

'Tis the Season: Christmas in Popular Culture, 1900-2000



An Academic Conference: Final Schedule

Saturday, November 15, 2025

11:00 a.m. – 5:55 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time, EST)

updated: 10/30/25

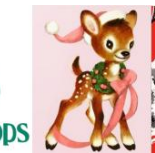


Shasta College



zoom

EVENT	TIME (EST)	PRESENTER
Welcome	11:00 a.m.	Brian Peterson (Shasta College, Redding, CA) Yanna Latridis (Shasta College, Redding, CA)
Keynote Address	11:15 a.m.	G. Vaughn Joy, Ph.D. (Ind. Scholar, Massachusetts)
	11:45 a.m.	Question and answer period
Paper #1	12:00 p.m.	Dusty Hixenbaugh, Ph.D., + Jessica Goodfellow, Ph.D., (San Jacinto College, Austin, TX)
	12:30 p.m.	Question and answer period
--Break--	12:45 p.m.	--Break--
Paper #2	1:00 p.m.	Richard Wood, Ph.D. (Ind. Scholar, United Kingdom)
	1:30 p.m.	Question and answer period
Paper #3	1:45 p.m.	Brian Peterson (Shasta College, Redding, CA)
	2:15 p.m.	Question and answer period
Paper #4	2:30 p.m.	Tim Dodge, Ph.D. (Auburn University, Auburn, AL)
	3:00 p.m.	Question and answer period
--Break--	3:15 p.m.	--Break--
Featured Session	3:30 p.m.	Anthony Sammarco (Ind. Scholar, Boston, MA)
	4:15 p.m.	Question and answer period
Publications "Shout Out"	4:30 p.m.	(Everyone in the Chat)
Special Panel/Roundtable	4:45 p.m.	Liz Faber, Ph.D. and Colleagues (Franklin, MA)
	5:30 p.m.	Question and answer period
Closing Remarks	5:45 p.m.	Brian Peterson
Adjourn: see you in 2026!	5:55 p.m.	Brian Peterson



How to Attend?

Welcome! Email bpeterson@shastacollege.edu to request and to receive the **free** Zoom URL

'Tis the Season: Christmas in Popular Culture, 1900-2000



Preview of Papers and Sessions



Keynote Address (Inaugural Olga Peterson Memorial Keynote)



Keynote Address	11:15 a.m.	G. Vaughn Joy, Ph.D. (Ind. Scholar, Massachusetts)
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"Selling Out Santa: Hollywood Christmas Films in the Age of McCarthy (2025)"

Vaughn Joy, Ph.D., is an independent scholar of 20th century American cultural history. Her work is primarily concerned with how popular culture constructs and responds to the world around it, how fictional media conveys reality, and how we in the audience parse these important messages. Joy's recent book *Selling Out Santa: Hollywood Christmas Films in the Age of McCarthy* explores how Hollywood manipulated the American Christmas holiday for socially conservative ends in the post-war, early Cold War period through a case study on Christmas classics.

Book Summary and [Amazon.com URL](#): Christmas is not just a day or a frame of mind as Kris Kringle (Edmund Gwenn) imparts in *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947); Christmas is also a vehicle for national mythmaking as an idealising mirror for American cultural and political attitudes of a given moment. Via a case study on Hollywood Christmas films released between 1946 and 1961, *Selling Out Santa* offers an examination of political pressures on Hollywood in the post-war period and the cultural ramifications of federal involvement in the motion picture industry. As the House Committee on Un-American Activities opened hearings in 1947 and the FBI gathered reports on potential communist subversion in Frank Capra's Christmas classic *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), Hollywood executives began to bend to the socially conservative pressures of this post-war moment. Using Christmas films as the core of this investigation to identify and analyse changes within the genre as they relate to and reflect changes in the wider cultural and political moments expose for film scholars, students, and non-specialists how these federal and external pressures on Hollywood moulded these holiday favourites throughout the 1950s and set the social standard for decades of Christmas releases.



