Who Brings the Gifts?

Customs Vary Around World

Who brings Christmas gifts?

Thoroughout the ages, the act of giving has been shrouded in an air of mystery that surrounds both giver and gift. Since three Wise Men appeared suddenly out of the desert bearing gold, frankincense, and myrrh for the newborn Infant at Jerusalem, Christmas giftbearers have appeared and disappeared mysteriously every year.

In Spain thyre Wise Men still bring the presents and distribute them on January 6, the Epiphany. Spanish children put their shoes out on the window sill and fill them, with straw for the camels — then awake by find that the straw is gone and presents have been left in its stead.

In Italy, the gift-giver is a La Befana — who is reputed to eat bad children as well as reward good ones. Legend has it that Befana was a woman who had been too busy with her housework to offer hospitality to the three Wise Men — and asked them to return when she was not so busy. They did not come back and Befana watches for them every Epiphany.

Two-Way Gifts

French children know that Le Pere Noel will come down from heaven and bring good things if they are well behaved — but if they are not, Le Pere Fouettard — Father Spanker — may arrive with a load of switches.

In Mexico gifts come tumbling from a pinata — a gay clay nerd or animal filled with fruit candy, nuts and small gifts. The pinata is hung from a doorway or tree and the child blindfolded breaks the pinata with a stick. In the mad scramble that follows each child strives to pick up as many gifts as possible.

In Denmark, presents are brought by the little gnome said to dwell in the family attic or barn — and in some parts of Scandinavia, gifts are brought by two goomes — an old woman carrying a basket of gifts and an old man with a white beard wearing a red hood.

In Russia, Grandfather Frost often is assisted in his gift-bearing by the Snow Maiden. And in Holland St Nicholas rides upon a white horse while his black-clad servant, "Black Pieter," carries the gifts.

In ancient times, the gift-giver was a local bishop accompanied in a procession by demons who scattered at his approach. Perhaps one of these oldest Christmas processionals was one in which two "ghosts of the fields" dressed in straw led the way, followed by Pan, and behind Pan, a masked and horned creature who carried a birch to chastise sinners.

Strange Gift-Giver

But one of the strangest gift givers of all flings open a door in Sweden — throws in a gift — then vanishes. The gift called the Julk'app is done up in so many wrappings that it is hard to find.

The red-clad figures who fling their clapper at shoppers have a real life model in the Turkish Bishop St Nicholas, who devoted his life to charity and good works more than 1,600 years ago.

An old story tells how St Nicholas unintentionally originated the custom of hanging stockings by the fireplace at Christmas time. St. Nicholas knew of a poor and proud nobleman who had no dowry for his three daughters. Coming to his house one evening, St Nicholas peered in the nobleman's window saw him fast asleep and stealthily climbed the roof to the chimney. Here he pitched down three gold pieces, expecting they would land on the hearth at the nobleman's feet. But one of the daughters had hung up a pair of stockings to dry and the gold pieces landed in the toe of one of them.

Christmas in the New England colonies was not a very happy affair. For a time — from 1642 to 1652 — the Puritans in England issued a series of ordinances forbidding church services and festivities on Christmas Day — as well as making plum puddings and mince pies. And in America, because such celebrations had a heathen origin, the General of Massachusetts passed a law in 1659 making the observance of Christmas a penal offense.

Origin Unknown Of Word 'Carol'

Despite the fact Christmas carols today are heard wherever the holiday is celebrated, no one is quite certain where the word carol originated.

Some contend the word comes from a Greek word for flute because they were used as an accompaniment to the musicians who played at early Christmas ringdances. It is also believed to have origin in the songs associated with the Roman Saturnalia.

The carols were sung in Italy by St Francis of Assisi who arranged the first Nativity scene at Greccio, Italy, in 1224 and wrote songs of praise to the Holy Child and so helped bring carol singing back to popularity after many years of decline.

As carol singing spread from country to country, new carols were developed. Today every Christian country has its own favorite carols.

THE MANAGEMENT AND STAFF of THE BANK OF NOVA SCOTIA

PAUL NIELSEN'S CLOTHING

FRANK TOTH MOTORS

ACTON MOTORS

J. B. Mackenzie & Son Ltd.

CANADIAN TIRE CORPORATION ASSOCIATE STORE

Caroline Nurseries Garden Centre and FLOWER SHOP
PEARL AND JACK ROL

Give Tips for Holiday Safety

Safety Measures Help Keep Holidays Happy

RUSS-MAC BEAUTY SALON

MANAGEMENT and STAFF
GOY CARTAGE Ltd.

Holy Day Helps Comfort Sorrow

SHORTILL SHEET METAL

STAFF & MANAGEMENT
THOMPSON MOTORS (Acton) LIMITED

Sincere Good Wishes

We wish everyone a holiday filled with joy and pleasure.
FROM THE MANAGEMENT AND STAFF
THOMPSON FUELS

GRANT'S MOTORS
GREEN ST. E.