



ROYAL BC  
MUSEUM



# Helmcken Old-Fashioned Christmas

HSBC  School Visits Programs

Teachers' Guide

Grades K – 3



## Helmcken Old Fashioned Christmas

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Prescribed Learning Outcomes Kindergarten ...	1
Prescribed Learning Outcomes Grade 2 .....	1
Prescribed Learning Outcomes Grade 3.....	1
Pre-Visit Instructions.....	2
<b>Program Itinerary Info .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Parlour & Dining Room.....	3
Kitchen .....	4
St. Ann’s Schoolhouse .....	5
<b>Pre-Visit and/or Follow Up Activities .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Christmas Post Card Colouring Sheet .....	7
Helmcken House Colouring Sheet .....	8
Christmas Now and Then .....	9
Christmas Wish List .....	10
<b>Teacher’s Resources .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Recommended Links.....	11
Book List .....	11

**Program Level:** Grade K–3  
**Program Length:** 75 minutes

## Introduction

This program will look at the Christmas traditions of the Helmcken family, as a typical family, from the period of time during the 1890s to just after World War I. Using material from the Royal BC Museum collections and those of the BC Archives, the program will demonstrate to students the ways in which Christmas in Victoria (and British Columbia) were celebrated. Students will experience Christmas through the testimonies of the Helmcken’s themselves. From the oral histories of their descendants who remembered their grandfather and relatives we are able to vividly see what the life and times of the Helmcken’s and their contemporaries would have been like.

Students will also have the opportunity to relive early Victorian school days in historic St. Ann’s school-house.

## Prescribed Learning Outcomes

This program is designed to fulfil the following prescribed learning outcomes as stated in the Ministry of Education’s Integrated Resource Package.

### Kindergarten – Self, Family, School

#### Skills & Process

- Co-operative participation
- Gathering info

#### Identity, Culture & Society

- Concept of change
- Similarities and differences among families

### Grade 1 – Self, Family, School

#### Skills & Process

- Co-operative participation
- Gathering info

#### Identity, Culture & Society

- Similarities and differences among families

### Grade 2 – Self, Family, School

#### Identity, Culture & Society

- Changes in the school and community

#### Economy and Technology

- How technology affects individuals and schools

### Grade 3 – Communities - Past and Present

#### Skills and Process

- Gathering information

#### Identity, Culture & Society

- Changes in communities over time

#### Economy & Technology

- How technology affects individuals and communities past and present

## Pre-Visit Instructions

The students should be divided into **3 groups prior to arrival**. If in accordance with school policy students should wear nametags.

Docents will guide the students through their program. Each group will work its way through **two stations in Helmcken House** and **one station in the St. Ann's Schoolhouse**. Each station will illustrate a different aspect of Christmas traditions as they relate to Victorian Christmas celebrations. Students will also get a hands-on opportunity to create their own historical Christmas Cracker hat to take home.

Students may not go through each station in the order presented below, but rather may start at any station and proceed through each of them until they have completed all four stations and reunite in Clifford Carl Hall for the conclusion.

## Background Information

The Helmcken's were prominent figures in the early Victorian community. Dr. J.S. Helmcken was among the earliest doctors to arrive to the colony in the 1850s, and later he was also elected to the Legislative Assembly. Notably Dr. Helmcken was integral to bringing BC into Canadian Confederation in 1871. His confederation diary was an important source of information regarding the negotiations between the colony of British Columbia and the new Dominion Government.

In 1852, Dr. Helmcken married Cecilia, the daughter of James Douglas, Governor of Vancouver Island, and his wife Amelia, who was of French-Canadian and Canadian First Nation's parentage. They built Helmcken House, on the same spot that it is located today, making it the oldest building in BC still standing on its original location. Cecilia and Dr. Helmcken had four children to survive to adulthood, Jim, Harry, Dolly and Amy. Dr. Helmcken lived at the residence until his death in 1920, the house growing and changing over time to suite the family's needs, changes in style, and technological advancements.

## Program Itinerary

### Welcome

Clifford Carl Hall – 5 min

### Objectives

Docents will greet you upon your arrival in Clifford Carl Hall. Your class will be put into three groups. These groups will all do the same thing, just at different times. The docents will lead each group out to Helmcken House and St. Ann's Schoolhouse where they will begin their program.

## Parlour and Dining Room

Helmcken House – 15 min

### Objectives

At this station students will

- Learn how the Helmcken's and early Victorians celebrated Christmas between 1890 and 1915
- Be able to identify the differences between their own Christmas celebrations and those of the Helmcken family
- See and talk about traditional Christmas foods and decorations

### Background Information

The parlour, built in 1880 is the newest addition to the building. It is often called Dolly's parlour as Dr. Helmcken's youngest daughter, Dolly, spent much of her time in here entertaining visitors and playing the piano. Dolly lived in the house, after the death of her husband, Mr. Higgins, until her own death in 1939. It was opened as a museum in 1941. There are several family photographs on the wall in this room.

