

## 1930s Christmas Tree Stand

Today, Christmas revelers living in town and out in the country alike decorate their homes with electric Christmas lights as part of the holiday celebrations whether the lights decorate bushes, trees, railings, or eaves on the outside of the house or strands are strung around an indoor Christmas tree. During the 1930s, however, when the Christmas tree stand pictured here was manufactured, many rural families in Johnson County and around the country were just beginning to experience the advantages of having electricity in their home. Thanks to rural electric cooperatives and the availability of federal funds in 1935 to help electrify rural areas, the 1930s brought electricity to rural America. This meant more and more families could take advantage of electric lights, tools, appliances, and yes even Christmas decorations.

Before a house had electricity, Christmas trees were lighted with candles. Because of the fire danger, the candles were lit only sporadically when the tree was watched by family members and for many that meant the tree was lit only on Christmas Eve. Once the electric wires came, families quickly switched from candles to electric lights on their trees. In addition, Christmas ornament manufacturers took advantage of the accessibility of electricity to more families by developing all sorts of new electric Christmas products like this cast iron stand which was patented in 1933. The bronze colored stand has features which had been standard to tree stands since they were first commercially produced in the 1870s. There is a reservoir for water for the tree in the base which in this stand looks like it might hold about a quart of water. Also, stands universally had some device to hold the tree in place. For this stand, there are four bolt screws that could be adjusted depending on the size of the tree's trunk.

What makes this tree stand part of the new electric era are the series of eight hexagonal shaped holes around the top of the stand which are designed to each hold a socket and bulb. So not only could newly electrified rural families light the tree with strings of electric lights but they could also illuminate the tree with a ring of light from the tree stand. The bulbs and sockets pictured here with the stand are not original. Madeline Sullivan of Iowa City the most recent owner of the stand replaced the original worn out sockets after she bought the stand from a rural Solon family so she could use it.

She did keep the original sockets mounted in pairs on metal bands which could then be screwed to the underside of the stand.

This Christmas tree stand was manufactured by the North Brothers Manufacturing Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. North Brothers primarily made tools and other household implements but by 1900 were also manufacturing Christmas tree stands. The stand is marked on the bottom as “Yankee No. 5.” North Brothers “Yankee” brand of tools would have been very popular in the 1930s and so a “Yankee” brand tree stand might have attracted customers familiar with the brand of tools.

Did your family have a Christmas tree stand like this one? What was the most unique electric holiday ornament your family had? Send us a note with your memories or e-mail us at [leighann@johnsoncountyhistory.org](mailto:leighann@johnsoncountyhistory.org).