian Culture

Midnight Mass is a special Catholic Mass celebrated around midnight on Christmas Eve, traditionally welcoming Christmas Day.

For historical Acadian families, it was often called **Messe de minuit** in French.

The traditional observance generally followed this pattern:

- Families gathered together on Christmas Eve.
- They attended **Messe de minuit**, often beginning around midnight.
- The Mass commemorated the birth of Jesus Christ.

- Afterward, families returned home for a festive meal known as a **réveillon**.
- Food, family, music, and religious observance were all central parts of the celebration.

When discussing traditional Acadian Christmas, Midnight Mass is especially significant because it connects Christmas to the French Catholic heritage of Acadian communities rather than to the later Christmas tree tradition.

It is also important to note that **Midnight Mass** did not always begin precisely at 12:00 a.m. Historically, the name referred to the traditional Christmas Eve or Christmas night liturgy, although the actual starting time varied from parish to parish.