A CHRISTMAS CAROL

From the Novella by CHARLES DICKENS
Adapted by TOM CREAMER
Directed by WILLIAM BROWN

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Co-Editors | Dawn Raftery, Willa J. Taylor, Teresa Rende
Production Manager | Teresa Rende
Designer | William Landon
Contributing Writers/Editors | Norrie Epstein, William Brown, Willa J. Taylor, Teresa Rende, Jessica Hutchinson, Elizabeth Mork, William Landon, Elizabeth Kuhn

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The Magic of Bah, Humbug!

BY WILLA J. TAYLOR

I have seen some version of *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens’ tale of the redemptive power of Christmas joy, since I was five. It was a holiday tradition in my family. The Saturday after Thanksgiving marked the official beginning of the Christmas season: Daddy would put up the lights to outline our house; Mama and I would go pick out a tree. That night, after decorating and singing carols, we would huddle in front of the television to watch “Scrooge”, a 1951 film adaptation starring Alistair Sims.

By the time I was in my teens public theaters in Dallas (where I grew up) were desegregated, and we started attending the annual production of *A Christmas Carol* at Dallas Theatre Center. But the movies continued to play a significant part in our holiday reverie. In the 1970’s, I fell in love with a new musical version of “Scrooge” starring Albert Finney. It remains my favorite film adaptation to this day.

I have worked on high school, college and community theater productions. I have even seen it performed in Greek. I watched Patrick Stewart – Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the Starship Enterprise – act out all the parts in a one-man version that is, without a doubt, one of the best productions I’ve ever seen. And I have watched any number of celluloid Scrooges – Susan Lucci, Bill Murray, Cecily Tyson, Jim Carrey and, of course, Kermit and the Muppets.

But every year around October I become a little like Scrooge. As we gear up to rehearsals for yet another production of *A Christmas Carol*, I find myself a bit jaded. The theater collectively goes into ACC mode – the sets and props come out of storage to be buffed and polished; actors who perennially do the show are in the halls running lines; the coffin – the most macabre set piece – is stashed in the loading dock. Ads appear on cabs and buses. The commercials run on radio and television. And the requests for tickets start pouring in. It is a Victorian Christmas in the building but it’s still warm outside. It’s not even Halloween. Why are we getting ready for Christmas when I haven’t even had Thanksgiving dinner?

Our production opens just after Thanksgiving, and during the first Wednesday matinee, I go down to the theater just to make sure everything is running smoothly. I only intend to stay for a scene but I find myself sitting through the entire show, crying at the end and awed by the magic of the production and the power of the story.

Charles Dickens’ novella, written in just six weeks and published in 1843, is the ultimate tale of transformative power of love and joy. The change in Scrooge from a miserable uncharitable miser to a generous Uncle Ebenezer is a tale all too relevant today. His realization that all his material wealth is nothing without a richness of spirit is a message with resonance in a world obsessed with material things. It reminds us of our responsibility to humankind, of our obligations to eradicate want and ignorance from this world, and of our ability to give of ourselves to others less fortunate. These are the lessons of this 167-year old story, lessons I hope I can live by in this joyous season and in the year to come.

*The Ghost of Christmas Present in a production of A Christmas Carol at the Goodman. Photo courtesy Liz Lauren.*
This is the last season for *A Christmas Carol*. The physical production you will see this season will be retired after its final performance on December 31st and a wholly new production – new adaptation, sets, and costumes – will debut next Christmas. This production has served us well. Redesigned in 2000 to accommodate our new theater space, the popularity of this show has never faltered and this production is being seen by the children and grandchildren of those original audiences at the Art Institute.

Initially chosen to financially support the theatre by bringing people in during the holidays, the production was an immediate hit. The response to the production from both critics and audiences alike was rapturous, prompting Goodman’s management team to schedule an encore production a year later. Audiences grew, as did the demand for subsequent revivals. Within a few years, the production had taken its place alongside the Marshall Field’s (now Macy’s) windows and the Joffrey’s The Nutcracker as bona fide Christmas traditions.

More than three decades ago, the Goodman unveiled its an all-new production of this best-loved entertainment, utilizing the state-of-the-art capabilities of its new Albert Theatre to create a wondrous landscape of Victorian London for Dickens’ classic tale.

But as the Goodman began preliminary production meetings for the show, success was not assured. Using Minneapolis’ Guthrie Theatre’s adaption, director Tony Mockus and set designer John Nieminski created a colorful, ingeniously mechanized physical production but the size and scope of it made *A Christmas Carol* one of the riskiest and most ambitious undertakings in the theater’s history. The limitations of the theater’s space at the Art Institute did not allow for a lot of theatrical magic. How would it be possible to realize all the effects – snow, ghosts, flying - demanded by Dickens’ original text or the stage adaptation?

The biggest obstacle was overhead space. The old theater space had been built without a fly tower, the large space above a stage that is at least 2.5 times as tall as the proscenium (the stage and playing area). Without the height about the stage, there was no way to have the system of ropes, counterweights and pulleys.
that would allow scenery and actors to fly across and around the stage.

Unlike the production you will see, the only things that “flew” at the Art Institute were Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Past. For several years, a makeshift track/rail system was used by the stage crew to move the actor playing Christmas Past from offstage in the wings to his mark or landing spot. As the actors performed the scene, Scrooge would surreptitiously connect himself to the harness, the crew would pull the ropes, and the actors would “fly” back upstage and off into the wings.

The new Goodman Theatre on Dearborn was designed with this in mind. There are 80 feet of space above the Albert stage, more than enough to allow Scrooge and the Ghosts of Christmas Past and Future to fly through time and space. It also makes it possible for it to “snow” on stage. The Albert stage floor is also trapped: there is a sub-floor underneath which allows for scenery like the Counting House to mechanically glide into place from the wings of the proscenium to the middle of the stage.

But this perennial hit is not just about the special effects. It is the story itself, a compelling blend of ghost story, romance, holiday cheer and redemption that grows increasingly relevant in a society prone to value economics and materialism instead of humanity. The show’s theme of inclusivity is evidenced by the broad range of actors cast in the show, reflecting the breadth of Chicago’s diverse communities.

In addition, the production is scrupulously maintained, updated and improved to avoid the staleness that often infects long-running shows. Since 1978, seven different directors have brought their own visions to this classic tale, and this production introduces the fantastic Chicago actor John Judd in the role of Ebenezer Scrooge.

Goodman’s A Christmas Carol has become the first theater-going experience for thousands of children in Chicago and is an annual family ritual for many. At any performance one can hear a parent telling her children about the first time she saw Marley’s ghost. The music, the dance, the awe-inspiring effects accompanying the arrivals of ghosts, the antics of Scrooge as he rediscovers the joy of Christmas Day – all are compelling magnets for audiences of all ages. For those who have seen countless versions of Dickens’ story, A Christmas Carol continues to catch and surprise us. The necessity of generosity, the promise of rebirth even for the most crotchety, and the sheer joy of the holiday spirit remain as compelling today as they were in our original production in 1978.

To learn more about our production, visit: http://education.goodmantheatre.org
Working on ACC: a Production Intern’s View
BY ELIZABETH KUHN

As the production intern here at Goodman Theatre, I work in the department that ensures that all elements of a show run smoothly and on time, as well as coordinating any other events that involve aspects of production including lights, sounds and costumes, among others. A Christmas Carol has been performed for more than 30 years here, so for the production department each Christmas season heralds an enjoyable familiarity. This is the 10th year that this particular production has been performed, meaning that the set, costume, sound and light designs remain essentially the same. Returning to ACC offers a degree of comfort after the initial kickoff to the season, and the friendship and camaraderie built over the years among the designers, staff and director is easily apparent. Many of the designers are in-house, meaning they are employees of the Goodman, or have worked here many times during their career and have created a strong relationship with the theater.

Although it may seem easy to become complacent with a production that remains the same technically, those involved in production approach it with the same level of commitment and attention to detail as with any other show. Although actors often repeat their roles each year, there also are many cast changes. This reminds those who have been involved in the past to see the show with fresh eyes, and of course that there are always new audience members. The director and designers re-examine the show every season, often altering aspects if they think it will enhance the production. They are always working to create the best possible show.

With A Christmas Carol containing many complex tech elements, such as flying actors and large moving set pieces, safety must always be addressed with the utmost concern. Each light and sound cue, costume and set change, and many other aspects are carefully planned out and rehearsed. During tech rehearsals, which occur the week before preview shows, the actors begin rehearsing on stage with all of the elements that will be present during a performance. Before tech rehearsals start, the entire cast walks through the set and backstage area, observing the placement of different prop and set pieces, ensuring that they know how to make the production run efficiently.

