



AMERICAN CHRISTMAS SCENE . . . Symbolic of our nation at this festive season of the year is this picture of little Ethel Gorman, 4, daughter of a guide at the Statue of Liberty, as she admires a Christmas tree on the porch of Newell M. Foster, superintendent of the statue staff on Bedloe's Island. Over her shoulder, Miss Liberty herself stays right on the job, blazing her message of peace and good will.

December 24 this year, the tradition of the Christmas tree in American church services will be 98 years old—for it was back in 1851 that a Lutheran minister in Cleveland, Ohio, lighted the first tree at such services.

The minister was the Rev. Henry Schwan, pastor of the Zion Lutheran Church on Cleveland's York street and his action brought on a storm of controversy which lasted several years. This was caused by the fact that the Christmas tree had so long been associated with pagan observance of the season that many conservatives believed it had no place in Christian ceremonies.

However, some of Rev. Schwan's congregation, especially the children, thought the beautifully decorated tree, glowing with candles, was just the spirit of the Christmas season.

But the objectors had their way and they were determined that Rev. Schwan's tree was to be the last of the Christmas trees erected in America.

Through the years that followed, the minister did all in his power to learn of the origins of the Christmas tree tradition in order that he might show that the tradition was far from the "heathen" ceremony it had been called.

He wrote countless letters to friends and acquaintances all over the world; he questioned strangers and made long notes of their conversations. And, when he learned that a particular part of the world already had Christmas trees, he would mark that place on a large map which hung in his study—a

dark green tree where the tradition was established, a light green one where Christmas trees, at least, were known.

Pastor Schwan made his search for knowledge of the Christmas tree almost a crusade.

But as Christmas time approached in 1852, Rev. Schwan had not found enough church support for the tradition to light another tree at his Christmas service that year. So, with great regret, he resigned himself to the end of his hope of establishing the custom.

But on December 24, he received from the pastor of one of Cleveland's older churches the present of a new tree. Rev. Schwan realized immediately that the present meant the acceptance of the custom by a churchman far more influential than himself, and his sadness vanished.

There was a Christmas tree in the York street Zion Lutheran church that year—and once accepted in Cleveland, the custom spread all over the United States.

York street where Pastor Schwan's church once stood is changed now and long ago was renamed Hamilton avenue, and the first tree, decorated with candles and a gold star at its top, has given way to trees with brighter, more colorful decorations.

But the tradition of erecting and lighting Christmas trees, which is observed throughout the nation, is the same tradition which Pastor Schwan introduced to this country in the town of Cleveland nearly 100 years ago.



HERALD ANGELS . . . Rehearsing for the annual Christmas candlelight service, the children choristers of the Crawford Methodist Memorial church in the Bronx, New York, make an impressive picture when viewed through a Christmas wreath in the foreground.



END OF THE RAINBOW . . . The rainbow of at least one human desire had fulfillment at the end when Judy Sue Warschauer found herself face to face with the doll of her dreams—and it was the very one she wanted for Christmas.

Russian People Are Also Able to Say "Merry Christmas"

"S' Rojdestvom Kristovym." That's what a Russian would say to you if you were in Russia on Christmas day and he wished to extend the season's greetings.

The phrase is the Russian way of saying: "Merry Christmas." In the past, the Russian's Christmas was closely associated with his church; but how the day is observed now that the religious life has been subjugated in the Soviet, one would have to be behind the "iron curtain" to know.

But it was not always like that. In other days, the Russian Christmas was much like the Ukrainian. There was a Santa Claus known as "Dedushka Moroz" and there were traditional gifts of red boots for children and golden slippers for young girls.

In certain parts of the country the "baboushka" (grandmother) was the legendary dispenser of gifts. According to one story, she repented of unkindness and ever since has tried to make amends by distributing gifts to children at Christmas.



Legend not only has identified the Wise Men as Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar, it has crowned them and given them the kingdoms of Tarsus, Arabia and Ethiopia. It has symbolized their gifts as symbolic of what Jesus was to become—gold for a king, frankincense for a high priest and myrrh for a great physician.

The Gospel text's specific wise men from the east logically identifies them with Zoroastrianism—an ancient monotheistic religion of Persia. Zoroastrian priests were called Magi; they were powerful in public and private life since they, and they alone, possessed the priestly mysteries involved in the worship of Mazda—who represented the Zoroastrian power for good.

