

Santa



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The Legend of Santa Claus

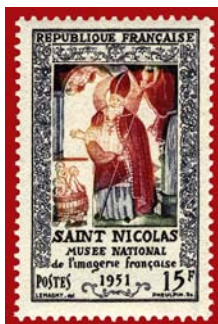
*Merry Christmas = Kala Christouyenna = Feliz Navidad = Shub Naya Baras = Glaedileg Jul =
Joyeux Noel = Buone Natale = Sung Tan Chuk Ha = Feliz Natal = Mele Kalilimaka =
Froehliche Weihnachten = Mitho Makosi Kesikansi = Nadolig Llawen*

The red-suited Santa Claus who brings gifts to children around the world in a single night is a familiar and beloved figure in the twenty-first century. However, his roots go deep into prehistory, when a charitable god brought the gift of sunlight back to a dark wintery world, particularly in the cold northern hemisphere where the tradition traces back to the Norse Yule gods. Gift giving at mid-winter is also a millennia-old custom. The Romans, perhaps, celebrated the most enthusiastically, enjoying the week-long Saturnalia in mid-December, the feast of lights (Natalis Invictis) on December 25 when the winter solstice sun is at its weakest, and finally the Kalends during the first three days in January when more gifts were exchanged.

The Christian tradition included the visit of the Magi — popularly known as the Three Wise Men or the Three Kings, although the Bible does not say how many there were — bringing gifts of gold (royalty), frankincense (divinity), and myrrh (bitter death and sorrow) to the Christ Child. Many European Christmas traditions include a visit by the Three Kings, who bring gifts to children. One interesting variation is the Italian legend of Befana, an old woman who was asked for directions by the Magi but who was too busy with her housecleaning to pause and go to visit the Christ Child. Now she visits all houses where there are children and leaves gifts.

The most immediate predecessor of Santa Claus, however, is St. Nicholas, a fourth century Christian Bishop of Myra (in present-day Turkey). Although the St. Nicholas of legend may himself be a combination of several historical figures, the stories of his kindness and acts of charity have become a vital part of the Christmas tradition.

The best known of the St. Nicholas stories laid the foundation for several modern Christmas traditions. According to broad legend (the details vary), out of charity he once threw several small bags of gold down the chimney (or through the window) of a house where three young girls were facing a life of prostitution since they couldn't be married without doweries. One bag landed in a stocking (or a shoe) hung by the fire to dry. Another well-known story connecting him with children is his discovery of three children, murdered and pickled in a barrel of brine by a greedy innkeeper. Nicholas miraculously restores them to life and punishes the evildoer. Over the centuries he continued to be associated with kindness to children. It also is easy to see the connection between his full episcopalian bishop's robes of red and white vestments and the white fur-trimmed red suit of the modern-day Santa Claus.



St. Nicholas • France,
Scott 657



First U.S. Christmas
Stamp • 1962 • Scott 1205

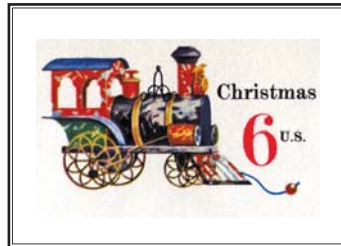
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UNITED STATES SANTA CLAUS AND SANTA-RELATED STAMPS, 1972–1982

Scott 1415–1418 • 1969 • Antique Christmas Toys



Tin and Cast-Iron Locomotive
Scott 1415



Toy Horse on Wheels
Scott 1416



Mechanical Tricycle
Scott 1417



Doll Carriage • Scott 1418



Santa Claus
1972 • Scott 1472



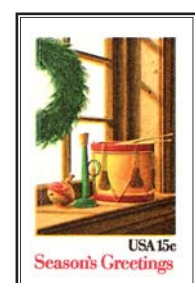
Christmas Tree in
Needlepoint • 1973
Scott 1508



Child on Hobby
Horse & Christmas
Tree • 1978
Scott 1769



Santa Claus
Ornament • 1979
Scott 1800



Wreath, Toys on
Windowsill • 1980
Scott 1843

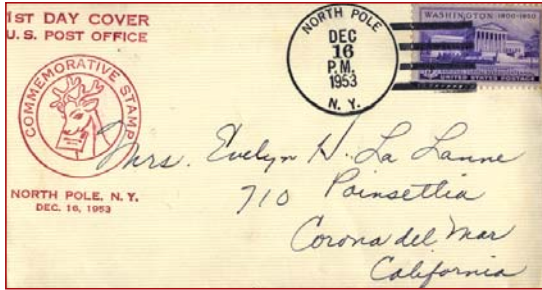


Felt Teddy Bear with Gift
on Sled • 1981 • Scott 1940



Children Decorating an Outdoor
Christmas Tree • 1982 • Scott 2030





Postmarked North Pole, New York, this first day cover sports a jaunty reindeer cachet.