Fly rehearsals, which are practice runs for the crew and actors who will be flying, ensure that everything runs safely and smoothly. This is especially important for a show like A Christmas Carol, because there are also many pieces of scenery that are stored in the space above the stage, known as the fly space. These rehearsals occur before every performance, ensuring that the mechanisms are working properly and everyone is alert and prepared to execute the action safely.

In my position, I am present for all of the tech rehearsals and many of the previews, and I help coordinate the special effects that are used. The Goodman utilizes a projector system to add to the supernatural nature of A Christmas Carol, creating the illusion of ghosts and spirits.

For many, the holiday season is one of celebration and remembrance— and Goodman Theatre’s A Christmas Carol is among the traditions they return to each year. The show offers an exciting dichotomy of innovation and tradition, with its staff knowing that, for some audience members, the 50th time they see the show can be just as exciting as for those who watch it for the first time.
This is William Brown’s fifth year directing Goodman Theatre’s *A Christmas Carol*. However, he’s been involved with the production since the late 1980’s when he joined the cast as Scrooge’s nephew, Fred. Since then he also has played the ghost of Jacob Marley and the man himself—Ebenezer Scrooge—for four seasons.

In an interview with CBS 2 - Chicago in 2005, Brown said his 15 years of experience in the show, particularly as Scrooge, help him to direct the cast members. He also noted that there are social issues in the story that still ring true today.

“What Scrooge learns with those three spirits is that he cannot avoid being a part of his world, whether it’s his family or his employees or the world at large where a lot of people go to bed hungry. All of that comes out ... Ignorance and Want turn into war and terrorism... It’s still out there,” Brown said.

“It’s a great role,” Brown said. “It’s an almost Shakespearean role ... this journey from the Scrooge we know and hate to someone who really finds a kind of peace and redemption at the end of the evening. We’re all drawn to that.”

Brown’s other directing credits include work with Northlight Theatre, Writers’ Theatre, TimeLine Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, American Players Theatre, Notre Dame Summer Shakespeare and Montana Shakespeare in the Parks, where he serves as associate artistic director.

*TOP: William Brown in rehearsal with the Cratchits for the 2010 production. Photo courtesy Liz Lauren.*

*BOTTOM: Director William Brown. Photo courtesy Liz Lauren.*
Patrick Stewart is one of the founders of the Royal Shakespeare Company and has played roles as diverse as Prospero in Joseph Papp's The Tempest (1996) and Captain Jean-Luc Picard on Star Trek: The Next Generation. For the last [13] years he has, like Dickens, induced tears and laughter with his dramatic reading of “A Christmas Carol,” which he has performed in London, on Broadway, and at numerous theaters and campuses across the United States. When Stewart tells the story of Scrooge’s downfall and reformation, no one is ashamed to weep over the death of Tiny Tim, and the gravity of his rebuke as the Ghost of Christmas Present could shake the conscience of a sociopath. His choking, wheezing, sputtering rendition of Scrooge’s first laugh as a new man sends shivers down an audience’s spine. His “‘Carol” has won the New York Drama Critics Award, and broken box office records for a one-man show on Broadway.

NE: Why do you feel you must do “A Christmas Carol” every year?
PS: This is going to be a long answer. I was on location in Derbyshire, and I was on standby, sifting in this little hotel waiting to be called. All they had in the lounge were some dog-eared paperbacks, and I was absolutely desperate for something to read. I pulled out this [holds up Carol] because it was the thinnest volume in the house. Thank God I was never called that day. I read all through the morning, all through coffee and all through lunch with the book propped up at my table, and then on into the afternoon hours. What surprised me was that the story was something very different from all the adaptations I had ever seen. All along I had carried around a sense of what “A Christmas Carol” was—a marionette version, a rather jolly, eccentric bit of mid-Victorian writing about some slightly bizarre and amusing characters—a harmless, soft piece of work. It’s interesting about A Christmas Carol: It’s like Hamlet—all the world knows “to be or not to be,” but very little else. Everybody knows“Bah, humbug!” but not the real Carol.

NE: When did you decide to make it a one-man show?
PS: After I started doing Star Trek, I wanted to do something so I wouldn’t lose my theatre skills. I was asked by my brother, who sings in the choir at a small northern town in England, if I would perform something for their organ restoration fund, and I didn’t know what the hell to do. It quickly occurred to me that here was an excellent subject, an opportunity to get to know the piece. What impressed me was that on a bitterly cold December night, people were visibly moved. I was moved, too. Even now after eight years there are two or three sections of the story that overwhelm me emotionally, simply take me apart whenever I come to them. There are two moments—there are a lot of them—but there are two in particular that affected me that night in that church.

NE: You make it sound like the mystery of conversion. What are those two scenes?
PS: The most potent occurs just toward the end of the Cratchits’ Christmas Day: just after Tiny Tim sings a song [which Stewart sings in the reading in a high-pitched, sweet treble]. Dickens writes, “They were not a handsome family, they were not well-dressed, their shoes were well-worn, their clothes were scanty, but they were happy, pleased with one another and contented with the time.” It overwhelms me, that moment. There is something about the affirmation of domestic happiness that I find very, very moving. The other is when Bob Cratchit breaks down when he talks about visiting the cemetery where Tiny Tim is buried. But there are other places too: the moment of Scrooge’s most intense terror in the graveyard, when he tries to avoid looking at the
NE: How did you prepare the text?
PS: During the late summer, early autumn of 1987, I would work on the text every weekend. Looking back, those were some of my happiest days. And the more I worked on it, I felt I could almost feel the characters demanding that I get on my feet and perform. I found myself wanting to become the characters—they started to inhabit me. I put Dickens’ reading version and mine side by side, and it was a fascinating study! To have done mine blind, and then to see what Dickens did! Because in so many places our cuts were identical!

NE: Is there anything Dickens cut that you left in?
PS: He changed as the years went by. What is most interesting is that he sentimentalized it; he started taking out everything that was hard, dark, grim, or uncomfortable. One reason for this was that he used “Carol” during the first half of his reading as an introduction to the murder of Nancy. So he was essentially trying to keep everything in the first part frothy, fun, and fantastical so he could heighten the dramatic effects in the second half. To my unimaginable horror, I discovered that during the last years of his readings, he never mentioned the two children, Ignorance and Want.

NE: Isn’t that an important moment?
PS: Ahh, it is for me, certainly; it is one of the two or three critical moments of the whole evening, that moment when he produces the two children. Because if the audience doesn’t get that, they won’t get anything I have to say.

NE: So it’s really about getting a second chance?
PS: Yes! That’s what’s so powerful about it! What happens to Scrooge is not that he’s told, “You’re going to die, mate.” It has already happened! He’s dead! The grave is already overgrown! That’s what’s so powerful about the scene at the graveyard! That’s why his waking up at the end is all the more powerful.

NE: What is the point that Scrooge finally “gets”?
PS: [Long pause.] He has a feeling, he has a gentle feeling about someone else.

NE: He feels tenderness? So the key is that he empathizes with himself too, and through that feels for others.
PS: That’s exactly what he does. He says, “I wish, I wish,”… and the ghost says, “What?” And Scrooge remembers the boy he sent away earlier.

NE: Does your audience go out afterward and do good deeds?
PS: I’m told they do. Joan Rivers came into the dressing room and said, “I am now going to do the typical Broadway audience leaving the theater: ‘Get out of my way. It’s my taxi!’” Mean, snarling, angry, irritable. Then she said, “I’ve just come out of the theater, and I’ve seen people say, ‘No, no, after you. You go first, would you like to share my taxi?’ I heard people say these things, they looked at one another and smiled as they walked out of your show.”

NE: Is that your goal?
PS: Oh, absolutely. Well, no, I do the story for myself. I am compelled to tell the story over and over again. And twice on Thursdays and Saturdays. It kills me to do it. It terrifies me. Every performance terrifies me. The aftereffect is one of absolute exhaustion, but it’s a story I have to tell for myself.
Charles Dickens was born the second of eight children in the town of Portsmouth, England on February 7th, 1812. His father, John Dickens, worked as a clerk in the Naval Pay Office which forced him and his family to move constantly. As a result, young Charles’ early years were spent in various cities in England.

The family moved to London just before Charles’ 12th birthday. Charles received some basic formal education at a private school before tragedy struck. His father was very irresponsible with the family’s finances, and constantly spent more money than he earned. Soon after moving into their new home, John Dickens was arrested for outstanding debt. The entire family, except for Charles, was sent to Marshalsea Debtor’s Prison, a prison specifically for individuals and their family members who were unable to pay back their debt.

