



The Christmas Tree That Wouldn't Die

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By Roberta Nicholls

Historic Hilton Village adds to its history a "legendary" tree, **the most famous holiday symbol on the Peninsula - The Christmas tree that wouldn't die.** It stands at the foot of Main street in front of Hilton Elementary School. Planted in the 1930's by the school janitor with assistance of 40-some pupils, watered each day by a different classroom and in the summertime by neighbors, adorned each May Day as a maypole (until it got too big) and each Christmas as a symbol of joy, the tree flourished

For over 30 years, the cedar took its place in the life of Hilton. Each year, school children donated their pennies and nickels to buy additional light bulbs because the tree was growing. An electrical contractor donated his time and draped the expressions of Holiday. Around the thriving cedar. Garden clubs and civic leagues fertilized and watered the spreading symbol and helped pay for the lost and stolen lights. And each year, the tree sprouted anew to receive the touch of thousands of children and hundreds of lights.

Three years ago today, **(December 19, 1965)** the 40-foot cedar, adorned with Christmas glow and nodding gently to the churches facing it, was sawed nearly halfway through at its base by vandals. They left the crosscut saw in the gaping wound. Tree surgeons came to look at the mutilation, shook their heads and said there was little hope for survival. Nevertheless, the 40-year-old Village hallmark was treated - its jagged scar bond up hopefully and wrapped in protective metal sheathing by employees of the Newport News Parks and Recreation Department.

The tree refused to die. As in the years past, Hilton School children bought lights for "their" tree and watched as they were strung around its undying branches.

Another watch was kept at Christmas, Hilton Village residents periodically checked * watered the base of "their" Village symbol.

The vandals did not return. Again this year (1968) on Tuesday about 8 p.m. Hilton Village's Christmas tree that would not die blazed with light, School carolers, joined by their parents and neighbors, sang of joy to the world... remembering, perhaps, not only their own private miracle but also the legend of the lighted Christmas tree.

"Some 400 years ago, martin Luther was returning home one beautifully clear and cold Christmas eve. He lifted his eyes to the sky and saw thousands of stars which seemed to be clinging to the branches of lofty pines. That night his gift to those he loved - and to the world - was a glittering tree blazing with star bright candles."

The famous Hilton Village Christmas tree is a reflection of that gift.



Dear Hilton Village Neighbors,

Please join us as we work together to keep "our Hilton Christmas tree" & other holiday traditions alive...

HHV Inc. Board Meeting (Encouraging all Neighbors to Attend)

**Monday, November 30th, 7 pm,
at the Hilton Presbyterian Church**

We look forward to seeing everyone Monday night.

Your ideas, suggestions, and input are vital as we plan and prepare for our Holiday Events.

**Historic Hilton Village.... Chosen One of the "TOP 10" 2009 Great American Neighborhoods
by the American Planning Association**