



American Corner

Universidad de Tarapacá

December 2006 Vol. 8



'Tis the Season...



Christmas is a joyful religious holiday when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The Christmas story comes from the Bible. An angel appeared to shepherds and told them that a Savior had been born to Mary and Joseph in a stable in Bethlehem. Three Wise Men from the East (the Magi) followed a wondrous star which led them to the baby Jesus to whom they paid homage and presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

To people all over the world, Christmas is a season of giving and receiving presents. In some European countries, Father Christmas, or Saint Nicholas, comes into houses in the night and leaves gifts for the children. Saint Nicholas is represented as a kindly man with a red cloak and long white beard. Another character, the Norse God Odin, rode on a magical flying horse across the sky in the winter to reward people with gifts. These different legends passed across the ages to make the present day Santa Claus.

Immigrant settlers brought Father Christmas to the United States. Father Christmas' name was gradually changed to Santa Claus, from the Dutch name for Father Christmas, which is Sinter Claas. Although he has origins in Norse and pre-Christian mythology, Santa Claus took shape in the United States. Americans gave Santa Claus a white beard, dressed him in a red suit and made him a cheery old gentleman with red cheeks and a twinkle in his eye.

Most children believe that Santa Claus lives at the North Pole. All year he lists the names of children, both those who have been good and

those who have been bad. He decides what presents to give to the good children. He oversees the manufacturing and wrapping of the presents by his helpers. Santa Claus supposedly gets his list of toys from the millions of children who write to him at the North Pole. Children also find Santa Claus at shopping malls across the country. They sit on his lap and tell him what they want for Christmas. Of course, their parents are probably nearby listening in as well.

On December 24, Christmas Eve, Santa hitches his eight reindeer to a sleigh and loads it with presents. The reindeer pull him and his sleigh through the sky to deliver presents to children all around the world, that is, if they had been good all year.

Several American towns maintain the spirit of Santa Claus. The New England state of Connecticut has a Christmas village where "Santa" and his elves give out gifts. In New York, a small town called the North Pole was designed for Santa Claus. There is a post office, a church and a blacksmith shop to repair the shoes of the reindeer.

Santa Claus exists only in our imaginations. But he, Saint Nicholas, and Father Christmas are spirits of giving. Christmas has been associated with gift giving since the Wise Men brought gifts to welcome the newborn Jesus Christ. In anticipation of Santa's visit, American children listen to their parents read "The Night Before Christmas" before they go to bed on Christmas Eve. Clement Moore wrote the poem in 1823.



'Twas the Night Before Christmas



'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 Mama in her 'kerchief, and I in my
cap,
had just settled our brains for a long
winter's nap.

When out on the roof 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 shutter, and threw up the
sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-
fallen snow
gave the lustre of midday to objects
below,
when, what to my wondering eyes should
appear,
but a miniature sleigh and eight tiny
reindeer.

With a little old driver, so lively and
quick,
I knew in a moment it 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, Donner and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch!
To the top of the wall!
Now dash away! Dash away!
Dash away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild
hurricane fly,
when they meet with an obstacle, mount
to the sky
so up to the house-top 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 peddler 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!"



Christmas Cards & Other Traditions



Another important custom of Christmas is to send and receive Christmas cards, which are meant to help express the sentiment of the season. Some are religious in nature; others are more secular.

Americans begin sending Christmas cards early in December to friends, acquaintances, and Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A. - Christmas Day (December 25) co-workers. The post office

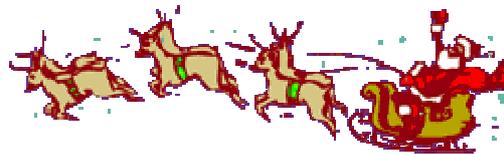
advises customers to mail early in the season and avoid the Christmas rush. Some people heed the advice; others wait until the last minute and then are upset when their loved ones have not received the greeting card or the present which they sent.