Charles began to work 10-hour days at Warren’s boot-blacking factory. He spent his days applying labels to jars of shoe polish, earning only six shillings per week—the equivalent of earning $26 per week today—the majority going to support his family.

After the family had been imprisoned for three months, John Dickens declared himself an “Insolvent debtor,” one who has insufficient funds to get out of debt. This enabled his family to be released from jail. Charles no longer had to work at the warehouse and was sent to private school where he did extremely well. Three years later Charles began working as a clerk in a law office. Unhappy with the position, Charles left the profession of clerk to become a journalist, and wrote most about parliamentary debates and campaign elections. He also penned humorous sketches for magazines in his free time. As his popularity grew, these sketches were compiled and published in his first book, *Sketches by Boz* (1836). They were very well received by both critics and the public. He followed this success with his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), which was released in monthly installments (as were many of Dickens’ works, including *A Christmas Carol*). To this day, none of his novels have gone out of print in England!

Due to his days working in the factory, he was also very interested in social reform. Throughout his works, Dickens retains empathy for the common working man and skepticism of the upper classes.
Unfortunately, his climb to success took a significant downturn during the next few years. *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), his follow-up to *Nicholas Nickleby*, was less than successful, and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) did even worse in sales. During 1842 he toured the United States, where he enjoyed favor in all of his travels. He was keenly disappointed, however, by the social issues he identified in America. He upset his hosts by condemning slavery, in the spirit of the social issues he took to heart. This distaste was evident in his book of *American Notes*, written that same year, which was highly critical of the new nation. By the fall of 1843 Charles Dickens had lost social and financial favor.

The author was in need of a new source of inspiration. Considering Dickens’ own personal history and fierce dedication to exposing the conditions of the poor, it is not altogether surprising where he found this muse.

**How “A Christmas Carol” Came to Be**

“In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice.”

- Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*
The Impact of the Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution was in full swing in 1834 when Charles Dickens began writing “A Christmas Carol.” The Revolution created a huge amount of low-paying, low-skill jobs within the cities, and manufacturers began hiring children in large numbers. These unprotected workers would do the job for little pay, leading to huge profits for the companies. Some children were forced by their parents into the factories before the age of seven, often laboring for more than 12 hours a day. Horrifyingly dangerous and unsanitary conditions were common.

Ragged Schools: Ignorance and Want

Dickens’ interest in education’s potential to save children from poverty grew rapidly. In the fall of 1843, Charles personally went to several institutions known as “Ragged Schools,” schools that were a direct product of the industrial Revolution which provided free education to children searching for answers. One school in particular Dickens described as “more than a ‘ragged’ place.” He recalls that the children were filthy and dressed in tatters. Some had already succumbed to the pressures of poverty by becoming pimps and thieves – many had lost their innocence. The children’s schoolrooms were in an equally depressing state. He wrote to a friend about the experience: “On Thursday night I went to the Ragged School; an awful sight it is. I have very seldom seen in all the strange and dreadful things I have seen in London and elsewhere, anything so shocking as the dire neglect of soul and body exhibited in these children.”

In an excerpt from The Friendly Dickens by Norrie Epstein: “In a piece for the Examiner, [Dickens] wrote, ‘Side by side with Crime, Disease, and Misery in England, Ignorance is always brooding.’ Thus the germinating image of ‘A Christmas Carol’ was not that of the ghosts, Scrooge, or even Tiny Tim, but the two ‘monsters,’ the allegorical children Ignorance and Want. Dickens had intended a tract on education for the poor, but he now decided to write a story that, he announced with justifiable hyperbole, would hit his readers over the head like a ‘sledge-hammer.’” And this is exactly what it achieved.

Charles wrote non-stop for the six weeks following his visit. He notes that while writing he often “wept and laughed and wept again.” At times his agitation was so great that he would “walk about the back streets of London fifteen and twenty miles many a night when all sober folks had gone to bed.” During these six weeks, he was able to turn out the story of the Christmas of 1843 in the form of “A Christmas Carol.” It was, in some ways, a push for a new literary hit as well as a cry for the public’s attention to a vast and deadly problem. He worked tirelessly to get the story into print by that Christmas, and put a lot of his own money into the publication process to do so.

Financial Problems

Response to the novella was immediate and positive. A remarkable 6,000 copies were sold on the day of its publication, but due to the book’s moderate price and beautiful but expensive packaging, profits were lower than Dickens anticipated. and most importantly, needed. In 1844, he complained to a friend, “Such a night as I have passed! The first 6,000 copies show a profit of 230 pounds! And the last four will yield as much more. I had set my heart and soul upon a thousand. What a wonderful thing it is that such a great success should occasion me such intolerable anxiety and disappointment!”

Portrait of Charles Dickens. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.
The Brighter Side of Things

The story’s popularity turned the public’s eye back to Dickens’ work dramatically increasing the sales of his upcoming novels. He became one of England’s most beloved writers and was similarly admired later in other countries, such as the United States. Initially, America had not been ready for a new Dickens book following the perceived injury of *American Notes*. Dickens revisited America in 1867. He came for a speaking tour, during which he read excerpts from his books and acted out all of the characters. On the night before tickets went on sale in New York, a line of people stretched half a mile down the street and by morning more than 5,000 eager audience members were in line waiting. “A Christmas Carol” was the book most often requested. While the money he received from book sales helped, he more than covered his previous losses through this reading tour.

The End of An Author’s Life

Charles Dickens died from a stroke on June 8th, 1870 at the age of 58, having completed 74 of a scheduled 100 readings on his reading tour. He was mourned by peers, friends, family, and the public at large. Charles Dickens is buried in the distinguished Poet’s Corner in Westminster Abbey where his grave marker still stands today. The inscription on his tombstone reads: “He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England’s greatest writers is lost to the world.”

Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey, where Charles Dickens is buried.
Charles Dickens had a critical eye and a sympathetic heart for issues of the poor. The themes of social injustice, greed among government powers, and hypocrisy in the church repeatedly appear throughout works such as *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Our Mutual Friends*. *Bleak House* also aimed at this, and was partially autobiographical. Similarly to *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens set *The Chimes* and *The Cricket on the Hearth* during the holiday season in order to create a greater focus on the issues of everyday poverty. Some of Dickens’ other works, like *Oliver Twist* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which he died before completing, have also been adapted for the stage and film. All remain beloved classics to this day.

**A Chronology of Dickens’ Major Works**

1836: *Pickwick Papers*

1837: *Oliver Twist*

1838: *Nicholas Nickleby*

1840: *The Old Cottage*

1841: *Barnaby Rudge*

1843: “*A Christmas Carol*”

1844: *The Chimes*

1845: *The Cricket on the Hearth*

1846: *The Battle of Life*

1847: *Dombey & Son*

1848: *The Haunted Man*

1849: *David Copperfield*

1853: *Bleak House*

1854: *Hard Times*

1855: *Little Dorrit*

1856: *Our Mutual Friends*

1859: *A Tale of Two Cities*

1860: *Great Expectations*

1870: *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*
The writing of “A Christmas Carol” in 1843 took place at a time when traditions which are now central to our Christmas were being established. In the 1840s, German-born Prince Albert wedded his cousin Victoria and became an English prince. He introduced the German Christmas tree to the English celebration and Christmas cards became popular greetings to send friends and family. One of Dickens’ best gifts to the holiday is a simple phrase we still use today; Scrooge’s nephew Fred’s cry, “A Merry Christmas, uncle!”, was the first use of this standard holiday greeting. As Dickens’ granddaughter Monica pointed out: “When you say ‘Merry Christmas,’ you are quoting Charles Dickens.”

Just as Scrooge’s persona is wrapped up in humbug, Charles Dickens’ is intertwined with Christmas. In one of Dickens’ obituaries it was reported that a young girl, upon hearing that Dickens was dead, asked: “Then will Father Christmas die too?” Secretary and late vice-president of the Dickens Fellowship, J.W.T. Ley, noted in the 1906 Christmas issue of the Dickensian: “Beyond question, it was Charles Dickens who gave us Christmas as we understand it to-day.”

Caroling

The Victorians loved music and Christmastime was no exception. They revived older carols and hymns from the medieval period, and created new pieces that were both secular and religious. Their interest in parlor singing sparked the use of cheerful, easily sung music in their Christmas celebrations. Musicians collected old nativity carols and wrote new ones to suit the tastes of the time. During Christmas Mass, popular music such as ‘O Holy Night’ and Handel’s ‘Messiah’ filled the churches.

