

Santa Claus has changed from his first appearance over 1,500-years-ago

He is an international traveler who has had many names. He has traveled by donkey and sleigh.

He has worn royal robes and a fur-trimmed red suit. Today, we know him as Santa Claus. And from his first appearance

more than 1,500 years ago, he has gone through many changes on his way to becoming one of the world's most beloved Christmas symbols.

Years of legends have contributed to the look of today's Santa.

The first of many concerns St. Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor.

During the fourth century, he was admired for his generosity. Dressed in bishop's vestments and wearing a long white beard, he distributed gifts to children on his feast day, December 6.

In 16th century Europe, a man called the Christmas Man replaced St. Nicholas because

supporters of the Reformation preferred a more secular character.

In England this figure was known as Father Christmas and in France, Pere Noel.

Later, Dutch immigrants brought the legend to America. They called their rendition Sinterklaas, a name derived from St. Nicholas.

Sinterklaas eventually became Santa Claus, and the colors of red and white, formerly part of the bishop's clothing, evolved into Santa's present day uniform.

The Germans had their own similar myth. They believed that the Christ child or Christkind brought gifts to children on Christmas Eve.

He was depicted as a small child who rode a mule, entering homes through keyholes.

When colonists settled in the Pennsylvania-German communities, Christkindl evolved into

Kris Kringle.

By the mid 1800s, the legends of St. Nicholas, Santa Claus and Kris Kringle were completely intertwined.

Over the years, Santa's image developed into the one we see today.

Perhaps the most significant contribution came from artist Haddon Sumbler.

He modeled a jolly, plump Santa with twinkling eyes after his own face.

This version, seen in the Coca-Cola advertisements of the 1930s, was loved by millions.



Santa Claus has had many names over the 1,500 years that he has been in existence. Courtesy Photo

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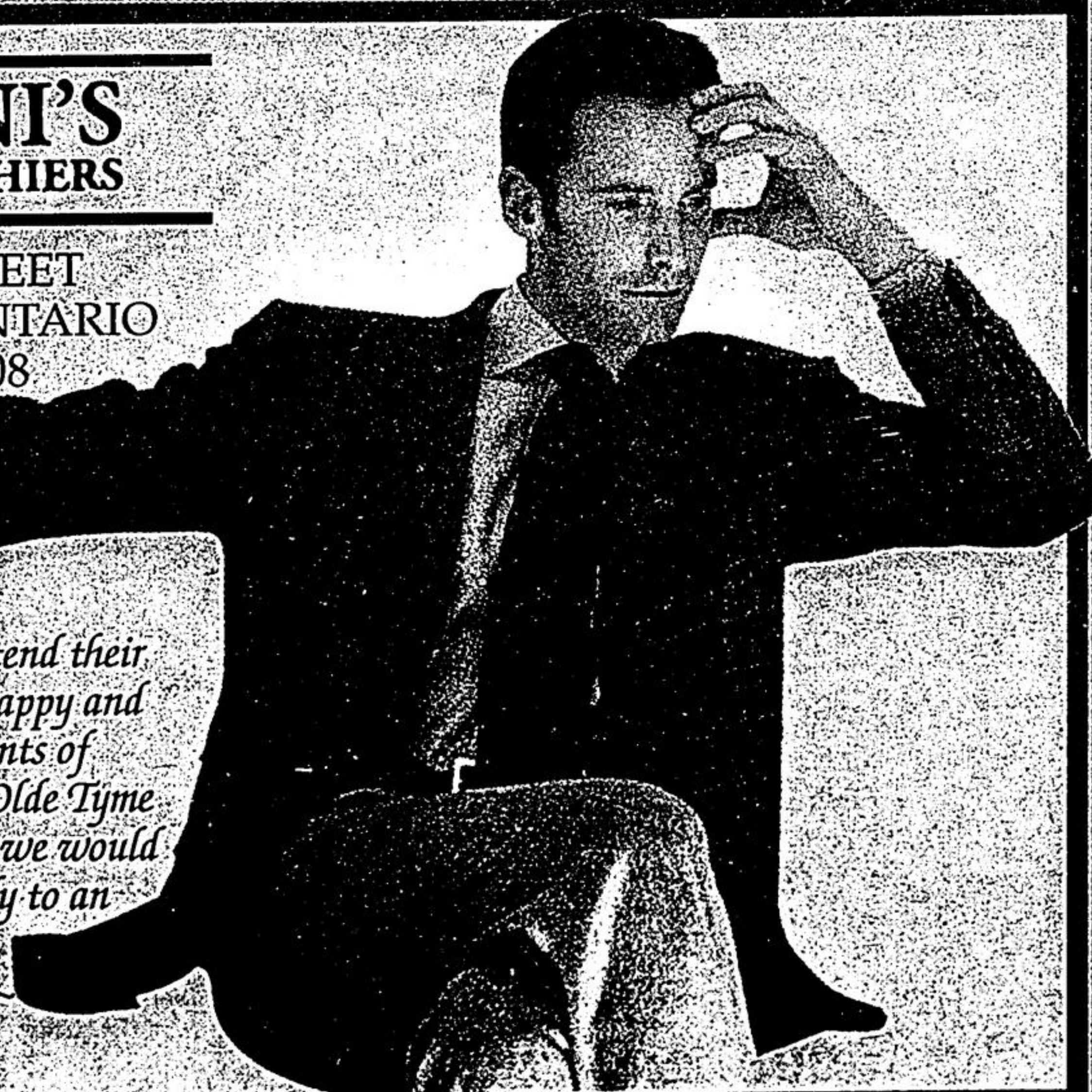
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