Paper #1

Paper #1	12:00 p.m. (EST)	Dusty Hixenbaugh, Ph.D., + Jessica Goodfellow, Ph.D., (San Jacinto College, Austin, TX)
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"Like Christmas: How *The Muppet Christmas Carol* Adapts Dickensian Ideals for the Late Twentieth Century"

Dustin Hixenbaugh, Ph.D. and Jessica Goodfellow, Ph.D. - San Jacinto College (Pasadena, TX)

In 2023, readers of the *Radio Times* named *The Muppet Christmas Carol* the best Christmas film of all time, placing a movie with singing frogs, pigs, and rats ahead even of long-time favorites like *It's a Wonderful Life* and *A Miracle on 34th Street*. This paper examines the film's enduring cultural resonance by placing it in the context of the Muppets' prior TV and film appearances and closely analyzing its unique features, including the Gonzo and Rizzo characters' direct interactions with viewers. Focusing on the film's portrayal of wealth as an obstacle to sustaining human relationships, we explore how *The Muppet Christmas Carol* refurbishes Dickensian ideals for viewers at the beginning of the 1990s, positioning joy and prosperity as communal, not individual, accomplishments. Ultimately, we contend that Christmas and the Muppets enjoy a mutually supportive relationship, with holiday entertainment offering the Muppets a stronger foothold in popular culture and the Muppets serving as unexpected but effective voices for Dickens's call to embrace community and the emotional warmth of the Christmas season.

Paper #2

Paper #2	1:00 p.m. (EST)	Richard Wood, Ph.D. (Ind. Scholar/Author, United Kingdom)
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Title:

"Manifestations of Female Trauma in Three Version of Black Christmas"

Abstract:

This paper uses trauma theory to explore the original *Black Christmas* (1974), with comparison to its remakes, *Black Christmas* (2006) and *Black Christmas* (2019), as manifestations of trauma in different eras in US culture, with particular emphasis on representations of women. Building on theory put

forward in *The Psychodynamics of Modern Horror Cinema* (Pitillas & Martinez-Biurrun, 2025), I outline how different versions of the same Christmas horror film act as trauma re-emergence and traumatic manifestations of both repressed and overt attitudes toward female empowerment and men-on-women violence.

I suggest that the original version reflects a patriarchal perception from second-wave feminism that sorority houses increased cult-like beliefs in female independence, thus making women vulnerable and in need of men's protection; I suggest the post-2000 remake was part of the torture porn cycle of films that reflected negative attitudes toward women through overt violence toward unlikeable female character tropes; and I highlight the progress that has been made in the most recent version, where the patriarchy and predator behaviour of men on US university campuses is portrayed as the villain rather than the saviour.

I conclude by providing context in trauma theory and exploring further whose trauma is being reflected, and how this impacts the perceptions and portrayals in these films.

Biography:

Dr Richard Wood is an author and academic in the field of Horror Studies. Having written over forty horror novels, he's maintained a successful career writing and marketing his own books, and has been able to share this experience and expertise with his students. He has a PhD titled *Demonic Horror and its Reflection of Society* and is currently researching how horror literature and film reflect societal attitudes, present those considered to be *The Other*, and exposes patriarchal norms.

Paper #3

Paper #3	1:45 p.m. (EST)	Brian Peterson (Shasta College, Redding, CA)
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"Arranging for the Holidays: Lawrence Welk, 'The Christmas Song,' and Insights into the 'Champagne Style' within American Popular Music, 1957-1989

This paper evaluates four recorded versions of "The Christmas Song" (Tormé/Wells, 1945) in the commercial output of twentieth century bandleader and television host, Lawrence Welk (1903-1992). Following a quick historical survey of Welk's origins and his rise in broadcasting, four historical recordings of this familiar, holiday tune (two vinyl discs and two television performances) will constitute a careful inquiry exploring genre markers, idiomatic conventions, and aural characteristics central to Welk's distinct legacy in North American popular culture.

The basis of this critical inquiry examines how these separate treatments of the same song over a span of multiple decades yield patterns—specifically, three observable tendencies—for Welk's staff when arranging music in the "champagne music." How do these recordings exhibit

Biography:

Brian Peterson (Instructor of Ethnic Studies, History, and Political Science, Shasta College, 2000-present) earned degrees from the University of California, Berkeley (BA, History), California State University, Chico (BA II, Music and Spanish; MA, History; California Teaching Credential), Harvard University (EdM, Learning and Teaching), and Yale University (MDIV, Latinx, Theologies; STM, Leadership). He was a visiting student to the University of Massachusetts, Boston where he studied with David Pruett, Ph.D. A recipient of a Charlton Research Grant (Institute of Oral History, Baylor University) and the New England Historical Association, previous conference papers include: International Country Music Conference, American Musicological Society, National Council of History Education, Society of American Music, New England Historical Association, Music Educators National Conference, Society for Ethnomusicology, and the "It's a Wonderful Life" Museum Festival (NY).