Today’s Christmas carolers may sing in the cold with hopes of being invited inside for hot chocolate and cookies but in Dickens’ time many carolers sang to keep from starving. This form of begging was illegal; it was a last resort for families struggling to stay out of the poorhouse. Dickens may well have considered the irony between the joyous nature of the carols themselves and the pitiful situation of the people he heard singing them in the London streets when he titled his book “A Christmas Carol.”

The singing of carols by waifs is another English tradition. Waifs were originally watchmen who patrolled the streets of the older walled cities, singing out the hours of the night while keeping guard against dangers such as fire. During the holiday season they would include some carols for people along the way - but many complained about the nighttime disturbances.

The Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree can truly be called a Victorian innovation. The custom of a lighted tree began in Germany and
German settlers brought the idea to America. However, it wasn’t until Prince Albert wedded Victoria, and brought the Christmas tree with him that the tree gained popularity. By 1847, the trees at Windsor Castle were laden with presents as well as wax candles. The tradition spread as English citizens followed the Royal example. The trees and other decorations were removed on Twelfth Night (January 6). To do so before or after was considered bad luck.

**Christmas Cards**

John Calcott Horsley designed the first Christmas card in 1843. Only 1000 cards were printed that first year and were expensive. By 1870, postage was reduced and a cheaper color lithography was used for printing. Thus began the real spread of the Christmas card — it reached the United States early that decade. Popular designs included Christmas feasts, church bells, snowbound mail-coaches and turkey and plum puddings. Popular designs today include traditional elements, as well as pop culture and other contemporary references.

**Food**

Christmas dinner was a grand affair; goose, chicken, turkey or a joint of roast beef took center stage on the table. Christmas pudding, made with beef, raisins and prunes, was mixed on Stir-up Sunday, the Sunday before Advent (the four weeks preceding Christmas), in order for the mixture to mature. All present in the house took turns stirring the pudding with a wooden spoon (in honor of the Christ child’s wooden crib). The stirring had to be done in a clockwise direction for luck. Mince pies were another traditional dish. They were sweeter, made with mincemeat, fruit and spices, and had to be eaten for the 12 days of Christmas to ensure 12 months of luck in the coming year. Each one had to be baked by a different person.

The famous plum pudding that Mrs. Cratchit makes was not made from actual plums, but raisins. At this economic level, the ‘copper’ - the pot used to boil the pudding - would have been used the rest of the year for the Cratchit family laundry. Poorer families like the Cratchits ate goose instead of turkey because it was much cheaper. “Goose clubs” - places geese were raffled off just before the Christmas holiday - were very popular with the working classes.

To learn more about Christmas traditions around the world, visit: [http://education.goodmantheatre.org](http://education.goodmantheatre.org)
Dickens’ Time: A Global Perspective
BY WILLIAM LANDON

The timeline below details important events in Charles Dickens’ life as well as happenings in Great Britain and around the world. As you look over the timeline, consider how Dickens’ life relates to what was happening elsewhere.

1812
Charles Dickens is born at Landsport, Portsmouth on Feb. 7.

1814
Congress of Vienna, a year-long meeting to determine the future of Europe, convenes.

1809-1811
Bolivia and Venezuela declare independence from Spain, beginning wars against that country.

1822
Dickens and his family move to London. Due to limited finances, he can no longer attend school.

1824
Charles’ father is arrested for debt; he begins working at Warren’s Blacking warehouse. He resumes schooling after his father is released from prison.

1832
Slavery is abolished in the British Empire.

1833
Dickens meets Catherine Hogarth, daughter of a Morning Chronicle music critic. Dickens works at the Morning Chronicle from 1833 to 1836.

1834
The Poor Law Amendment Act in Britain is passed under the belief that if a person was poor, it was his/her fault. It established workhouses, which were notorious for their dangerous conditions.
1842
British East India Company defeats the Qing Dynasty in the First Opium War, forcing China to tolerate smuggling of opium from British India into China. Dickens and his wife go on a six-month American tour. His account of the trip, American Notes, criticized slavery and angered many Americans.

1848
Seneca Falls Convention for women's rights organized in New York; Manifesto of the Communist Party published in Germany.

1853
Dickens gives his first staged reading of “A Christmas Carol” before 2,000 people at a benefit for the Birmingham and Midland Institute, a pioneer of adult scientific and technical education.

1855
American Civil War ends; death toll is an estimated 620,000 soldiers and undetermined number of civilians; Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolishes slavery in the United States.

1861
The American Civil War begins.

1864
Taiping Rebellion in China ends; death toll is an estimated 20 million civilians and soldiers.

1865
American Civil War ends; death toll is an estimated 620,000 soldiers and undetermined number of civilians; Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolishes slavery in the United States.

1868
Exhaustion and illness force Dickens to return home from an English tour of “A Christmas Carol,” after delivering 74 of a planned 100 readings.

1870
On June 9, after a day of work on his novel in progress, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Dickens dies. He had presented a total of 444 readings of A Christmas Carol in Great Britain and the United States.
When Charles Dickens was born in 1812, Great Britain and indeed the entire world entering a time of great change. From the mid-1800s onward, society was entering an increasingly global economy. Improvements in transportation and communication resulted in more countries being able to sell their agricultural goods and raw materials at an international level. The industrial era was evolving quickly, and many countries sought to benefit immensely from it while others fell behind because of their inability to participate.

Britain’s success in industrialization was unmatched by any nation, making it the first fully industrial nation. The success Britain held from the late 1700s through the 1800s actually pushed other countries out of the competition. Countries including China and India experienced periods of de-industrialization as certain industries, such as their textile markets, became obsolete when compared to the cheap, high quality and swiftly produced British textiles. As such, these non-western countries suffered the plight of growing populations and decreasing household income. Furthermore, the prosperity and technological advances of western nations allowed them to travel more often, meaning western folk were spreading new goods, religions and diseases abroad, while using their advanced weaponry to further their own agenda in foreign countries.

Emerging philosophies of free trade and “international peace,” (influenced primarily by the prosperity that followed international trade), only added to the economic situation that aided a number of western nations. This is not to say that international peace served as the standard. There was, in fact, the same fancy for conquest that European nations had exhibited in the past. As industrialization pushed on, the focus of conquest changed dramatically. Differing from the many Napoleonic battles of the late 1700s and early 1800s, conquest battles of mid - to late 1800s were characterized by the overthrow of many less developed nations. Interstate battles still existed, but they were shorter and more internally isolated than were conquest and territorial battles of prior decades. Historian Paul Kennedy explains that, “In the year 1800, Europeans occupied or controlled 35 percent of the land surface of the world; by 1878 this figure had risen to 67 percent, and by 1914 to over 84 percent.”

Changes in international banking and the concept of “credit” also gave advantages to certain nations during this period. The new practice of amassing resources in a short time and winning any given conflict quickly moved the focus away from long-term military mobilization. Simply being a “wealthy nation” was not enough to ensure success. Instead, a country had to have a well-balanced economy with healthy credit, international trade and, most importantly, a national stake in industrialization. The combination of these varied factors made Britain more powerful than any nation in the world.
London geography was determined by the Thames. The great river ran from west to east through the city after a dogleg north past Westminster—so, too, did the city itself, its two great thoroughfares being the Strand—Fleet Street and Oxford Street—Holborn—Cheapside.

At its core was the old City of London—known as “the City” as the century wore on—an entity consisting of the roughly square mile making up the area that had once been inside the old walls of the medieval city of London, bounded by the Thames on the south, the Inns of Court and Temple Bar on the west, and the Tower in the east, with its seven gates (Newgate of prison fame being one), which had all been torn down save for “that leaden-headed old obstruction,” as Dickens calls it at the beginning of *Bleak House*, “appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed corporation, Temple Bar.”

Within the City lay the Royal Exchange (the ‘Change upon which Scrooge’s word in “A Christmas Carol” is said to be so good), which was a gathering place for merchants in different trades, and the Bank of England, the financial nucleus of the nation, together with the financial offices and activities that naturally clustered around them. In fact, the term “the City” was also used to denote the financial heart of England in the way that “Wall Street” is used to describe the financial heart of the United States. In Jane Austen’s day, it was still customary for some merchants to live in the City, but as railroads were thrust through it and commuting became more feasible, even poor clerks began commuting to work from fringe or suburban areas the way we are told that Bob Cratchit does from Camdentown. In the first eighty years of the nineteenth century, in fact, the resident population in the City dropped from 128,000 to 50,000, while greater London as a whole mushroomed from a million to more than 4.5 million people.