St. Nicholas first appeared on a stamp in 1951 (France Scott 657), where he is shown in an eighteenth-century print by Jean-Charles Didier bringing the three murdered children back to life. Other early stamps with the saint's image include Liechtenstein Scott 267 and 433, Monaco Scott 161 and 268, and Turkey Scott 1191, which also shows the St. Nicholas Church at Myra.

St. Nicholas Day is celebrated December 6. On that day the saint arrives on his white horse to deliver gifts to good children and switches to punish bad children. Often he is accompanied by a dark figure known variously as Klaubauf, Krampus/Grampus, Bartel, Knecht Ruprecht, Zwarte Piet, or Pelznickel who carries out the punishments. A classic image of St. Nicholas on his horse can

be found in the Netherlands Holiday Folklore issue of 1961 (Scott B358). Among the first stamps to commemorate St. Nicholas Day are Austria Scott B261, and Luxembourg Scott B186 and B189.

However, it was in America with its melting pot of cultures, religions, customs, and languages that the modern Santa Claus evolved. Although Christmas itself did not become a national holiday in the United States until the 1890s, when it was finally approved by the last of the state legislatures, the celebration of this sacred and festive day was an important occasion in early settlements, where people were homesick for traditions and family left behind.

The exception was New England where the very concept of observing Christmas was so strongly disapproved of by the Puritans, who were attempting to cleanse church traditions, that celebrating the day was declared illegal and violators were subject to a fine. One of the early laws enacted by Puritans forbade local citizens, among other things, to "keep Christmas or saints days, make mince pie, play cards, or play on any instrument of music except the drum, trumpet and Jew's harp." The agricultural South, on the other hand, was more heavily settled by members of the Church of England and they celebrated well and heartily with feasting, visiting, music, and gift giving.



National Christmas Tree
1963 • Scott 1240

Nevertheless, by the 1800s Christmas celebrations were gradually becoming acceptable to even the strictest of the Protestant groups, and Sunday school pageants and presentations came to incorporate decorated trees, small gifts (especially candy), and secular recitations and songs. There were no Christmas carols in American-printed hymnals before 1830, but by the time of the Civil War some of the most popular of today's carols had been written and were being sung: "We Three Kings of Orient Are," "O Little

Town of Bethlehem," and "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear."

But it was in New York State that the Santa Claus we know today took his final shape and form. In 1809, writing under the pseudonym "Diedrich Knickerbock," Washington Irving published his fictional *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, in which he retooled the St. Nicholas legend. In his version children hung stockings for the saint to fill (in Europe they usually left shoes filled with hay and a carrot or two for his horse). He also described St. Nicholas flying through the air and leaving his white horse and wagon parked on the roof while he dropped gifts down the chimney. Irving also originated the image of St. Nicholas "laying a finger aside of his nose."

A few years later, in 1821, a small Christmas book titled *The Children's Friend: A New-Year's Present, to Little Ones Five to Twelve* included colored lithographs showing a sleigh pulled by a single reindeer and filled with presents for good children and switches for the naughty. The driver of the sleigh was a diminutive figure called "Sante



"Merry Christmas" cachet on a 1970 first day of issue Christmas stamps.



UNITED STATES SANTA CLAUS AND SANTA-RELATED STAMPS, 1983-1992



Santa Claus Holding Gift
1983 • Scott 2064



Santa Claus Holding His
Sack • 1984 • Scott 2108



Ornaments on a Tree
Branch • 1987 • Scott 2368



Sleigh Full of Wrapped
Gifts • 1989 • Scott 2428



Christmas Tree (garland
bands & "Greetings"
in blue green) • 1990
Scott 2515



Santa Claus in Chimney
1991 • Scott 2579



Santa Claus Checking
His List • 1991 • Scott 2582



Santa Claus with Present
1991 • Scott 2583



Santa Claus at Fireplace
1991 • Scott 2584



Santa Claus & Sleigh
1991 • Scott 2585

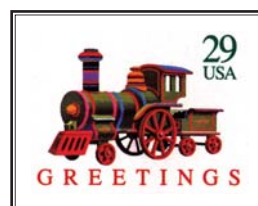
Victorian Christmas Toys • 1992 • Scott 2711-2714



Horse & Jockey • 2711



Fire Engine • 2712

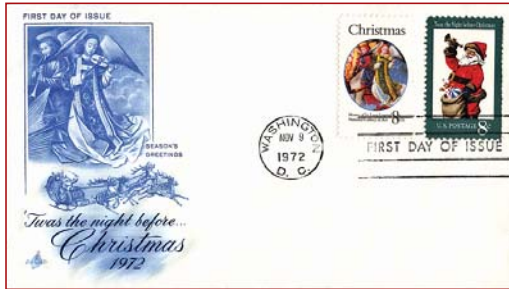


Locomotive • 2713



Riverboat • 2714





First day of issue cover for the first U.S. Santa stamp; “Twas the night before Christmas 1972.”

