

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

coastal STYLE

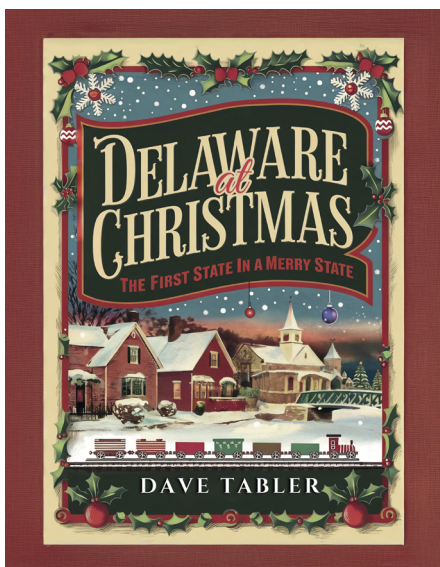


THE HOLIDAY ISSUE
FESTIVE RECIPES FOR ENTERTAINING
BOXWOOD MANOR: TIMELESS BY DESIGN

Unwrapping History

IN HIS NEW COFFEE-TABLE BOOK, DAVE TABLER SHARES FESTIVE TALES, MEMORABLE IMAGES AND FASCINATING TRADITIONS THAT SHAPED DELAWARE'S EARLIEST HOLIDAY SEASONS

Written by **Kristen Hampshire**



Did you know Delaware once supplied plum pudding to the British royal family? Or that Milton once led the nation in holly wreath production? Or that Wilmington still celebrates St. Lucia Day each December—a Swedish tradition from the state's earliest settlers?

These are among the surprising discoveries in Dave Tabler's latest book, *Delaware at Christmas*, an illustrated homage to the state's yuletide past. The Dover-based historian and photographer stitches together curious customs, bygone industries and vintage imagery into a visual tribute to Delaware's holiday heritage.

"All of this is a reminder that our history doesn't just live in museums," Dave says. "Sometimes it's right there in the decorations, the recipes and the memories we bring out every year."

Holiday History, on the Table

"Researching the book, I kept stumbling on details that even longtime Delawareans didn't know," Dave relates. "Before fruitcake became America's most controversial dessert, the country's premier producer of plum pudding was Richardson & Robbins right here in Dover."

He also resurrects the story of Milton's once-booming holly wreath industry. "From the 1880s through the 1940s, it was a multimillion-dollar business," he notes. "Families would cut fresh holly and ship wreaths all over the country. Then plastic wreaths appeared in the 1940s, and that industry vanished almost overnight."

And in Wilmington, he highlights the luminous pageantry of Old Swedes Church, where congregants still don white robes and candle crowns for St. Lucia Day, a nod to the only Swedish colony ever established in America. "It's one of those threads connecting Delaware directly to centuries-old European tradition," Dave says.

He designed *Delaware at Christmas* as a keepsake volume—oversized, image-rich and an ideal accoutrement for a coffee table. "I wanted it to feel like something you'd page through by the fire," he says. "The photos, postcards and stories all reflect how Delaware has celebrated across generations."

Among the book's playful touches: the origin of Christmas in July. "Rehoboth stores



DAVE TABLER

have done summer holiday sales for years," Dave says. "That whole idea came from a 1940s film called *Christmas in July*—and the phrase just stuck."

The inspiration for this book came from a conversation at Huxley & Hiro Books, an indie book shop in Wilmington. "I was talking with the owner about what people ask for after Thanksgiving," Dave recalls. "She said, 'Everyone comes in wanting a Delaware Christmas book, and there isn't one.' I told her, 'Well, there will be.'"

Dave sees *Delaware at Christmas* as a celebration of community and local business. "It's fun to create something that literally fills a Delaware-shaped gap on their shelves," he says.

A Delaware Storyteller

Trained as a photojournalist, Dave has long focused his lens on the First State's cultural landscape. His previous trilogy traced Delaware's development from railroads to freeways. He now balances that documentary eye with a sense of whimsy and wonder.

"I like uncovering the stories beneath the surface," he says. "Whether it's a vanished wreath factory or a church that still glows with candles in the December night, it all speaks to who we are."

Dave will hold signings through the season at Huxley & Hiro Books in Wilmington, Bethany Beach Books, and libraries statewide. He hopes readers will find "something local, something that feels like home" for the holidays. **CS**