Next to the piano will be a Christmas tree, laden with gifts. Gift giving was also an important part of Christmas in the last century, though not as much as today. Gifts were fewer and would have mostly been a practical nature. As Victoria grew and communications and transportation with the rest of Canada improved, it became possible to order gifts through catalogues like Eaton's. Children could pick things out of the catalogue, just as they do today.

The dining room was an addition to the House in 1856. Members of the family, particularly Dolly Helmcken, did much of the artwork decorating the room. Many of Dr Helmcken's belongings are still scattered throughout the room. The dining room was the hub of Christmas festivities in Helmcken household. From the interviews conducted with Cecilia Bullen and Ainslie Helmcken, the Helmcken grandchildren, we know a great deal about how Christmas was celebrated in this home.

### Lesson Plan

At this station students will have the opportunity to review some historic gifts and decorations used during Victorian times. They will also discuss and compare traditional foods enjoyed by the Helmcken family and what they themselves eat and enjoy today.

## Kitchen

Helmcken House – 15 min

### Objectives

At this station students will

- Learn how the Helmckens and early Victorians celebrated Christmas between 1890 and 1915
- Discuss how Victorian technology affected life in the kitchen and how it had an effect on a favourite Christmas decoration
- Make a craft

### Background Knowledge

Not a lot is known about the appearance or location of the original Helmcken family kitchen. After the death of Cecilia, Dr. Helmcken brought in a housekeeper to help with the children and meals. Objects found in the kitchen are typical of the 1880s to 1920s.

In 1847 Tom Smith of England invented the Christmas Cracker. He made a coloured paper wrapper and put another strip of paper impregnated with chemicals which, when rubbed, created enough friction to produce a noise. He knew that bangs excited children and the mottos and poems inside of the crackers amused adults. This combination of innovation and tradition is a hallmark of the Victorian period. Archival images of the Helmcken family show them seated around the dining room table with Christmas crackers and wearing tissue paper crowns.

### Lesson Plan

This station will primarily be a craft station. Students will learn about how early Victorians would have decorated their homes. They will learn about the origins of the Christmas Cracker and they will make a Christmas Cracker hat. As students work on the craft they will be invited to look around the kitchen and discuss the differences between a kitchen from 100 years ago and their own family kitchen.



BC Archives

## St. Ann's Schoolhouse

St. Ann's Schoolhouse – 15 min

### Objectives

At this station students will

- Learn about early school pageants in Victoria by re-enacting Helmcken's own Christmas wedding.

### Background Knowledge

The Sisters of St. Ann opened St. Ann's Schoolhouse in 1858. Children were taught reading, writing, math practical and rational bookkeeping, geography, grammar, rhetoric, history, natural history, English, French plain and ornamental needle. The daughters of Helmcken, Amy and Dolly, both received very good educations from the Sisters. The schoolhouse was moved from its original location and is now set up as a typical one-room schoolhouse, with an interpretive display on early school days in B.C.

Christmas pageants were an important part of the school year. Parents, trustees and members of the community and journalists attended the pageants and they were written about in the local newspapers.

Tableaux vivants or "living pictures" were popular in the 19th Century. Costumed actors or models would be carefully posed to recreate paintings or historical scenes on stage. The actors would not speak. During the Victorian period, tableaux vivants were often performed as the basis for school nativity plays.

### Lesson Plan

Students will hear the story of the Helmcken's Christmas wedding. After hearing a scene read aloud students will be invited to create a still image (tableaux) of that scene using simple props. All students will participate in creating the atmosphere of the scene by making sound effects.

## Pre-Visit Activities

Before coming to the museum students can create their own old fashioned Christmas ornament like they will see when they visit Helmcken House. Here are a few ideas of traditional ornaments that children would have made in the 1890's:

- paper cornucopias
  - coloured paper or foil, rolled and glued or stapled into a cone, decorated with lace, beads, paper, doilies, photos, newsprint and hung by a ribbon
- decorated paper fans
  - coloured paper folded into a fan, decorated with lace, beads, etc.
- decorated photos
  - create colorful frames out of paper, fabric or foil to place favorite photographs in
- paper/ribbon garlands
  - colourful paper cut into strips and taped or glued into attaching rings
  - colourful ribbon can be used in place of the paper
- popcorn strings
  - unbuttered popcorn strung, using a needle and thread
- paper flags
  - international flags drawn or made from coloured paper; they can be strung together as a chain or hung separately
- clothespin dolls
  - old-fashioned clothespins decorated with felt, paper, fabric, bead etc. to create human or animal figures
- decorated pinecones
  - pinecones decorated with felt, paper, material, beads, etc. to create human or animal figures
- bead ornaments
  - wire formed into shapes (stars, hearts, trees, etc) and threaded with decorative beads



### Christmas Post Card Colouring Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The first commercial Christmas card was made in England in 1843. In the Victorian Age, mail was often the only way to keep in touch with loved ones. Colour our postcard and if you like, cut it out and write a message on the back to someone you care about.



## Helmcken House Colouring Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Colour the picture of Helmcken House, the home of Dr J.S. Helmcken and his family.  
Draw a picture of the family at Christmas.



## Christmas Now and Then

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Think about Christmas 100 years ago. Write down an example of a toy you might have got then and a toy you would like to get now. Do the same for decorations you might use, food you might eat or games you might play. What things have changed and what things are the same?