The Magi may or may not have been fabulously wealthy: St. Matthew does not elaborate their treasures nor the amount of gold, frankincense and myrrh which they presented to the Christ Child. The gifts may have been mere tokens of their treasures, or the sum and substance thereof.

And if they were soothsayers, mystics and possibly clairvoyants, they were also truly wise—in as much as they did not return to Herod, but departed into their own country by a different route.

Pilgrims Deplored "Ye Christmas Day"

Puritan disapproval of Christmas celebrations disembarked from the Mayflower with the Pilgrims in 1621 and, accordingly, Governor Bradford issued a statement publicly rebuking certain young men who declined to work on December 25, "ye day called Christmas."

This first New England Christmas—or non-observance thereof—should not be credited as the first Christmas on American soil, since Leif Erikson spent a winter or two on the North American continent around the turn of the 11th century.

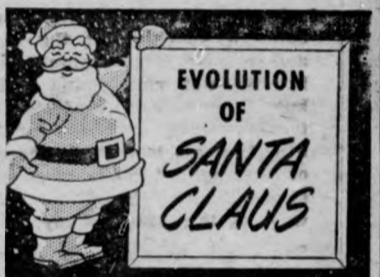
Leif was a Christian, and it is likely that members of his crew were Christians, too; although it is quite possible that some had accepted the faith without remodeling their pagan natures, since King Olaf's methods were ruthless and his command "Be baptized, or else!" left them little choice.

Undoubtedly, flagons of crude, raw wine fermented from the grapes of Leif's Vinland were passed around and the celebration may have been rather boisterous, but in all fairness to Leif—who, according to excellent testimony, was a sincere convert—it is reasonable to assume that there was a trace of religious observance.

Perhaps Leif remembered the few words of Latin prayer he learned at the time of his conversion and recited them in honor of the birthday of the Redeemer he had accepted. . . . Thus, the first Christmas in America was observed.

The first Christmas card was designed in 1845.

Poinsettias which have come to be a "must" for Christmas decorations owe their name and popularity to an early American diplomat, botanist and scholar—Joel Roberts Poinsett.



Christmas has rolled around once again and Santa Claus with round red cheeks, jolly smile and chunky figure looks the same as he did nearly 90 years ago.

His creator was Thomas Nast, one of America's greatest cartoonists. During the early 1860's he was asked to illustrate Clement Clarke Moore's poem, "A Visit to St. Nicholas, better known to us as 'Twas The Night Before Christmas." The result was Santa Claus as we know him.

Santa's creator was born in Bavaria in 1840, son of a musician in a Bavarian army band. When he was a fat little boy of six, Thomas' father left Germany to enlist in the United States navy, and Thomas' mother brought the boy to New York to live.

Along about the time stocky Tommy was 15 he landed his first job as an illustrator for Leslie's Weekly at \$4 a week. By the time he was 20 he was sent to England by the New York Illustrated News to sketch the Heenan-Sayers fight, an out standing sports event of the day.

In 1862 he joined the staff of Harper's Weekly and began the series of emblematic drawings which continued throughout the Civil War. From those he created certain trademarks that have been the inspiration of cartoonists down to the present—notably the Republican elephant and the Democrat donkey.

Famous as the political symbols are today, Nast's Santa Claus probably holds first place in the hearts of Americans. Before Nast's day a few artists had drawn Santa on one occasion or another, but could not seem to agree on how the old gentleman should look.

Nast changed all that. He located Santa's home at the North Pole and gave him a sleigh drawn by reindeer. He drew the familiar, fat, merry old fellow with red cheeks and white beard, dressed in red, wearing a cap and boots, carrying a pack of toys and smoking a short pipe.

The artist then gave Santa a spy-glass so that during the year he might pick out the good children from the bad, and also a big book in which to write their names and keep their records.

This conception of Santa Claus first appeared in 1863. Since that time, the pictured Santa has been the same, although the spy-glass and pipe seem to have been dropped by the way.

to wish you HAPPINESS at Christmas

There's a wealth of happiness in store for you this Christmas if all our wishes come true. On this, the most glorious season of the year, we are thinking about our legions of loyal friends who have made possible a successful year for our organization. You have been considerate and liberal with your patronage and we are truly appreciative of all you have done to make the past year an enjoyable one.

That's why, at Christmastime, we welcome the opportunity it affords to express our sincere thanks and to wish you a pleasant holiday.

AMERICAN LEGION POST NO. 24



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