

An old Spanish Legend: San Froilan of the Wilderness

Many years ago a pilgrim monk, Brother Froilan, came to live in the wilderness. With him he brought an old rug for protection against the elements, some packets of healing herbs and seeds for growing. Around his waist hung his crucifix, and a short-bladed Damascus sword.

His neighbors were the remnants of the Germanic tribes, all pagans, believing

in gods of wood, stone and sacrifice.

With one of the few gold pieces he had brought he purchased a small gray donkey, which became his companion and friend, as well as his beast of burden. This was his only friend among the hostile families nearby with whom he could not communicate by the spoken word.

Only the children treated him kindly. They loved to watch him sit by the fire, take his knife and carve some small animal which they knew — a goat, a calf, a sheep, even a wolf or fox, traditional enemies.

As the months went by, the older people began to trust him; they began to share language, and he read to them the story of Christmas and some of the teachings of Jesus from the breviary he carried at all times. Even in Latin the stories had a rhythm and cadence they could enjoy. But the monk knew that the tribesmen did not really identify with the meaning of his stories. The children seemed to be the only humans who warmed to his spirit.

Brother Froilan pondered how he could reach the minds and souls of the older folk. Out of a quiet mind he summoned what might be the answer: through the wooden figures he made — things these people could see, touch, feel.

The little animals he carved represented that first Christmas. Perhaps he could also carve angels, shepherds, kings from the East . . . perchance even the Holy Family! Then he could indeed bring a Christmas to his neighbors which they could truly take to their hearts.

Thus the monk began fashioning the other figures of the first Christmas, and he told the story to the children as he carved the figures. The children, de-



lighted, shared their joy with their elders.

After a while they too came to sit and watch the "strange" monk with his "strange" stories to tell.

Even in the rain they came. He was weaving the threads of truth.

The children made a small spread for the tiny Jesus figure. The older people brought offerings of food to the monk for his evening meal.

Brother Froilan was deeply grateful to the heavenly Father for showing him a way to these people's hearts . . . and perhaps to a better way of life, through Christmas.

Santa's White Beard, Red Suit Come from Cartoonist

Who gave Santa his red suit, broad girth, white beard, ruddy cheeks and nose, fur-trimmed hat and coat?

Surprisingly enough, the donor was a political cartoonist.

The artist's name was Thomas Nast, cartoonist for Harper's Illustrated Weekly, who also created the now-famous symbols of the Republican elephant and the Democratic donkey.

The figure of Santa that Nast drew in 1863, and perhaps earlier, has proved to be the definitive one, and even today the figure as drawn by Nast appears occasionally on Christmas greetings.

"Nast's image of Santa was extraordinary," says Mrs. Jeannette Lee, director of design at Hallmark.

"He gave Santa many of the qualities that have endeared him to children ever since, and we wouldn't dream of tampering very much with them today."

Nast first credited Santa with keeping books on good and bad children, having a Christmas toy workshop and reading letters sent to him by children.

Perhaps it was the now-famous poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," by Dr. Clement Clarke Moore, that inspired Nast's illustration of Santa. In this children's classic of 1823, the right jolly old elf, who looked like a peddler with a pack on his back, was first described in print.

Nast followed Dr. Moore's description of Santa in several particulars, but many of his concepts were original.

At the time of Nast's Santa Claus drawings the nation was at Civil War, and families were separated. In a note to cheer both soldiers and their waiting families Nast drew "Santa Claus in Camp," for Harper's Weekly. This earliest Santa was different from any artist's creations up till then. He was shown wearing stars and stripes of the Union and distributing gifts to soldiers. Actually, this Santa might have been meant as a representation of Uncle Sam also.

A later, equally moving Nast illustration featured a soldier's Christmas homecoming.

Born in 1840 in the tiny hamlet of Landau, Bavaria, Nast probably pictured Santa as the long-imagined Saint Nicholas of his childhood.

Albert Bigelow Paine, a friend and admirer of Nast, said the artist often revealed to him his love of the Santa illustrations. He later wrote in his biography of the cartoonist:

"His own childhood in far-off Bavaria has been measured by the yearly visits of . . . St. Nicholas . . . and the girlhood of the woman who was to become his wife (Sarah Edwards of New York) was intimately associated with brilliant and joyous celebrations.