It seems that nearly every family has its own unique Christmas observances. Many people are

especially proud of Christmas traditions brought to the United States from their countries of origin. The wonderful diversity of foods, music and songs, prayers and stories all make Christmas the holiday of holidays in the United States. One custom in Texas and other parts of the American Southwest warmly welcomes Christmas visitors. People cut designs out of the sides of paper bags. Then they put enough sand in the bottom of the bag to hold a candle. They line their walkways with the bags, and light the candles after dark. Guests can easily find their friend's walkway and follow the candles up to the door. In San Antonio, these "luminaries" are placed all along the River Walk, a paved walkway alongside the San Antonio River, and an old custom called "Las Posadas" is acted out.

"Las Posadas" represents the journey that Mary and Joseph took from Nazareth to Jerusalem

on a winter night 2000 years ago. Mary was about to give birth to Jesus on their way to be counted in the census. The inns were full and the only place they could find to rest was a barn. Jesus was born there and was placed in a manger, or wooden bin for feeding animals. Two young people are chosen to play the roles of Mary and Joseph. They follow the luminaries up to a house and knock on the door. Joseph asks the owner if they can stay there for the night. The owner refuses to let them in, because the house is full. They knock at several more houses until finally someone lets them come in to stay the night. The house where the couple is invited was chosen before the celebration, and has a doll in a manger, representing Jesus. When the couple arrives at the house, they and the people who have followed sing Christmas carols and eat the food provided by the "innkeeper."



Seasons Greetings from the American Corner

From all of us in the American Corner to all of you, we would like to wish everyone Happy Holidays! We are very grateful for your interest and support. Good luck for the end of the school year and we are looking forward to seeing you again next year.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Mast, Graciela Rodriguez, and Loreley Parra

This Month in U.S. History

December 1, 1955 - The birth of the modern American civil rights movement occurred as Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her seat to a white man and move to the back section of a municipal bus.

December 2, 1954 - The U.S. Senate condemned Senator Joseph McCarthy for misconduct following his ruthless investigations of thousands of suspected Communists.

December 2, 1982 - The first permanent artificial heart was implanted in 61-year-old Barney C. Clark by Dr. William De Vries

December 5, 1933 - The 18th Amendment (the Prohibition Amendment) to the U.S. Constitution was repealed. For nearly 14 years, since January 29, 1920, it had outlawed the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages in the U.S.

December 5, 1955 - In Alabama, the Montgomery bus boycott began in response to the arrest of Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her seat on a municipal bus to a white man.

December 5, - George Armstrong Custer was born in New Rumley, Harrison County, Ohio. He graduated from West Point at the bottom of his class in 1861, then became a dashing cavalry in the Civil War and fought at Bull Run. He was appointed brigadier general and served gallantly at Gettysburg and in the Virginia campaigns. After the war, he took part in the western expedition against the Sioux Indians. In June of 1867, Custer and over 200 of his soldiers from the U.S. 7th Cavalry were killed by Sioux warriors at Little Bighorn in Montana.

December 5, 1901 - Walt Disney (1901-1966) was born in Chicago, Illinois. As a little boy, he liked to draw farm animals and eventually got a job as an artist. He moved to Hollywood and in 1928 produced *Steamboat Willie*, starring Mickey Mouse, in the first cartoon with synchronized sound. In 1937, he released his

full length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. He opened the Disneyland amusement park in Anaheim, California, in 1955. Five years after his death, Disney World opened in Florida. The company he founded has since grown into a global entertainment empire.

December 6, 1877 - At his laboratory in West Orange, New Jersey, Thomas Edison spoke the children's verse "Mary had a Little Lamb..." while demonstrating his newly invented phonograph which utilized a revolving cylinder wrapped in tinfoil to record sounds.

December 7, 1941 - The U.S. Naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was attacked by nearly 200 Japanese aircraft in a raid that lasted just over one hour and left nearly 3,000 dead.

December 8, 1980 - Former *Beatle* musician John Lennon was assassinated in New York City.

December 10, 1898 - The Treaty of Paris was signed between American and Spanish representatives following Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War. Under the treaty, the U.S. gained the Philippine Islands, the islands of Guam and Puerto Rico, and an agreement by Spain to withdraw from Cuba. The treaty passed by a single vote in the U.S. Senate on February 6, 1899, and was signed by President William McKinley four days later.

December 10, 1830 - Poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was born in Amherst, Mass. Her poetry became known only after her death when her sister discovered nearly 2,000 poems locked in her bureau, written on the backs of envelopes and scraps of paper. They were published gradually over the next 50 years, beginning in 1890.

