**Christmas & Santa Claus**

**A movie actor once won the Academy Award for playing Santa Claus. It happened in 1947. Edmund Gwenn played the part of Santa Claus in the movie Miracle on 34th Street, and won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor. In movie history, actors have won Academy Awards in a variety of roles, but no one would have thought a man could win the Academy Award for playing Santa Claus. *(Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 49)***

**The actual Saint Nicholas was born around A.D. 270 and lived in Myra, a region in what is now known as Turkey. His parents died while he was young and left him a large inheritance. It is said that young Nicholas decided to forsake his fortune and dedicate his life to charity. He was renowned for his generosity and was especially loved by children.  Historians claim that St. Nicholas died in A.D. 343, but children throughout the world believe he still celebrates the birth of Christ by delivering presents every Christmas Eve. *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)***

**Even Santa Claus needs a hand to deliver presents to children in Alaska’s isolated villages, and he’s getting it from the Alaska National Guard. This year, Santa is hitching rides on C-130 transports and dog-drawn sleds to visit 18 tiny communities near the Arctic Circle, including Little Diomede Island, a remote atoll just east of the Russian border. “Some kids want guns,” said the jolly, white-bearded guardsman, who preferred to keep his identity a secret. “That’s really important here in the bush. One girl said she wanted fun for Christmas. I told her that was my favorite thing.” *(The Week magazine, December 17, 2004)*  
Santa Claus is one of the more memorable symbols associated with the celebration of Christmas. The image we have of Santa, with his long white beard, bulging fur-lined red suit and overflowing sack of gifts, is recognized and adored by children across America. The American version of Santa was actually created in just the past few hundred years by creative artists and writers. Other countries tell of similar characters, some of them dating back thousands of years. So who is this man we call Santa Claus and where did he come from? It all depends on what you choose to believe. *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)*  
The Saint Nicholas Bank of New York City was chartered in 1865. It was one of five banks in the U. S. that at some time pictured Santa Claus on legal currency. *(L. M. Boyd)*  
Dennis walks up to Santa and whispers in his ear: “Do you believe in yourself?” *(Hank Ketcham, in Dennis The Menace comic strip)***

**Boy: “If I stop believing in Santa Claus, will that mean he won’t bring me presents anymore?” Girl: “Nah. All that matters is that your parents don’t stop believing in Santa Claus!” *(Art Sansom, in The Born Loser comic strip)***

**Didn’t the $1 bill once have a picture of Santa Claus on it? No, but a $5 bill did. It was put out by a New York bank in 1858 when banks could do that. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**The famous cartoonist Thomas Nast drew a cartoon of Santa Claus in 1882 that showed him sitting on a box labeled “Christmas Box 1882, St. Nicholas, North Pole.” Three years later he drew another cartoon showing Santa at the North Pole. He never said why. *(Rebecca Jones, in Rocky Mountain News)*  
  
Our version of Santa is a combination of many different characters including the real St. Nicholas, with his short dark beard, the Viking god Odin, with his flowing white beard, Father Christmas from England and a Scandanavian character dressed in furs and skins known as “Winterman.” *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)*  
  
St. Nicholas was known especially for his love of children, and many stories are told of how he helped the little ones. The most famous and fabulous tale concerns three schoolboys. The boys had wandered into some woods and after dark had found an inn in which to spend the night. The innkeeper was extremely poor and, fearing starvation, robbed and killed the boys. He then put them in a tub of saltwater, planning to use them for food! But St. Nicholas came to the inn, evidently knowing what had occurred and brought the boys back to life. The innkeeper tearfully repented and begged forgiveness, which the magnanimous bishop granted him. Because of this and other stories, Nicholas was made the patron saint of children. *(Jim Gaither)***

