

SANTA: A poem fixed the image of Santa Claus in the popular imagination

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of bishops, priests, and deacons, there was no room for the real criminals—murderers, thieves and robbers. After his release, Nicholas attended the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. He died December 6, AD 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church, where a unique relic, called manna, formed in his grave. This liquid substance, said to have healing powers, fostered the growth of devotion to Nicholas. The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration, St. Nicholas Day, December 6th (December 19 on the Julian Calendar)."

The historical St. Nicholas became a figure of folklore as Christianity spread across Western Europe, picking up characteristics of pagan figures like Odin (long white beard, travel across the night sky, etc.)

A few hundred years ago, somebody in Holland ran the name St. Nicholas through Google Translator into Dutch and ended up with Sinterklass. Predictably, when anybody used Siri on their iPhone, "she" heard Sinterklass as "Santa Claus" and there you go.

That's the story, anyway.

Santa Claus has a close cousin in England called Father Christmas. Flamboyant dresser, that guy. Drinks a bit.

Santa Claus as we know him in America dates from 1822, when Clement Clarke

Moore, a professor at an Episcopal seminary in New York, wrote "A Visit From St. Nicholas," which we know better as "'Twas the Night Before Christmas."

The poem gave Santa his sleigh and reindeer and that elfish twinkle in the eye. He was, however a little fellow, with a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer. But, hey, this is America — bigger is better. Now he's, well, let's just say, "generously proportioned." Must be all the cookies...

Civil War-era cartoonist Thomas Nast put Santa at the North Pole in a workshop, building toys for nice children who were listed in a big book.

Santa's red and white uniform wasn't a fixed feature till the turn of the 20th century — before that he wore all kinds of different colors.

Today, we know a great deal about Santa Claus, yet there are still many unexplained aspects to the phenomenon. The exact location of his workshop has not been determined, nor are the physics of how he manages to deliver all those gifts internationally in one night (even using time zones and the International Date Line to stretch his hours), well understood by scientists.

Not to mention how he is able to appear in different places in the Sisters Country *at the same time*.

Some things are best left mysterious.

For more information on the origins of the iconic elf, visit www.unmuseum.org/santa.htm and www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/who-is-st-nicholas.

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