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www.holidaymarket.org or 541-686-8885

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Rudolph, a ball and Hong Kong

• New Year's ball

The original ball lowered in Times Square on New Year's Eve in 1907 was made of iron and wood, and it was decorated with 100 light bulbs. The modern New Year's ball is made of Waterford crystal, covered with 696 light bulbs, 96 strobe lights and 90 rotating pyramid mirrors.

• The popular poinsettia

Poinsettias were first introduced into this country in 1828 by the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Joel Poinsett. Poinsettias are now grown in all 50 states and represent over 85 percent of potted plant sales during the holidays. More than \$220 million worth of poinsettias are sold during the holiday season.

• A tree of lights

In 1949, the tree at Rockefeller Center was strung with 7,500 bulbs. This year, more than 25,000 bulbs will be strung on the tree — nearly 5 miles of lights.

• The tree tradition

The first American mention of a Christmas tree was in 1747, and it wasn't a tree at all — it was a wooden pyramid covered with evergreen boughs and decorated with apples. More than 34 to 36 million Christmas trees are now produced each year in the United States. The industry employs more than 100,000 people, and more than 1 million acres of land have been planted with Christmas trees.

• Artificial trees

Artificial Christmas trees were on the market by 1900. They were available by mail from Sears, Roebuck and Company, and cost 50 cents for 33 limbs or a dollar for 55 limbs. Most artificial trees are now manufactured in Korea, Taiwan, or Hong Kong and contain non-biodegradable plastics and metals. They usually range in price from \$200 to \$2,000.

• Holiday mail

The first Christmas card, created by a London businessman, was printed in England in 1843. Three years later, the first commercial Christmas cards were available to the public. One thousand cards in all were produced and they were an instant success. The holiday season is now the busiest time of the year for the U.S. Postal Service. Last year, more than 20 billion cards, letters and packages were sent, prompting the USPS to hire nearly 40,000 temporary workers and put thousands of additional trucks, trains and planes in service.

• The origins of Rudolph

In 1939, an advertising employee at the department store Montgomery Ward wrote the story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer for a store promotion. That year the store gave away 2.4 million copies of the story. Ten years later, Gene Autry recorded the song "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Since then it has sold more than 80 million copies.

SOURCE: <http://www.familyeducation.com>

Wrong message reigns during holiday months

This column, in part, is inspired by Emerald columnist Joe Bechard's tirade on the Thanksgiving holiday ("No thanks," ODE Nov. 26). Now that the cultural obstetrician is closing up shop (in

celebrated it, but where I'm from (in chronological order: New Hampshire, California and Oregon), it's never been about the birth of Christ. The most frequent question I hear repeated is, "What do you want for Christmas?"

Let's begin with Santa Claus. He seems to have been perverted into a symbol for an increasingly obvious form of American religion called "consumption." If he ever had any significance, it has long since departed. Actually, it's almost like 'ol Saint Nick has been replaced by a militaristic red-and-white uniformed overweight man delivering material goods to pacify the hearts, minds and bodies of the masses.

And what's the deal with Christmas trees? I suppose they fill some sort of need for warmth and nostalgia during these cold winter months. Far be it for me to attack people's attachments of meaning, but does it really make sense to have an industry where you grow fields of trees each year,



Aaron Shakra

Notebooks of DJ Serpentine

other words, graduating), I'd like to continue along his path of investigative consumption. I mean, journalism.

Christmas, I'll be honest — I don't really know what it is. I mean, I know when it is and that I've

Turn to **SHAKRA**, page 3C

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