**Once upon a time, banks all over the country issued their own currency. Even after the National Bank Act of 1863 imposed a 10 percent tax on such notes, many banks continued to make their own money. By 1935, the national banks had transferred this power to the Federal Reserve. Yet throughout most of this nation’s history, bank-issued currency, now relegated to myriad numismatic collections, was as legal a tender as any. The banks issued every denomination of paper money now in circulation, plus one: the three-dollar bill. Specific designs varied from bank to bank. But one design was used more than any other. That preeminent picture was, as on current currency, of someone. Someone you’ve known all your life. He appeared on the three-dollar bills issued by the Howard Banking Company of Boston and the Central Bank of Troy and the Pittsfield Bank and the White Mountain Bank--and by one Manhattan bank bearing the name of the man on the three-dollar bill: the Saint Nicholas Bank of New York City. And yes, I do mean to tell you that the person whose image was once absolutely lawfully engraved on the dead-serious 100 percent legitimate three-dollar bill -- was Santa Claus. *(Paul Aurandt, in Destiny & 102 Other Real Life Mysteries, p. 89)*  
  
A book about the Dutch version of St. Nicholas, written by Washington Irving, was published in 1809.  It was a fanciful account describing St. Nicholas as a jolly old elf who flew his horse drawn wagon over the tree tops to deliver yearly presents to children. *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)*  
England’s “Father Christmas” wears a red robe lined with fur and a crown of holly. He is said to fill children’s stockings with presents on Christmas Eve. *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)*  
  
In Germany, St. Nick is accompanied by an assistant who punishes naughty children by hitting them with a rod. In Holland, St. Nicholas travels with “Black Peter” who takes bad children away. *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)*  
Miracle legends continued to be associated to his name, even after his death: children were rescued from all kinds of danger, lame men were healed, and sea disasters were averted when people called upon St. Nicholas to intercede. Today the spirit of St. Nicholas survives in our Christmas traditions. The Christmas Eve flights of Santa Claus are reminiscent of St. Nicholas’ reputed ability to travel instantaneously from one place to another. The gifts of Santa Claus remind us of St. Nicholas’ love for children and his almost extravagant generosity. *(Jim Gaither, in U.S.R.S. newsletter)*  
Miracle stories about St. Nicholas abound. He is said to have had the power to travel from one place to another instantaneously, to have been highly clairvoyant as well as a powerful healer, and to have had the power to calm the sea and walk on water. Nicholas always demonstrated those powers in acts of charity. *(Jim Gaither)***

**The St. Nicholas legend can be traced to a third-century Catholic bishop of Asia Minor, who allegedly worked many miracles. One story has him taking over the helm of a ship during a gale when the crew became paralyzed with fear. He calmed the gale, then plucked a drowned sailor from the sea and restored him to life. *(Rebecca Jones, in Rocky Mountain News)*  
  
The former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan has mountains honoring Communist and Russian leaders. Just in time for Christmas, authorities say they plan to name a snowy peak “Mount Santa Claus.” Three climbers set off Wednesday to scale the designated peak and bury a capsule containing the flag of Kyrgyzstan at the summit of Christmas Eve. Why is a predominantly Muslin and former Soviet land honoring the jolly old elf. “We want to develop tourism, and Santa Claus is an ideal brand to help us to this,” said Nurhon Tadzhibayeva, an official with Kyrgyz tourist authorities. Plans are afoot to hold an international Santa Claus congress in Kyrgyzstan in the summer, Tadzhibayeva said. The country also intends to hold annual games in which Santas from all over the world will test chimney-climbing, sled-racing, and tree-decorating skills. *(The North Platte Telegraph, December 25, 2007)*  
  
Multilingual Santa: Santa Claus, as everyone knows, works at the North Pole, has a big belly like a bowl full of jelly -- and speaks seven languages. At least, that’s true at the Hilltop Mall in Riuchmond, California, where Santa is doing his best to keep up with the multicultural times. Santa, also known as Michael Cox, has solid command of French, Spanish, German, Italian, Russian, Arabic, and English. Cox, 46, also says he can fumble through -- or at least say hello -- in roughly 230 different languages, including Hindu, Vietnamese and Tagalog. *(San Francisco Monitor, as it appeared in the Rocky Mountain News on December 25th, 2003)*  
Don't forget to check out Santa's travels this weekend at noradsanta.org, a Web site of the Colorado-based North American Aerospace Defense Command. In 1955, an ad for a Santa Claus hot line for children misprinted the telephone number, using the number of the Continental Air Defense Command. In 1958, when the U.S. and Canada created NORAD, the new organization continued taking calls from children keeping tabs on Santa's travels. *(Rocky Mountain News, December 20, 2004)***

