

Santa's beard and suit created by cartoonist

Who gave Santa his red suit, broad girth, white beard, ruddy cheeks and nose, fur-trimmed hat and coat?

Surprisingly enough, the donor was a political

cartoonist.

The artist's name was Thomas Nast, cartoonist for Harper's Illustrated Weekly, who also created the now-famous symbols of the Republican ele-

phant and the Democratic donkey.

The figure of Santa that Nast drew in 1863, and perhaps earlier, has proved to be the definitive one, and even today the figure as drawn by Nast appears occasionally on Christmas greetings.

Won't tamper

e of Santa was extraordinary," says Mrs. Jeanette Lee, director of design at Hallmark.

"He gave Santa many of the qualities that have endeared him to children ever since, we wouldn't dream of tampering very much with them today."

Nast first credited Santa with keeping books on good and bad children, having a Christmas toy workshop and reading letters sent to him by children.

Perhaps it was the now famous poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," by Dr. Clement Clarke

Moore, that inspired Nast's illustration of Santa. In this children's classic of 1823, the right jolly old elf, who looked like a peddler with a pack on his back, was first described in print.

Originals

Nast followed Dr. Moore's description of Santa in several particulars, but many of his concepts were original.

At the time of Nast's Santa Claus drawings the nation was at Civil War, and families were separated. In a note to cheer both soldiers and their waiting families Nast drew "Santa Claus in Camp," for Harper's Weekly.

This earliest Santa was different from any artist's creations up till then. He was shown wearing stars and stripes of the Union and distributing gifts to soldiers. Actually, this Santa might have been meant

as a representation of Uncle Sam also.

A later, equally moving Nast illustration featured a soldier's Christmas homecoming.

Childhood saint

Born in 1840 in the tiny hamlet of Landau, Bavaria, Nast probably pictured Santa as the long-imagined Saint Nicholas of his childhood.

Albert Bigelow Palne, a friend and admirer of Nast, said the artist often revealed to him his love of the Santa illustrations. He later wrote in his biography of the cartoonist:

"His own childhood in faroff Bavaria has been measured by the yearly visits of St. Nicholas... and the girlhood of the woman who was to become his wife (Sarah Edwards of New York) was intimately associated with brilliant and joyous celebrations. "Nast's children later recalled there was always a multitude of paper dolls—marvelo-

usly big and elaborate, a race long since become extinct.

Time of splendor

"And these the artistic father—more than half a child himself at the Christmas season—arranged in processions and cavalcades, gay pageants that marched in and about those larger presents that could not be crowded into the row of stockings than hung by the family fireplace.

"It was a time of splendor and rejoicing—the festive blossoming of the winter season—and it was a beautiful and sturdy family that made Merry Christmas riot in the spacious New York home."

In Nast's day, the idea of some sort of Santa was not new to this country. He was introduced to North America by the early Dutch settlers and his name was St. Nicholas. The annual visit of this kind man, who was thought to have been a fourth-century bishop, was his feast day, December 6th.

By 1809, Washington Irving was describing Santa as a small Dutch citizen who looked much like Father Knickerbocker. Irving wondered how the poor old man could get to all the homes in a growing America on his horse, so he invented the famous reindeer-drawn sleigh.



"Hello little one" was title for this famed drawing of Santa, by Thomas Nast from Harper's Weekly. Nast, a noted 19th century political cartoonist, was the first to illustrate Santa as a bearded, red-nosed jolly old man whose rotund figure was clothed in a fur-trimmed red suit.

Fire safety for Christmas

A Happy Christmas can change in a few moments into a family tragedy, warns fire prevention officer Larry Brassard, in homes where fire safety precautions are neglected. Such precautions should head the list of every sensible family's preparations for Christmas; he says.

Mr. Brassard urges the public to exercise special care in the setting up and decorations of Christmas trees.

If plans call for a natural tree it should be bought fresh, and green, and kept outdoors or in an unheated garaged before being brought into the home for decorating. Then, one or two inches should be cut diagonally from the butt, and the tree should be set up with the butt in water which should be maintained above the level of the cut.

Strings of electric lights should be carefully checked for worn insulation, broken plugs or loose bulb sockets. Only CSA-Approved lighting sets and only non-flammable decorations should be used. Declare the tree a no-smoking area and keep matches out of the hands of children.

Do not allow discarded gift wrappings to accumulate under the tree. Dispose of them as soon as the gifts are opened. Even a green tree will burn if ignited by burning paper around the base.

Set up the tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces, TV sets or radiators. Do not allow it to block access to doors or windows in the event of fire. Switch off tree

lights at bedtime or when leaving the house.

Know what 'Wassail' means

This ancient word, familiar to us from song and story, comes from the Anglo-Saxon words "Wes Hal" — which means "be whole," or in more modern terms, "Good Health." It was used as a toast, before lifting one's glass—and by extension came to mean a drinking song.

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