



Little Door to the 24th of December

Today's the last day of the Advent calendar, at least in Europe. So, naturally, we will talk about Santa Claus and his origins.

Santa Claus is based on traditions associated with Saint Nicholas (which is celebrated on December 6). It was the Dutch who transported the legend of Saint Nicholas (Sinterklaas) to New Amsterdam (now New York, the English conquered it in 1664) with the customs of giving children gifts and sweets.

The current depiction of Santa with an impressive white beard, dressed in a red suit with a black belt and white fur trim, black boots, and a soft red cap was the creation of Haddon Sunblum (1899-1976) in 1931 who worked as an illustrator for the Coca-Cola company.

An earlier depiction was created by the cartoonist Thomas Nast (1840-1902) which was published in Harper's Weekly beginning in 1863. His version was heavily influenced by the description given in the poem 'A Visit from St. Nicholas' (aka Twas the Night Before Christmas) first published in 1823. You'll find the poem on the next page.

New Amsterdam, and thus New York as a trading hub, was the result of the Dutch Golden Age.

"The Dutch Golden Age emerged during the Netherlands' long struggle against Spanish rule. The Dutch revolution against Habsburg Spain began in 1566. The Seven Provinces joined together under the Union of Utrecht (1579) and formally declared their independence with the Act of Abjuration in 1581. The new, united Dutch republic fought the Eighty Years War to secure its independence which was finally achieved and recognized by Spain with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648."
(New Amsterdam History Center)

England was another emerging power at the time and the competition between both countries eventually led to war: between 1652 and 1674, three separate Anglo-Dutch wars were fought. Pressure from France and England, as well as Orangists within the Netherlands, led to the collapse of the Dutch government and WIC bankruptcy.

A Visit from St. Nicholas by Clement Clarke Moore

(July 15, 1779 – July 10, 1863)

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all
through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with
care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds;
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their
heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's
nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a
clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the
matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave a lustre of midday to objects below,
When what to my wondering eyes did appear,
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny rein-deer,
With a little old driver so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment he must be St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them
by name: "Now, *Dasher!* now, *Dancer!* now
Prancer and *Vixen!* On, *Comet!* on, *Cupid!* on,
Donder and *Blitzen!* To the top of the porch! to
the top of the wall! Now dash away! dash away!
dash away all!"
As leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to
the sky; So up to the housetop the coursers they
flew
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas
too—
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a
bound. He was dressed all in fur, from his head
to his foot, And his clothes were all tarnished
with ashes and soot; A bundle of toys he had
flung on his back, And he looked like a pedler
just opening his pack. His eyes—how they
twinkled! his dimples, how merry! His cheeks
were like roses, his nose like a cherry! His droll
little mouth was drawn up like a bow, And the
beard on his chin was as white as the snow; The
stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth, And
the smoke, it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly
That shook when he laughed, like a bowl full of
jelly.

He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of
myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his
work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a
jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a
whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a
thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of
sight—
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good
night!"