"Nast's children later recalled there was always a multitude of paper dolls — marvelously big and elaborate, a race long since become extinct.

"And these the artistic father — more than half a child himself at the Christmas season — arranged in processions and cavalcades, gay pageants that marched

in and about those larger presents that could not be crowded into the row of stockings that hung by the family fireplace.

"It was a time of splendor and rejoicing — the festive blossoming of the winter season — and it was a beautiful and sturdy family that made Merry Christmas riot in the spacious New York home."

In Nast's day, the idea of some sort of Santa was not new to this country. He was introduced to North America by the early Dutch settlers and his name was St. Nicholas. The annual visit of this kind man, who was thought to have been a fourth-cen-



tury bishop, was his feast day, December 6th.

By 1809, Washington Irving was describing Santa as a small Dutch citizen who looked much like Father Knickerbocker. Irving wondered how the poor old man could get to all the homes in a growing America on his kind horse, so he invented the famous reindeer-drawn sleigh.



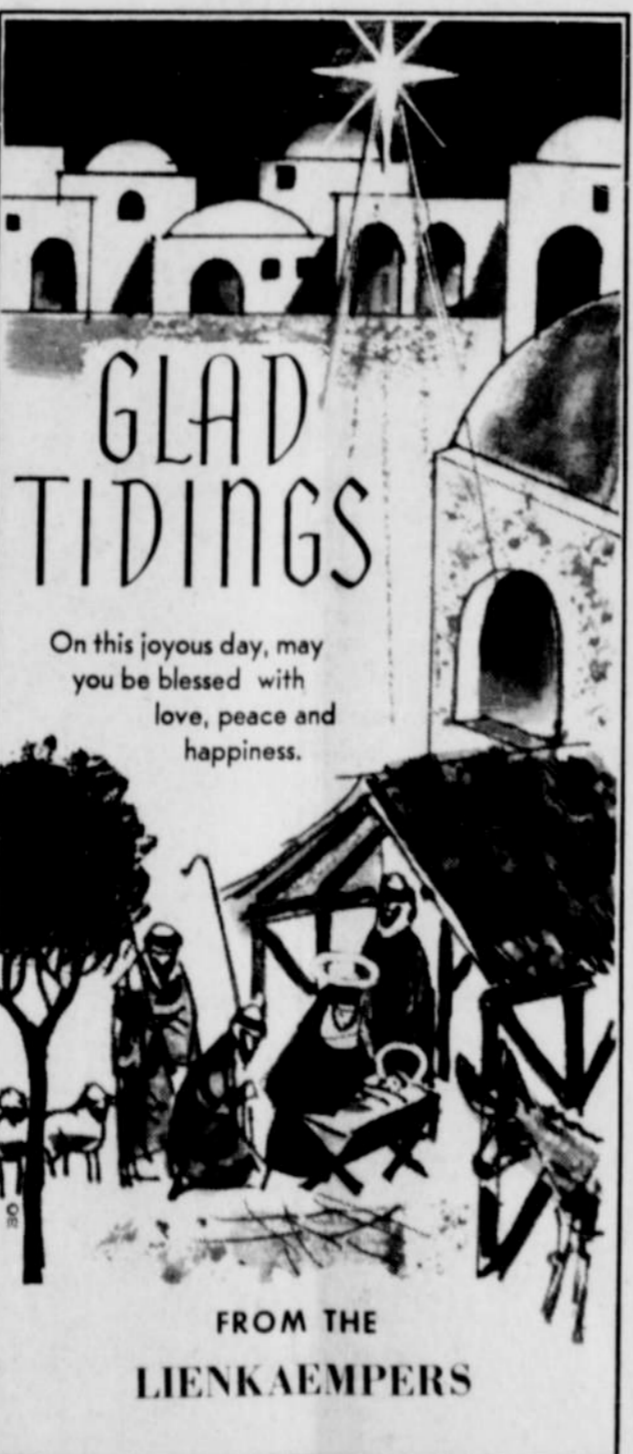
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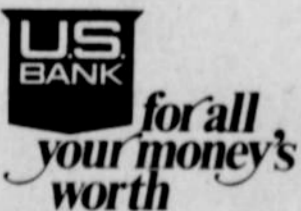


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