Paper #4

Paper #4	2:30 p.m. (EST)	Tim Dodge, Ph.D. (Auburn University, Auburn, AL)
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"Doo-Wop for Christmas"

This conference paper will explore the rich archive of 60 doo-wop Christmas-related recordings, circa 1948-1963, as a distinct arranging, recording, and cultural style within American popular music.

Description: Christmas-related recordings appear in several genres of American popular music. This presentation concerns the Rock -n- Roll sub-genre known as "Doo-Wop" featuring vocal group recordings made between the late 1940's and early 1960's. We will explore such questions as who were these groups? Did any of these recordings achieve hit status? What are some of the major Christmas-related themes addressed by these recordings? In addition to description and analysis, the presentation will also feature brief audio extracts of some of these engaging, sometimes serious, and sometimes humorous recordings.



Originally from Lee, New Hampshire, Dr. Tim Dodge now resides in the small east central Alabama town of Camp Hill where he serves as a Research Librarian (History, Political Science, Economics, and Theatre and Dance) at the Ralph Brown Draughon Library at Auburn University. He earned a Ph.D. in History (University of New Hampshire, 1992); M.A. in History (University of New Hampshire, 1982); M.L.S. [Master of Library Science] (Columbia University, 1980); and B.A. in History (Swarthmore College, 1979).

Previous Conference Papers include:

"Bill Haley: Country Artist," International Country Music Conference, Belmont University, Nashville, Tenn., May 29, 2025

"The Korean War in Country Music," International Country Music Conference, Belmont University, Nashville, Tenn., June 1, 2023

"Country Music during the 'Dirty Thirties'," International Country Music Conference, Belmont University, Nashville, Tenn., June 2, 2022

"Hardrock Gunter: Country's Missing Link to Rock 'n' Roll," International Country Music Conference, Belmont University, Nashville, Tenn., June 3, 2021

"Rhythm & Blues Goes Calypso: The Incorporation of West Indian Calypso into African American Rhythm and Blues c. 1945-1965," Discover Auburn Lecture Series, Auburn University, September 20, 2016.

Featured Session

Featured Session	3:30 p.m. (EST)	Anthony Sammarco (Ind. Scholar, Boston, MA)
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"The Christmas Tree Shops (1970-2024): A Beloved New England icon for Unique Bargains"

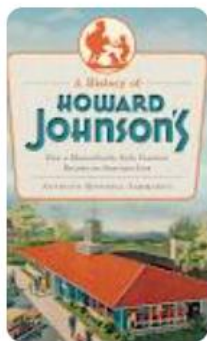
The Christmas Tree Shops was an icon of New England, with stores that offered a diverse assortment of merchandise from seasonal decorations, home decor, housewares, food and giftware, and just about everything else. Founded in 1970 by Chuck and Doreen Bilezikian, they opened their first shop on Route 6A at Willow Street in Yarmouth Port in a former grocery store. Over the next three decades, twenty-three stores were opened that not only had distinctive architecture but also became a destination for the public and offered items you never thought you needed before stepping through the door.

Despite the seasonal name, the Bilezikians sold unique, one-of-a-kind quality merchandise at bargain prices from closeouts and overruns, as well as small batches of baskets made in Eastern Europe, glass Christmas ornaments from Poland, and a plethora of intriguing merchandise. One customer described the stores as "like walking into a closet full of surprise treasures" and combined with great prices, they would coin their familiar catch phrase "Don't You Just Love a Bargain?" Employees radiated a warm, positive attitude and were valued for their part in making the Christmas Tree Shops not just a special place to shop but a great success.

As Chuck and Doreen Bilezikian once said, "Together we grew a successful company and created many memories." Indeed, there are many who fondly recall the thrill of finding a bargain at these iconic stores.

Biography:

Originally from the Hub and a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, Charles Sammarco is a renowned and extensively-published local historian for Boston, including these publications:



A History of
Howard...
2013



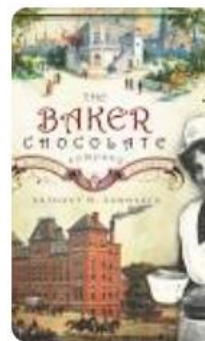
Lost Boston
2014



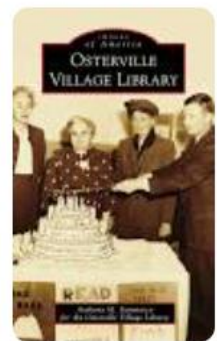
The Christmas
Tree Shops:...
2025



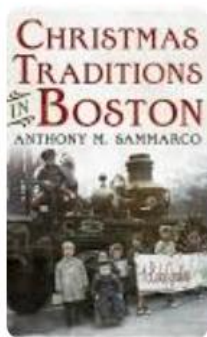
Jordan Marsh:
New England's...
2017



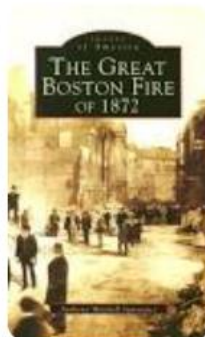
The Baker
Chocolate...
2009



Osterville
Village Library
2017



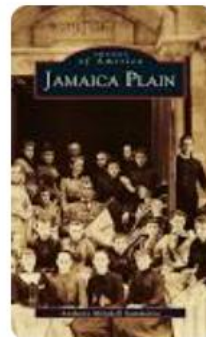
Christmas
Traditions in...
2017



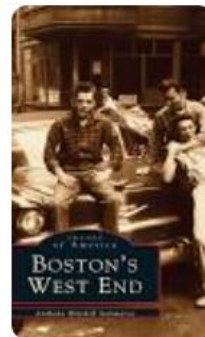
The Great
Boston Fire of...
1997



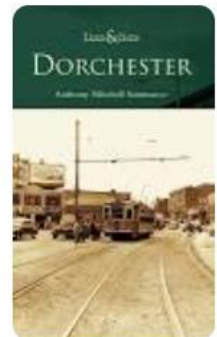
Boston in
Motion
1999



Jamaica Plain
1997



Boston's West
End
1998



Dorchester
1995



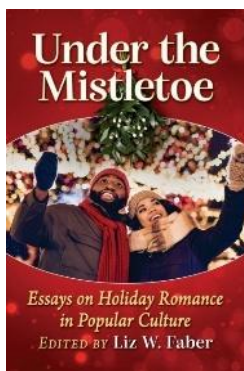
Publications: "Shout Out"

Publications "Shout Out"	4:30 p.m. (EST)	(Everyone in the Chat)
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An informal time for everyone to share and provide information about seminal, innovative, and/or recent academic publications regarding topics of possible interest and relevance within the study of Christmas celebrations, expressions, and traditions within popular culture (1900-1991): welcome!

Special Panel/Roundtable

Special Panel/Roundtable	4:45 p.m. (EST)	Liz Faber, Ph.D. and Colleagues (Franklin, MA)
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"*Under the Mistletoe: Essays on Holiday Romance in Popular Culture* (2024)"

This special panel/roundtable will feature Liz Faber, Ph.D. (Dean College, Franklin, MA), editor and contributing author to this 2024 academic publication (McFarland, 2024). Book information via Amazon.com (full entry [HERE](#)):

"When you think of holiday romance in popular culture, you probably imagine the formulaic made-for-TV movies we all love to watch: a career gal moves from the big city to a small town, where she finds the love of her life and the true meaning of Christmas. Yet, as with so much of the romance genre, our favorite holiday movies, books, TV episodes, and plays are so much richer than the oft-derided formula. The 22 essays in this volume turn a scholarly eye to one of our most beloved and under-examined subgenres, offering celebrations and criticisms alike of Christmas, New Year, Hanukkah, and Diwali romances.

This work includes voices from global scholars across an impressive breadth of disciplines: literature, history, theater, media, gender and sexuality studies, sociology, psychology, anthropology, law, and victim studies. Readers will delight in celebrations of old classics like *Christmas in Connecticut*, new favorites like *A Holly Jolly Diwali*, and everything in between."





CONFERENCE MISSION:

Explore academically topics in commercial expressions of Christmas in popular culture in the United States of America and beyond in the twentieth century through critical inquiries into popular music, visual culture, cinema, radio, magazines, material culture, commerce, culinary arts/confectionaries, television, toys, and tourism studies. View brief Information video: [HERE](#).

EVENT FORMAT:

Original papers welcome on any topic within the scope and focus of this online conference. Paper presentations will need to include slides and other relevant digital media. Each presenter will have up to 30 minutes plus ten minutes for questions/discussion. This is a fully online, free conference (Zoom) to facilitate greater access with no registration fees nor attendance costs.

HOW TO ATTEND?

Attendance at any/all sessions is **free** and convenient:

WELCOME

Simply email Brian Peterson (bpeterson@shastacollege.edu) to receive the Zoom URL. Welcome!

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE:

One day = Saturday, November 15, 2025 (11:00 a.m. – 5:55 p.m., EST). 100% online.
Questions are welcome! Please submit any questions to:

Brian Peterson

bpeterson@shastacollege.edu



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