The fancy area of London was the West End, which lay west of Temple Bar and London’s center, Charing Cross. ...At the historic core of the West End lay what had once been the royal city of Westminster, with its palaces of St. James and Whitehall, along with Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. The Treasury building was here, along with Downing Street, the Foreign Office and the Horse Guards (army headquarters). These had now become part of the larger, expanded London, and adjacent to this nerve center of government and royalty the ultrafashionable West End residential area of Mayfair (and, later, Belgrave Square and the nonfashionable Chelsea farther south) grew up. Mayfair was the location of the posh men’s clubs on Pall Mall, the exclusive shops on Bond Street and the fancy houses on the ritziest residential street in the city, Park Lane, overlooking the great greensward of Hyde Park on Mayfair’s western border. All were within a short distance of the new royal residence, Buckingham Palace. ...

Such was London. But what was it like to live in? The fog in London was very real. Just why it was the color it was no one has ever been able to ascertain for sure, but at a certain time of the year—it was worst in November—a great yellowness reigned everywhere, and lamps were lit inside even during the day. In November, December, and January the yellow fog extended out some three or four miles from the heart of the city, causing “pain in the lungs” and “uneasy sensations” in the head. It has been blamed in part on the coal stoves.

A recreation of London smog for a Sherlock Holmes film. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.
At eight o’clock in the morning on an average day over London, an observer reported the sky began to turn black with the smoke from thousands of coal fires, presumably for morning fires to warm dining rooms and bedrooms and to cook breakfast. Ladies going to the opera at night with white shawls returned with them gray. It has been suggested that the black umbrella put in its appearance because it did not show the effects of these London atmospherics. The fog was so thick, observed a foreigner at mid-century, that you could take a man by the hand and not be able to see his face, and people literally lost their way and drowned in the Thames. In a very bad week in 1873 more than 700 people above the normal average for the period died in the city, and cattle at an exhibition suffocated to death.

There were problems underfoot as well as in the air. One hundred tons of horse manure dropped on the streets of London each day, and a report to Parliament said that “strangers coming from the country frequently describe the streets of London as smelling of dung like a stable-yard.” Originally, many streets were not paved; by midcentury, however, the dust from the pulverized stone with which London streets were paved coated furniture in good weather and turned to mud when it rained. An etiquette book advised gentlemen to walk on the outside of the pavement when accompanying a lady to ensure that they walked on the filthiest part of it, and every major Street had a crossing sweeper like Jo in Bleak House, who for a penny swept the street before you made your way across it on rainy days so your boots did not become impossibly filthy. Nor was the Thames any better. London sewage, some 278,000 tons daily at mid-century, as well as pollutants from the factories along the river’s banks, was dumped untreated into the water, presumably helping to fuel the cholera epidemics that swept the city in the early part of the century. The smell was bad enough in the summer of 1858 to cause Parliament to end its session early.

There was what we would surely call noise pollution, too—the incessant sound of wheels and horses’ hooves clacking over the pavement, the click of women’s pattens on the sidewalks in the rain, the bell of the muffin man, and the cries of the street peddlers selling such items as dolls, matches, books, knives, eels, pens, rat poison, key rings, eggs, and china, to say nothing of the German bands, the itinerant clarinet players, and the hurdy-gurdies.

The children who added their din to that of the costermongers remind us that London was an overwhelmingly young city, as we are apt to realize when we read, say, Oliver Twist, a city of multitudinous street arabs, young costermongers, crossing sweepers like Jo, or the mud larks who scavenged the bed of the Thames all playing in the streets or crying their wares, holding horses for gentlemen, fetching cabs for theatergoers on rainy nights, carrying packages or opening cab doors or doing cartwheels or handstands in the street in the hope of earning a ha’penny or penny. There was no compulsory school until 1880, and children under fourteen made up 30 to 40 percent of the population.
Poverty in America: Millions in Need
EDITED BY ELIZABETH MORK AND WILLIAM LANDON

The poverty line refers to the minimum amount of necessary income to live upon as deemed by each country’s standard of living. In America, this line sits at $10,830 for a single person. As of 2009, the amount of Americans below this line was 14.3 percent. Although a significant figure, this statistic fails to illustrate who in particular suffers the most from poverty. It is necessary to research and examine particular groups of people in order to find more dynamic poverty levels. Specifically, African American and Hispanic populations report higher poverty rates than the national average. The poverty rate for both of these groups remained near 30 percent of the national average during the 1980s and mid-1990s. It began to fall in 2000, and has risen again in recent years. The percentage of African Americans in poverty rose to 25.8 percent in 2009. Poverty among the Hispanic population in 2009 also rose to 25.3 percent.

According to the U.S. Census, national poverty levels have risen to 43.6 million people in poverty from 39.8 million in 2008 - these figures were heightened from those in previous years due, in part, to the 2007 economic downturn. Children make up the largest percentage of the poor in the United States, with more than 12 million living below the poverty line. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, the United States has the second highest child poverty rate of all industrialized nations. Sweden’s child poverty rate is less than 3 percent, the Czech Republic is less than 8 percent, France is just under 8 percent and Germany is just over 10 percent. Roughly 7.2 million people living in poverty are the working poor. Most are families with children. They represent the fastest-growing population living in poverty. A study by the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that children younger than the age of 18 accounted for 25 percent of the urban homeless. Families comprised 37 percent of the homeless population; single men and women comprised 45 and 14 percent respectively.

Poverty in Chicago: A City of Homeless

According to a report by the Social IMPACT Research Center (a program of Heartland Alliance), Cook County, Ill., has the second highest number of millionaire households (167,873) and the second highest number of poor households (273,658) of any county in the nation.

For reference, there are currently 3,141 counties in the U.S. The disparity of wealth among Chicago citizens is second highest of them all. In 2006, the Chicago City Council voted for an ordinance that would have required mega retailers such as Wal-Mart and Target to pay their workers higher wages, totaling at least $10 per hour by 2010. Mayor Richard Daley vetoed the ordinance in September of that year, in what was his first veto in 17 years in office. He reasoned it would cost the city jobs and hurt the people who need them most. Major retailers agreed they would be less likely to build stores in Chicago if the ordinance had been passed.

The minimum wage in the state of Illinois is currently $8.25 an hour, considerably higher than the federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour. An estimate of the “living wage” in Chicago using the Living Wage Calculator—a computing website created by the Living Wage Project at Penn State University—puts this amount at $9.95 per hour for a single adult. Add a child to the picture, and that amount jumps to $18.13, nearly $9 more per hour than Illinois’ minimum wage.
London is as much a character in Charles Dickens’ novels as Ebenezer Scrooge or Tiny Tim. To Dickens, London was a living, breathing entity for which he had an enduring fascination.

In the 19th century, London was the largest and richest city in the world, yet it was struggling to cope with large numbers of desperately poor people. The city was divided geographically between the very rich and the very poor. The aristocracy were building townhouses in the elegant squares and crescents near Westminster in the West End. The bulk of the middle and lower classes lived down both sides of the Thames River from the Tower of London in what came to be known as the East End. About one-third of London’s population lived in very unsanitary and neglected areas called the Slums. The Cratchits lived in Camden Town, an area in the north of the city. The city expanded outward at a rapid pace in just a couple of centuries. In the early 1600s, almost all of London was contained in the walled City of London.

In 1666, the Great Fire of London consumed almost the entire city. Dickens’ London was a fairly new one, and new changes had been made. How was Chicago influenced by its catastrophic 1871 fire?

These problems may have increased because of the city’s growth. Between 1800 and 1880, London’s population soared from 1 to 4.5 million people.
Most of Dickens’ novels take place in London, the city in which he lived. He would often walk the streets, sometimes as many as 10 or 20 miles at a time! As a result, his descriptions of 19th century London allow readers to experience the sights, sounds and smells of the city.

What is Chicago like to you? How would you describe it?

Like London, the nature and boundaries of Chicago’s neighborhoods are always changing. Think about the Chicago you know today. What do you think makes Chicago’s geography different from London’s? How is it similar? Think about what the Chicago River, in particular, does to the layout of the city. What impact do you think bodies of water such as the Chicago River and Lake Michigan have had on the formation of the city?

Think about how today’s Chicago is similar to, and different from, London in the 1800s. There may be some patterns in the socioeconomic disparity throughout the city. The West Side of Chicago, primarily neighborhoods such as Wicker Park and Bucktown, are some areas where the hip and social elite have started to migrate. Prices have gone up in these areas. What about the North Side, from areas such as Old Town and Rogers Park? What about the differences between Pilsen and Bronzeville on the South Side?

