

7-25-2023

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Schweickart, Michelle, "Christmas in July" (2023). *Marian Library Blog Archive*. 24.
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Christmas in July : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Tuesday July 25, 2023

Christmas in July

By Michelle Schweickart

History of ‘Christmas in July’

“Christmas in July” is an annual celebration held in July and usually includes Christmas-themed parties and activities. It is unofficially observed in many countries and is sometimes referred to as Midwinter Christmas, Christmas in Winter, Christmas in Summer and Early Christmas. It is particularly popular today for those living in the Southern Hemisphere, where winter occurs during June, July and August. Those in the Northern Hemisphere may be more familiar with the commercialized version featuring Hallmark Christmas movie marathons and Christmas in July sales. So where did the idea for celebrating Christmas in July start?

It started with an opera

The oldest known reference comes from the 1892 French opera *Werther* by Jules Massenet, based on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's book *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. In the opera, a character tells a group of children rehearsing Christmas music, "When you sing Christmas in July, you rush the season." While that may be the oldest reference, the first recognized celebration of Christmas in July didn't occur for another 41 years. It took place July 24-25, 1933, at a girls' camp called Keystone Camp in Brevard, North Carolina, at the request of camp co-founder Fannie Holt. The celebration featured carolers, a Christmas tree, Santa Claus, presents and cotton snow. The tradition grew over time and continues to this day. The term became more widely used in 1940 with the release of the movie *Christmas in July* featuring Dick Powell and Ellen Drew. In 1942 and 1943, the phrase was used for donation drives to collect Christmas gifts for missions around the world. The U.S. Post Office also held similar drives during World War II to gather cards and gifts for soldiers serving overseas. Retailers ran with the idea for their summer advertising campaigns as early as 1950. Christmas in July at the Marian Library, however, means that staff are hard at work on the preparations for the 2023 Christmas exhibit.

Making our list and checking it — a lot

Our list is not of things we would like to receive, but of things we would like to share. The Marian Library has one of the world's largest Marian collections, and it's continually evolving and expanding. With a collection this large, it's difficult to choose what to include in the Christmas exhibit each year. It all starts with a planning meeting in late spring to review past exhibits and identify items that haven't been exhibited before or recently. A central theme aids in the selection of items to feature. Then the team begins to design the best layout to display the Nativities and other items. Then comes the writing, design and printing of exhibit materials; bringing display cases out of storage; and promoting the exhibit. All of this behind-the-scenes work culminates in the exhibit installation, which requires coordination with multiple departments within the library and other campus partners.

Coming this November: 'Nativities and the Natural World'

This year's Christmas exhibit — *Nativities and the Natural World* — will explore the intersection of Christmas and nature in Nativity sets, artwork and more. The featured works incorporate plants and animals from around the world into the Christmas story. Gourds, straw, wood, mother-of-pearl and beeswax are among the materials used to create Nativity sets that reflect the natural world in which Christ was born.

We invite all to experience the wonder of Christmas through this exhibit, which opens Monday, Nov. 20, and runs through Friday, Jan. 12, 2024. Stay informed by visiting go.udayton.edu/christmas-exhibit and following @MarianLibraryUD on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

— *Michelle Schweickart is a library assistant in the Marian Library.*

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Owen, Katherine. (2022, September 15). The Real Story Behind Christmas in July, Started in North Carolina. *Southern Living*. <https://www.southernliving.com/holidays-occasions/christmas/how-did-christmas-july-start>



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“Only Icicles Are For Real?” (Alaska) from the Marian Library’s Elisabeth van Mullekom Collection, University of Dayton