December 13, 1835 - American clergyman and composer Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) was born in Boston, Mass. He wrote the lyrics for the Christmas Carol *O Little Town of Bethlehem*.

December 14, 1799 - George Washington died at Mount Vernon



December 15, 1890 - Sioux leader Sitting Bull (native name Tatanka-yatanka) was killed in a skirmish with U.S. soldiers along the Grand River in South Dakota as his warriors tried to prevent his arrest.

December 15, 1939 - *Gone with the Wind* had its world premiere in Atlanta, introduced by producer David O. Selznick and featuring appearances by Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable.

December 16, 1773 - The Boston Tea Party occurred as colonial activists disguised as Mohawk Indians boarded English ships anchored in the harbor and dumped 342 containers of tea into the water.

December 17, 1903 - After three years of experimentation, Orville and Wilbur Wright achieved the first powered, controlled airplane flights. They made four flights near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, the longest lasting about a minute.

December 17, 1760- Deborah Sampson (1760-1827) was born in Plympton, Mass. During the American Revolutionary War, she disguised herself as a man and enlisted in the Continental Army under the name Robert Shurtleff. Although she was wounded in battle, she was not discovered until a severe fever unmasked her identity. She was dismissed from the army in 1783. In later life, she lectured professionally on her wartime experiences.

December 18, 1865 - The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified abolishing slavery, stating, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, save as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

December 19, 1732 - Benjamin Franklin first published *Poor Richard's Almanac* containing weather predictions, humor, proverbs and epigrams, eventually selling nearly 10,000 copies per year.

December 20, 1868 - American industrialist Harvey S. Firestone (1868-1938) was born in Columbiana County, Ohio. He founded Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. and was a close friend of Henry Ford and Thomas Edison.

December 21, 1988 - Pan American Flight 103 exploded in midair as the result of a terrorist bomb and crashed into Lockerbie, Scotland. All 259 passengers and crew members along with 11 persons on the ground were killed.

December 23, 1805 - Mormon prophet Joseph Smith (1805-1844) was born in Sharon, Vermont. He founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

December 24, 1905- Howard Hughes (1905-1976) was born in Houston, Texas. He was a movie producer, aviator and industrialist whose legendary desire for privacy generated many rumors and much curiosity. Perhaps best remembered for designing an eight-engine flying boat, nicknamed the *Spruce Goose*, which was to carry 750 passengers, although it only made one brief test flight.

December 25 - Christmas Day, commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Although the exact date of his birth is not known, it has been celebrated on December 25 by the Western (Roman Catholic) Church since 336 A.D.

December 25, 1821- American nurse and philanthropist Clara Barton (1821-1912) was born in Oxford, Mass. She served as a nurse during the Civil War and in 1881 founded the American Red Cross.

December 25, 1899- Film actor Humphrey Bogart (1899-1957) was born in New York City. Best known for *The African Queen*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Casablanca* and *To Have and Have Not*.

December 30, 1903 - In Chicago, a fire inside the Iroquois Theater killed 588 persons, eventually resulting in new fire safety codes for theaters.



Important Dates to Remember

December 1 - AIDS Day

December 2 - International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

December 5 - International Volunteer Day

December 10 - Human Rights Day

December 24 - Christmas Eve

December 25 - Christmas Day

Current American Corner Activities

Conversation Hour - Wednesday (16:30 - 17:30) & Thursday (11:20 - 12:20) in the American Corner.

Fun & Games in English - Monday to Friday (10:00-10:30 & 16:30-17:00) in the Rincón Infantil.

Reforzar Inglés w/ Funcionarios de la Biblioteca - Friday (11:00 - 12:00) in the Sala de Conferencias

American Corner Hours

Monday through Friday

10:00 - 13:00

and

15:00 - 18:00

Contact US!!

Email: americancorner@uta.cl

Telephone: 205929

Or Come See Us on the Second of El Anexo del Biblioteca, Campus Saucache.

Sources

Christmas

- usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/symbols/celebrat.pdf

'Twas the Night Before Christmas & Graphics

- blackdog.net/holiday/christmas/twas.html

This Month in U.S. History

- www.historyplace.com/specials/calendar/index.html