	Now	Then
<b>Toys</b>		
<b>Decorations</b>		
<b>Foods</b>		
<b>Games</b>		

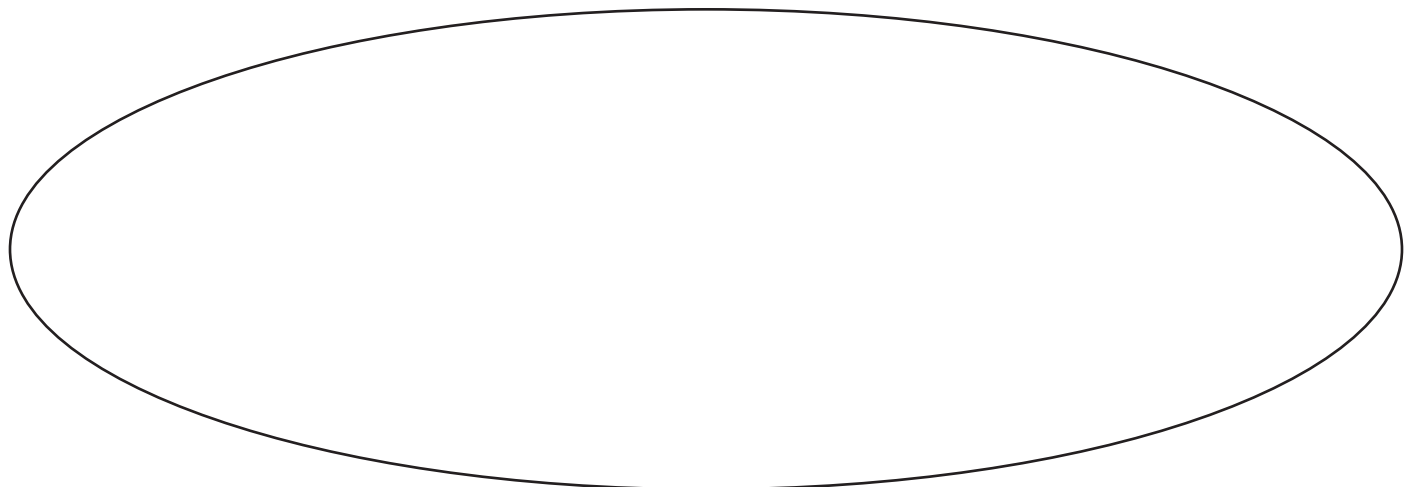
**Christmas Wish List**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Look at the list of toys advertised in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* newspaper (known today as the *The Times Colonist*) in 1908. **Underline the toys you would have asked for if you were a child at that time.**

<b>Special Table of Toys—Most Attractive Values</b>			
<b>At 25c</b>	<b>At 50c</b>	<b>At 75c</b>	<b>At \$1.00</b>
NOAH'S ARK PIANOS VIOLINS REVOLVING CHIMES GUNS MUSIC BARRELS MECHANICAL MICE MECHANICAL ENGINES TOOL SETS SKIPPING ROPES TEA SETS WASH SETS CASH REGISTERS BANKS HORSES AND CARTS ANIMALS METAL SOLDIERS FANCY DOLLS TOPS TOY GO CARTS	MAGIC LANTERNS BUILDING BLOCKS TOY SOLDIERS MECHANICAL ANIMALS MUSICAL TOPS PIANOS CHECKER BOARDS PICTURE BLOCKS NOAH'S ARK GUNS AND PISTOLS DRUMS SPRING TOPS VIOLINS DOLL'S TRUNKS SETS OF TOOLS DRESSED DOLLS	GAMES MECHANICAL TOYS UNDRESSED DOLLS BOATS TEA SETS ENGINES MECHANICAL HORSES BUILDING BLOCKS NOAH'S ARK MECHANICAL ANIMALS UNDRESSED DOLLS RAILWAYS MERRY GO ROUNDS ROLLER CHIMES PICTURE BLOCKS TEDDY BEARS DRESSED DOLLS GUNS FOR BOYS CHILD'S GO CART	TEDDY BEARS UNDRESSED DOLLS MECHANICAL RAILWAYS MAGIC LANTERNS STEAM ENGINES HOBBY HORSES ON WHEELS DRESSED DOLLS DOLL'S GO CARTS MECHANICAL TOYS CRADLES FOR DOLLS GAMES BARROWS NOAH'S ARK HORSES BUILDING BLOCKS MECHANICAL ANIMALS BOXES OF TOOLS And Many Other Articles.

Now, imagine that you only have \$1.00 to spend. What would you get? **Write the name of the toy or toys you would get in the oval below.**



## Teacher Resources

### Recommended links:

*John S. Helmcken*

<http://www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/exhibits/tbird-park/html/pre/johns.htm>

*The British Colonist: 1858 – 1910*

<http://www.britishcolonist.ca/>

*St Ann's Academy National Historic Site*

<http://www.stannsacademy.com/>

### Books:

*Christmas in Old Victoria*, John Adams. Firgrove Publishing, Duncan, BC. 2003