Illustration of ChicagoLand and its neighborhoods.
“Guineas, shillings, half-pence. You know what they are?” Mr. Dombey asks his little son Paul. Paul, Dickens tells us, knew, but the average reader of today is not always likely to be so knowledgeable.

In the 1800s, British money was calculated in units of pounds, shillings, and pence. These were the units of value—like the American mill, cent, and dollar—in which all transactions were reckoned, regardless of whether the value was represented by a bookkeeping entry, by coin, by bank notes, or by notations written on a check. The actual physical instruments of currency were paper bank notes and gold, silver, copper, and bronze coins like the sixpence, the crown, the sovereign, the shilling piece, and the penny. Thus, for example, the physical units called pennies were used to measure the value created by an equivalent number of pence. (The guinea, uniquely, was a unit of physical currency that also became an abstract measure of value as well; that is, long after the actual guinea coin itself stopped being minted in the early 1800s, prices for luxury items like good horses and expensive clothes continued to be quoted in guineas as if it were some independent unit of value like the pound.)

Sovereigns and half sovereigns were gold; crowns, half crowns, florins, shillings, sixpences, and threepences were silver; pence, ha’pence, and farthings were copper until 1860, after which they were bronze. The coins were issued by the Royal Mint, but the bank notes got their names from the fact that they were not issued by a government agency but by a bank, in fact—after the mid-1800s—only by the bank—the Bank of England. Until then banks all over the country issued their own bank notes (or promises to pay), which circulated more or less like money. Private banks in the provinces are by one estimate believed to have cranked out about £20,000,000 worth of notes between 1810 and 1815. With the Bank Charter Act of 1844, however, the government gave the Bank of England a monopoly on the issuance of bank notes. As the currency of other banks subsequently disappeared from circulation, “bank note” or “note” in consequence became synonymous with the paper issued by the Bank of England.

To abbreviate their money, Britons used the symbol £ for pound, s. for shilling, and d. for pence, although five pounds, ten shillings, sixpence could be written £5.10.6. “Five and six” meant five shillings and sixpence, and it would have been written “5/6.”

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Rough monetary values and terms in Dickens’ time. Courtesy of Education and Community Engagement.

It is very difficult to know what a pound or shilling from 1800 to 1859 is worth in 1990s America, and, as any economist will volubly inform you, the fact that the Victorians had no Hondas and we have no candles, i.e., we don’t buy the same goods and don’t have the same economic needs, makes the purchasing power of the two currencies fundamentally incommensurable. Nonetheless, intrepid estimates in the last ten years have put the pound’s worth in the neighborhood of $20, $50 or $200.

**Being Wealthy**

What did it mean to be wealthy in the days before tax shelters, credit cards, junk bonds, and golden parachutes? No stocks and bonds, no money market funds—what did you put your money into?

First and foremost, it went into land. Land was socially prestigious and it also produced rent from tenant farmers that was probably the major source of income for most of the landed gentry and nobility during much of the 1800s. Good land, however, was not likely to be easily attainable. Much of it was tied up through entail in family estates, and it was an extremely complicated and expensive procedure to purchase it. A contemporary observer toward the end of the century said the legal fees involved were enormous and also pointed out that by then the 2 percent return on land made it a bad investment unless you didn’t need a big income. In families, land always went to the men, while the women got things like government securities...
It may well be asked—what about taxes? When the young visitors are shown around Sotherton in Mansfield Park, Jane Austen comments at one point that they were not shown the chapel until after “having visited many more rooms than could be supposed to be of any other use—than to contribute to the window tax.” It is a passing remark; but one that gives a small glimpse of the remarkably extensive system of taxation that must have made the English one of the most taxed peoples in the world. During the nineteenth century, for example, there was a tax on land, income, the practice of law, newspaper advertisements, glass, candles, beer, malt, carriages, menservants, coats of arms, newspapers, paper, bricks, stone, coal, windows, corn, soap, horses, dogs, salt, sugar, raisins, tea, coffee, tobacco, playing cards, timber, silk and—but the extent of the taxation begins to become clear. There was even a tax on headgear, which, after Wordsworth was appointed as a collector of stamp duties, moved Byron to write: “I shall think of him often when I buy a new hat. There his works will appear.”

The taxes were important not only because of the bite they put on people but because of their individual social consequences. Until repealed in 1861, for example, the tax on paper helped to keep books scarce and expensive. Soap was taxed until 1853 with the consequence of the poor personal hygiene which may have contributed to some of the epidemics of typhus and other diseases that periodically devastated elements of the population. (In fact, a black market sprang up in soap, and it was smuggled in from Ireland, where there was no tax, to the western shore of England.) The tax on windows mentioned in Mansfield Park was perhaps the most pernicious one, since even a hole cut in a wall for ventilation was counted as a window, making, among other things, for dark houses for the poor. The fact that a family was taxed £2 8s. for each male servant in 1812 (bachelors £4 8s.) helped to steer people toward womenservants—both this and the tax on carriages were based on the government’s (correct) assumption that these were two of the leading ways to get revenues from the wealthy.

And these were only the national taxes. At a local parish level from the 1800s on, one could be required to pay a “rate” for the maintenance of the poor (one reason why people were always anxious to have the poor settle somewhere else besides their parish), to which, in due course, were added rates for highways and other local expenses. There was also a local church rate for the physical upkeep of the local Church of England house of worship until 1868. To the national taxes and this local tax must then be added the tithes which farmers and craftsmen had to pay the local clergyman in support of the Church of England. These amounted to one tenth of the value of the year’s annual produce and, until 1840, also had to be paid in kind, when it was “commuted” to payment in money.
We think of afternoon tea as being an English practice of long standing, but in fact the habit began in the 1840s. Before that, tea was frequently offered after dinner, when the ladies and gentlemen had gathered together in the drawing room. By the 1860s or so, five o’clock tea was a recognized social ritual, company sometimes being formally invited to partake, and by 1877 there was even a special costume—the tea gown—with which ladies could grace the occasion. Tea was customarily served in the drawing room, although, at a country estate, if the weather were good, it might be served outdoors on the lawn...

“Two lumps of sugar and a splash of cream” is no longer the everyday vernacular of a modern tea party. Attending an outdoor tea party nowadays will most likely require the following: a loud voice, zealous political beliefs and a very bold sign. Merriam Webster adequately describes the phrase “tea party” as both a) an afternoon social gathering at which tea is served and b) an exciting disturbance or proceeding. If Fox News, MSNBC or CBS News covers a tea party today, it will probably be in relation to the latter definition. Indeed, a modern tea party refers to a group of people who’ve hit a collective breaking point and are rallying together to protest government acts that they perceive as crossing political lines. However, in the political sphere, modern tea partiers are made of independent groups without political affiliation to either Republicans or Democrats. Historically, the tea party most often protests against the dominant political party, which means in the current political climate, the majority of tea party protests favor conservative values. Yet, how did the term “tea party” evolve from cream and biscuits to shouting and rallies?

The tea partiers of today can trace their heritage to a chilly December night in Boston in the year 1773. As the sun set, roughly 100 Bostonians boarded trade ships heavy with British tea. The ships, loaded with highly taxed tea imported from Britain, were kept stagnate in the harbor. They were kept from returning to Britain and unable to unload with riotous colonists protesting the unfairly taxed product. Instead of returning the tea to sender, the Boston colonists set upon the ships, destroying the product by dumping tea bags directly into the water. The event has gone down in history as The Boston Tea Party and remains an iconic example of America’s willful resistance against overbearing political powers.

How do you take your Tea Party?
In Victorian England, strict social rules determined interactions between men and women. Some of these may play into relations in A Christmas Carol, and may differ by class - but many, as you will see below, span social status. Think about it: are any of these rules, or variations of them, still followed in the US today? Which?

The Gentleman

1. In riding horseback or walking along the street, the lady always has the wall.

2. Meeting a lady in the street or in the park whom you know only slightly, you wait for her acknowledging bow—then and only then may you tip your hat to her, which is done using the hand farthest away from her to raise the hat. You do not speak to her— or to any other lady—unless she speaks to you first.

3. If you meet a lady who is a good friend and who signifies that she wishes to talk to you, you turn and walk with her if you wish to converse. It is not “done” to make a lady stand talking in a street.

4. In going up a flight of stairs; you precede the lady (running, according to one authority); in going down, you follow.

5. In a carriage, a gentleman takes the seat facing backward. If he is alone in a carriage with a lady, he does not sit next to her unless he is her husband, brother, father, or son. He alights from the carriage first so he may hand her down. He takes care not to step on her dress.

6. At a public exhibition or concert, if accompanied by a lady, he goes in first in order to find her a seat. If he enters such an exhibition alone and there are ladies or older gentlemen present he removes his hat.