**Radar and satellite experts at NORAD in Colorado Springs, Colorado, will track Santa Claus today as he makes his annual Christmas Eve flight around the world. NORAD will post a map on its Web site of Santa's exact whereabouts and where he's headed next. To follow his progress, go to www.noradsanta.org. *(Rocky Mountain News, December 24, 2004)***

**A study in December 2004 found that parents enjoy a visit with Santa more than their children do. *(Uncle John’s Bathroom Reader: Extraordinary Book of Facts, p. 50)***

**Saint Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop of Myra, in Asia Minor, is the patron saint of children, virgins, sailors, thieves, and pawnbrokers, and also of Greece, Russia, and Sicily. Nicholas shouldn’t be confused with the patron saint of golfers, Nicklaus. *(J. Bryan, III, in Hodge Podge Two, p. 40)*  
It was Clement Clarke Moore, author of the poem that begins “Twas the night before Christmas” who had St. Nick visit at Christmas rather than on St. Nicholas Day. Moore also added such touches as calling St. Nick a little old man who was lively and quick. And for reasons known only to himself, he did away with the horse St. Nicholas traditionally rode and substituted a magic sleigh with eight reindeer. The real name of that very famous poem, by the “A Visit From St. Nicholas.” Moore wrote it in 1822, but wouldn’t allow it to be published until 1844. *(Sheryld Ann Karas, in The Solstice Evergreen)***

**Santa Claus is OK, but in recent popularity polls among young kids, the tooth fairy got a much higher score. She comes more often, they said. *(L. M. Boyd)*  
For more than 20 years, starting in 1863, Thomas Nast popularized Santa Claus as a jolly elf with his illustrations for the newspaper “Harper’s Weekly.” *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)*  
  
Santa Claus is based on a real-life bishop, St. Nicholas, born in the fourth century, in Myra, in Asia Minor. He was the son of wealthy parents and got a reputation for giving away money and gifts to people in his domain. He came to symbolize gift-giving. The name Santa Claus is a corruption of St. Nicholas. *(Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 232)***

**Santa Claus topped the Forbes.com list of the richest fictional characters. His wealth was deemed to be “infinite” as evidenced by his annual gift-giving frenzy. Defense tycoon Oliver “Daddy” Warbucks came in second, with an estimated net worth of $27.3 billion. *(Forbes.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine on December 16, 2005)***

**For the fourth straight year, a crew of “Secret Santas” has roamed the streets of Charlotte, N.C., handing out $100 bills to anyone who appears in need. The anonymous donors were accompanied this year by volunteers from the Charlotte police and fire departments. “It’s about the pure joy you’re able to give people,” one Charlotte businessman said. The Santas descended on a local thrift store, dispersing bills to shoppers and the store’s cashier. Many recipients cried. Foster parent Donna Green, who was recently laid off, said, “God bless you,” as she hugged a Santa. *(The Week magazine, December 17, 2010)***