7. A gentleman is always introduced to a lady—never the other way around. It is presumed to be an honor for the gentleman to meet her. Likewise (and it is the more general rule of which this is only a specific example), a social inferior is always introduced to a superior and only with the latter’s acquiescence.

8. A gentleman never smokes in the presence of ladies.

The Lady

1. If unmarried and under thirty, she is never to be in the company of a man without a chaperone. Except for a walk to church or a park in the early morning, she may not walk alone but should always be accompanied by another lady, a man, or a servant. An even more restrictive view is that “if she cannot walk with her younger sisters and their governess, or the maid cannot be spared to walk with her, she had better stay at home or confine herself to the square garden.”

2. Under no circumstances may a lady call on a gentleman alone unless she is consulting that gentleman on a professional or business matter.

3. A lady does not wear pearls or diamonds in the morning.

4. A lady never dances more than three dances with the same partner.

5. A lady should never “cut” someone, that is to say, fail to acknowledge their presence after encountering them socially, unless it is absolutely necessary. By the same token, only a lady is ever truly justified in cutting someone: “a cut is only excusable when men persist in bowing whose acquaintance a lady does not wish to keep up.” Upon the approach of the offender, a simple stare of silent iciness should suffice; followed, if necessary) by a “cold bow, which discourages familiarity without offering insult,” and departure forthwith. To remark, “Sir, I have not the honour of your acquaintance” is a very extreme measure and is a weapon that should be deployed only as a last resort.
Although none are as popular or as widely done as A Christmas Carol, there are other theatrical productions in Chicago and throughout the nation that capture the holiday season and have become annual classics.

An ever-present and beloved holiday event is Black Nativity by Langston Hughes. As a poet, novelist and playwright, Hughes remains one of the most influential African American writers of our time. He was a leading voice during Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s, aiding to create a missing narrative in the predominately European American cannon. Black Nativity, performed in churches, theaters and college campuses in nearly ever major city in the United States is one of his greatest contributions.

On Dec. 11, 1961, the play originally titled Wasn’t It a Mighty Day? was first produced on Broadway. Hughes himself adapted the tale from his 1958 novel Tambourines to Glory. Originally intended as a play, Tambourines prominently features the use of gospel music and lyrics. Gospel music was very popular during this time in America. Its presence and popularity inspired Hughes to incorporate more of the music into his dramatic writing. He also was aware of the popularity of Gian Carlo Menotti’s Christmas television opera, Amahl and the Night Visitors. Rather than write a play featuring a few gospel songs, he would create a Nativity play with gospel music at its heart.

The original Broadway cast featured the talents of Alvin
Ailey and Carmen de Lavallade. Opening night audiences gave such an enthusiastic applause that the cast sang for an additional half hour after the close of the show. Gian Carlo Menotti arranged to take the show to his Spoleto Festival in Italy in 1962. It quickly became the hit of the festival. The musical then toured Europe for the rest of the year before returning to New York’s Lincoln Center for Christmas.

Although best known as a poet, Hughes wrote more than 20 plays and other musicals prior to and after Black Nativity. Tambourines to Glory, Mulatto, Emperor of Haiti, Simply Heavenly and Jericho-Jim Crow are a few of the stage works by Hughes, a writer very interested in the African-American oral tradition. His political plays include Scottsboro Limited, Harvest, Angelo Herndon Jones and De Organizer. He also wrote Mule Bone with Zora Neale Hurston.

Many contemporary productions of Black Nativity have tweaked the original musical to reflect today’s cultural interests. As The Goodman does its annual production of A Christmas Carol, Chicago’s Congo Square Theatre does an annual production of Black Nativity. This year, it will come to the Goodman as McKinley Johnson’s adaptation The Nativity, inspired by Langston Hughes’ African-American classic Black Nativity. Congo Square Theatre’s last production at the Goodman in 2007 ushered in a hope-filled holiday season. Amidst troubling headlines of war, starvation, genocide and natural disaster over the years since, prayers for “peace on earth and good will toward men” have echoed across the globe. This play and its message are needed perhaps more than ever, and take on a whole new meaning in light of the Obama administration. The following is a description from Theatre in Chicago:

“This production has become a Christmas tradition, much like ‘A Christmas Carol’ in the city of Chicago. This tradition is a legendary celebration of the biblical narrative of the Nativity [the birth of Christ] told through dance and gospel music. Black Nativity personifies the messages of family, unity, and the ultimate love.”

The production is in its 11th year, with this year’s show directed by Aaron Todd Douglas. The Nativity cast features Congo Ensemble member Alexis J. Rogers and will be choreographed by the artistic director of Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, Kevin Iega Jeff. With music composed by Jaret Landon, the musical personifies the messages of family, unity and love through the traditions of African-American heritage. This year’s production, while a new and different take on the original, is contributing to making The Nativity a Christmas tradition as well. As performances run through the end of December, the choreography, script and music of this production should have something to teach all of us, with a reminder of what to keep in mind this holiday season.
Charles Dickens called it a “ghostly little book,” and that wasn’t far from the truth. The famous spirits in "A Christmas Carol" helped to serve the messages of the novella and have become a major part of our modern interpretations of the tale. The four ghosts have undergone various interpretations as the story has been produced for stage, film and television. Although the spirits of Jacob Marley and the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Christmas Yet to Come may appear differently dozens of times, their message and purpose remain the same. Charles Dickens was not the first writer or storyteller to make use of a ghostly presence, either. He was most likely influenced by centuries of earlier English storytellers. Shakespeare’s powerful ghosts and spirits come to mind—Hamlet’s Ghost and The Tempest’s Ariel, among others, served as intervening forces in the lives of the mortals in his plays. And it wasn’t just Shakespeare! Ghosts and spirits have been used in storytelling in Western and Eastern cultures for hundreds of years. They can be found in everything from American folk tales to ancient Asian and European religious texts. Why are they a part of so many cultures, and what could their purpose be?

When you think of many ancient American, African or Asian indigenous cultures, you may think of a “witch doctor” or “medicine man.” They are shaman, spiritual healers thought to be able to travel between the physical and spiritual worlds. They heal by maintaining the balance between those two worlds. Calling on their connection to the ancestors to rid a patient of illness or negative energy, it is in part because of these powerful social figures that many of these cultures have such a close connection to ghosts and spirits.

Christianity takes a different stance on these beliefs; Catholic and Protestant priests are thought to have communication with the spiritual world and Christians believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and others all share a profound reverence for the dead, placing a great importance on the role of ancestors and the soul.

As such, ghosts can be connected to the concept of an afterlife. This is, however, not the only way in which ghosts appear. Many Native American and Southeast Asian folk stories, for instance, use ghosts as benevolent or malicious non-human forces. Spirits also can be manifestations of an environment, such as a forest spirit, as well as the immortal form of ancestors who have died recently or long ago. Some are spirits of those who have passed away, but others, as they’re found in belief systems and folk religions, are special beings that existed before humans and will exist after them. They serve a similar purpose to Dickens’ Christmas ghosts: they know more than mere humans and can do things that humans cannot. Although you can look into just about any religion and find evil spirits that are sent to harm and harass humankind, there are many who serve as guardians. And the idea of the guardian spirit isn’t just confined to worshippers in Bali or India: there’s no doubt you’ve watched a holiday film or a TV episode that features a character’s guardian angel.

But the ghost stories told around a campfire are the stories of people who died of sad or mysterious circumstances, with unfinished business, and horrify the living. They serve a purpose as well. Think of Scrooge’s first reaction to the ghost of Jacob Marley, or his visit with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Ghosts remind Scrooge, on one hand, that we don’t live forever. We may see them as a reminder of death, or a representation of the unknown. They might be strange, and we don’t necessarily understand who they are or what they want. Regardless of their purpose, they can be frightening because of one question that may plague him: how can something exist that is no longer living?

Ghosts are frequently used as warnings. Parents might tell a ghost story about a haunted forest, or an old haunted house, in an effort to scare children away from that place. Native Americans craft ghost stories about swamps to prevent people from wandering into them and drowning. Colonial Americans, well aware of the dangers of the new American wilderness, used folklore to scare their children and friends away from the “haunted” woods.

Ghosts and spirits are supernatural. They don’t follow the rules of what we think of as the “natural” world. They have powers; they do not die. Ghosts and spirits, whether human, angel, demon or something else, all have one thing in common: they are our attempt to find ways to explain the unexplainable, whether it be why nature behaves the way it does or what happens to people after death. For many living in modern society, this is the stuff of myth and legend. For others, ghosts are as real as any human being. Dickens used them as sentient metaphors to explore a person’s past, present and future, as well as to look at why society behaves the way it does. He wanted these spirits to allow people to look at their actions and the world around them from an outside view. What do your ghosts do for you?

Haunted Chicago

Halloween has passed, but Chicago is still full of ghost stories. It is a city of the Great Fire, of theater fires, of mobsters and gangs, and of colonial battles with American Indians. Many consider it to be the most haunted city in the Midwest. Think about places around Chicago that are spoken of as haunted. Maybe you have heard stories about these places. Choose one and do some further research. Why do you think this place may be seen as haunted? Who believes it, and is there proper evidence one way or the other? Do you believe in ghosts?

Finally, can you think of any other Christmas ghost stories? What about ghost stories around other holidays? Scrooge confronts the Ghost of Christmas Future in a past production at the Goodman. Photo courtesy Liz Lauren.
Eggnog, turkey and every family member from the far corners of life all appear as the temperature drops. Whether by hanging stockings, lighting candles or singing a merry tune, traditions bind the holiday season together. While everyone rests before the fireside and sips cider, traditions layer upon tradition in the form of storytelling. Ears get their fill of these classic tales. It is a time to reflect on all of the good that the year has brought and to bring aid to the less fortunate. What better way to usher this spirit of giving in than by incorporating a beautiful twist in the familiar tales of A Christmas Carol, How The Grinch Stole Christmas and It’s a Wonderful Life. At the heart of these and other favorite wintery classics rests a key theme, turning all hearts from coal into gold.

Redemption: three syllables create the transformative noun that alters the lives of these bah-humbug personalities. Redemption Stories. Merriam Webster defines “redeem”: a) to buy back or repurchase; b) to get or win back; c) to free from what distresses or harms; d) to extricate from or help to overcome something detrimental; e) to release from blame or debt, to clear; and finally d) to change for the better, reform. Each holiday classic showcases a dastardly soul. These individuals symbolize the worst of humanity through their greed, callousness and desire to capture joy from those otherwise joyfully content.

Charles Dickens’ Scrooge is perhaps the pinnacle of a selfish life. He allows his only clerk to freeze on Christmas Eve, berates his nephew and spits upon those seeking charity. Dickens leaves the audience with little to love in his crotchety miser. A certain green fiend is next on the famous roll call of holiday haters. Theodor Seuss Geisel, a.k.a. Dr. Seuss, crafts the tale of a creature whose heart is literally two sizes too small into a child’s nursery rhyme. The Grinch, whether appearing as the famous cartoon or in live form played by Jim Carrey, hates Christmas with a passion that has him robbing children. Similarly to Scrooge, the Grinch begrudges all who are happy. He even goes a step further than Dickens’ Scrooge. The Grinch attempts to steal the entire holiday.

It’s a Wonderful Life is the story a man who chooses to take his own life when, due to a series of tragic turns, he realizes suicide is the only means to secure vital insurance money for his family. By a holiday miracle, he has the opportunity to witness what the world would be if he had never been born, and the great things his existenced has caused. In the same vein of Dickens or Seuss this story emphasizes the importance of every life and the impact that one person can have on every single life that he or she touches. The string pulling these narratives together? At the end, each lowly and selfish creature finds redemption in the abundance of giving, which occurs during the holiday season. Toys and turkeys do not change lives, but genuine love and compassion for fellow humanity is the true catalyst in bettering the world.

Because of the extreme nature of these three characters, the respective authors offer the audience a chance to reflect. If such lowly people can find and are worthy of redemption, is not everybody capable of receiving such grace? Likewise, if these fictional souls are able to look within their tiny, cold, hard hearts and find compassion, how much more is the average person capable of changing? ‘Tis the season, and goodwill to all of humankind, indeed.
Dear Cast and Crew,

I would have to say that every single one of you have done a superb job in this play. All the effort you have put forth into this play has resulted in a memorable experience for all of us. I thought it was clever that the actors, actresses and the orchestra interacted with the audience. From viewing the original film of *Animal Crackers*, I think the cast played in the play and the original cast of *Animal Crackers* very similar! This play might have been the first encounter of the Marx brothers for many teenagers and children and I believe that the crew and cast of *Animal Crackers* proved that early comedy can also be entertaining and memorable!

The director’s vision of the play was a rather conscious one. Exposing the Marx brothers to the vast majority of people who never knew about them and bringing back nostalgic memories to the older audience was a great idea. This play was actually my first play and a first trip to Goodman Theatre. I myself, as a young adult, finally realized that plays are enjoyable and gratifying. The play had all the elements of emotion and slapstick comedy which made it a great one. The technical aspects as well as the props were amazingly set to follow each scene. My favorite scene had to be the scene where Harpo and Rivelli tried to clear up the misunderstanding of “The Flash.” Though the script was very flowing and comfortable. Was there any improv involved? I did not find any negative aspects of this play. I have found the play and the ambiance of Goodman Theatre very positive. I give *Animal Crackers* two thumbs up.

Sincerely,

A CPS student
Theatre Etiquette
With Santa Claus

What should I wear?
Definitely dress nicely but comfortably; try business casual. No tank tops, ripped jeans, etc. Baseball caps or hats must be moved once you enter the theatre. The Goodman is air-conditioned so be sure to bring an extra sweater or dress warmly.

What should I bring?
Only what you really need. Electronic devices such as PSP, Nintendo DS, smart phones, and laser pointers are not permitted during the show. If it makes noise or is distracting, please refrain from having it out in the theatre. A purse, bag, or backpack is fine. School supplies are not necessary. Remember that you are here to sit back, watch and enjoy, so don’t bring anything you don’t need.

What if I need to leave the theatre during the show?
Only if it is an emergency. Otherwise, it’s very disrespectful. Make sure to use restrooms before the show, or wait until interval.

Have respect for other audience members. This means no talking during the performance, no feet on seats, and no kicking.
(For your safety and others’!)

(Please remember):
No smoking, and no eating or drinking while inside the theatre.
How should I respond to what's going on on the stage?

Honestly but appropriately. If you find something funny, then laugh—but don’t laugh for five minutes straight or laugh so hard that you need to leave the theatre. Theatre is very different from watching a movie at home. Always remember that you are in a room full of people who are there to watch the performance. They can hear your responses just as well as you can hear theirs. Most important, the actors can hear and see you. They will appreciate any appropriate feed back but might be extremely offended if it is inappropriate. Whether you enjoy the play or not, you owe respect to the actors for having given it a try.

What to do before the show:

When your class arrives, your teacher will let the Education staff know how many people are in your group. It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes before the performance.

If you are late, often you will not be allowed to enter the show until after intermission.

Once your group is called, an usher will lead you to your seats and hand you a program.

Please promptly sit where you have been assigned. Remember that the show needs to begin on time and everyone needs to be seated.

And remember the Golden Rule of Theatre-going:

Theatre artists are paid professionals.
When you enter a theatre, you are entering their work space. Respect their work as you would have them respect yours.

Enjoy the Show!

What to do during intermission:

Most plays have a 15 minute intermission. This gives you time to stretch your legs, walk, use the restroom, get water and discuss the play with your friends.

We do ask that if you are sitting on the main floor that you remain downstairs and if you are sitting in the mezzanine that you remain upstairs. There are restrooms on both floors. When intermission is over, the lights in the lobby will flash several times; that is your cue to get back to your seat because the performance is about to begin!

What to do after the show:

There will be a post-show discussion immediately following the performance. Members of the cast will come out on stage and answer your questions. Feel free to ask anything that’s on your mind about the show, but please remember to be respectful.
Reading Your Ticket

As a patron of the theatre, it is important to know how to read your ticket and find your seat. Generally, seats for all performances in the Goodman’s Albert Theatre are assigned seating, so be sure to know how to be able to find your seat. When you come with your school, you will be ushered to a section where you and your fellow students can sit and enjoy the play together.

Below is a seating chart—a map of all the seats in the Albert Theater—and an explanation of how to read your ticket. If you have any problems, ask an usher for help. They’re here for you.

This will guide you to the lobby door closest to your seat—aisle numbers are on plaques that hang above the doors to the theater.

The section of the theatre you will be sitting in: Main Floor or Mezzanine.

This is your seat number, located on the edge of the bottom seat cushion.

The row where your seat is located, noted in a letter on the side of the end seat of each row.

Day and date of performance

Curtain time

Play you are seeing and its author

Goodman’s Albert Theatre

Albert Ivar Goodman Theatre—Main Floor

Albert Ivar Goodman Theatre—Mezzanine

This is NOT an Aisle. It is a Price Break.