**The solemn Saint Nicholas who first arrived in America with the 17th-century Dutch settlers bore little resemblance to today’s Jolly Old Saint Nick. It wasn’t until cartoonist Thomas Nast drew him in 1863 that he became the rotund, red-cheeked man with the white beard whom we know and love as Santa Claus. Every Christmas, Nast, famous for his illustrations of the Civil War in “Harper’s Weekly,” depicted buoyant scenes as a respite from the clever and often biting cartoons that had made his reputation.  It was with these forays into the land of make-believe that Nast did a lot to popularize Santa Claus and his beloved world of holiday merriment, North Pole workshops, and a gift-filled sleigh pulled by obliging reindeer -- everything to delight children during the Christmas season. *(Reader’s Digest: Strange Stories, Amazing Facts of America’s Past)*The three stages of man: he believes in Santa Claus; he does not believe in Santa Claus; he is Santa Claus. *(Jim Guthrie)*  
Kris Kringle started out as Christ-Kindli.  From the Swiss. *(L. M. Boyd)*  
One of the most famous stories about Saint Nicholas tells how he helped three poor sisters who could not marry because they had no dowries. Nicholas threw bags of gold into their homes and one bag supposedly landed in a stocking that was hung by the fireplace to dry. Afterward, whenever somebody received an anonymous gift, they thanked Nicholas.  *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)*  
Sleigh sold separately: $79.50 for the Deluxe Lightweight Flanelette Santa Suit with fur trim from www.SantaClaus.com. Includes jacket, hat, pants, semi-boots with fur-like trim, belt, beard and wig set and eyebrow whitener. It’s the standard 40-46 size. $489.50 for the Super Deluxe Santa Suit. The company says you can pass it on to your grandchildren and it’s designed to stand up to repeated dry cleanings. Beard and wig not included “another $32.50). $72.75 to complete the look: glasses, white gloves, eyebrows, the Jumbo Belly and a toy sack. *(Rocky Mountain News, Dec. 23, 2003)*  
At present there is no way to tell which stories about St. Nicholas are based on fact and which on fancy.  Perhaps it doesn’t really matter, for he has become a symbol of generosity, love, and miracles, and symbols sometimes convey truth as accurately and as objectively as established facts.  After all, mathematics relies heavily on symbols and who can deny the value of those symbols for science, business, and the arts?  Then who can deny the value of love and faith, of which St. Nicholas is a grand symbol? *(Jim Gaither, in U.S.R.S. newsletter)*  
In another, more gruesome tale, he entered the shop of an evil butcher who seven years before had not only killed several little boys, but had cut them up and pickled them in a barrel in his shop. St. Nicholas in one day, confronted the butcher and subsequently pulled each of the pickled pre-teens out of the brine alive and in one piece. *(Sheryld Ann Karas, in The Solstice Evergreen)***

**Shirley Temple stopped believing in Santa Claus at age six, when her mother took her to a department store to see St. Nick and he asked her for her autograph. (Don Voorhees, in The Essential Book of Useless Information, p. 24)**

**The traditional image we have of Santa today was created by Haddon Sundblom in 1931. Sundblom’s version of Santa was created to advertise Coca-Cola. The actual Saint Nicholas was born around A.D. 270 and lived in Myra, a region in what is now known as Turkey. His parents died while he was young and left him a large inheritance. It is said that young Nicholas decided to forsake his fortune and dedicate his life to charity. He was renowned for his generosity and was especially loved by children. Historians claim that St. Nicholas died in A.D. 343, but children throughout the world believe he still celebrates the birth of Christ by delivering presents every Christmas Eve. *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)*  
I believe I have a solution to a most contentious issue. From the very earliest years of their lives, young people are admonished to behave and act appropriately, and that in doing so Santa Claus (or some other benevolent being) will reward them with gifts at Christmas time. Nearly every young person understands this. Therefore, instead of posting “In God We Trust” in schools, the posting ought to be “In Santa Claus We Trust.” In public places, the posting could be “In Goodness We Trust.”   
*(K. E. Stirling, in Rocky Mountain News)*  
Santa Claus, U.S.A.:  
- Santa Claus Church, Dillingham County, Alaska  
- Santa Claus Lake, Spencer County, Indiana  
- Santa Claus Spring, Humboldt County, Nevada  
- Santa Claus Lake, St. Louis County, Minnesota  
- Santa Claus Stream, Grant County, Oregon  
- Santa Claus Museum, Colorado County, Texas.  
*(World Features Syndicate)*  
Thousands of years ago, the Vikings believed their god Odin came down from the heavens dressed in a hooded cloak bearing gifts for the needy and worthy. *(Jeff Harris, in Shortcuts)*  
Where is Santa Claus a woman? Maybe you mean Italy. The gift-giving Christmas figure there is an old lady called “La Befana.” *(Boyd’s Curiosity Shop, p. 185)*  
A man who lives in North Pole, Alaska, which advertises its 99705 ZIP code as Santa’s ZIP code, takes it upon himself every year to answer many of the hundreds of thousands of letters that are sent to Santa via the town’s mailbox by children around the world. (Noel Botham, in The Amazing Book of Useless Information, p. 18)**

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