Claus,” a name that appears to have been derived from a combination of “Sanct Herr Nicholaas” and the colloquial Dutch “Sinterklaas.” In the book, “Sante Claus” delivered his gifts, not on St. Nicholas Eve but on Christmas Eve.

In 1922 the Rev. Clement C. Moore wrote a light-hearted Christmas poem for his children, a copy of which a family friend, without authorization, offered for publication in the local paper. It appeared anonymously in the *Troy Sentinel*, December 23, the following year. (Moore finally acknowledged his authorship in 1837, but the poem was not printed under his name until 1844.). “A Visit from Saint Nicholas” (or “The Night Before Christmas,” as it became known in the twentieth century) put a stamp on the creation of Santa Claus that cannot be

erased. He added more reindeer, for a total of eight, and gave them all names: “Now, *Dasher!* now, *Dancer!* Now, *Prancer* and *Vixen!* On, *Comet!* on *Cupid!* on *Donder* and *Blitzen!*” Moore’s description of a very secular Saint Nicholas is reported to have been based on the jovial Jan Duyckinck, caretaker of the Moore’s New York home: “He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf.”

Another element to the story was added in the 1840s. A German tradition that was particularly popular in Pennsylvania held variously that the Christ Child, or an angelic child spirit representing Him, visited homes on Christmas Eve with gifts for children, humbly traveling by mule or donkey. The Christkindel or Krist-Kringle morphed into the secular Kriss Kringle who appeared in two children’s books, *Kriss Kringle’s Book* (published by Thomas Cowperwaite & Co. in 1842) and *Kriss Kringle’s Christmas Tree: A Holiday Present for Boys and Girls* (published by E. Ferret & Co. in 1845) — both publishers were located in Philadelphia where the Pennsylvania German traditions were very strong. In *Kriss Kringle’s Christmas Tree*, for the first time the presents are hung on the tree rather than tucked into shoes or stockings. This became an extremely popular method of displaying small gifts, particularly before they were distributed in schools and churches.

The American holiday classic took on even stronger visual form with the publication of political cartoonist Thomas Nast’s 1863 drawings of Santa Claus in *Harper’s Weekly*, based on the descriptions found in Clement Moore’s poem and Washington Irving’s earlier work. Nast continued to draw Santa Claus for publication until 1886 and his work had a profound influence on the image we see in our mind’s eye today. The final touches were added by commercial artist Haddon Sundbloom who in 1931 began a thirty-five year career illustrating a jolly Santa Claus enjoying a Coca Cola beverage at Christmas time.

A final element was added in 1939 by an advertising writer for Montgomery Ward Company. Robert L. May was asked to come up with a Christmas story the store could give away as a small booklet for children. Thus was the story of the ninth reindeer, Rudolph, born. *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* was published commercially in 1947 and shown in theaters as a short cartoon the following year. May’s brother-in-law, songwriter Johnny Marks, worked up a short, catchy song that was recorded by Gene Autry in 1949 and went on to become one of the best-selling American songs of all time.

By the 1950s the American version of Santa Claus was familiar around the world. It was not the United States, however, that was the first to honor this iconic Christmas symbol with a postage stamp. Cuba issued the first stamp celebrating Santa Claus (Scott 532–533) in 1954. Released in two values (2 centavos and 4 centavos), the stamp showed Santa’s face with the words “Navidad 1954–55” across the lower portion of his full beard.

The U.S. Post Office Department did not get around to issuing a Santa Claus stamp until 1972 (Scott 1472), and he has remained an irregular visitor to the annual Christmas issue ever since. Some of the other images associated with his



“Season’s Greetings Christmas 1973” cachet echoes the needlepoint tree on the Christmas stamp.

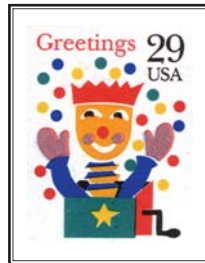


UNITED STATES SANTA CLAUS AND SANTA-RELATED STAMPS, 1993–1995

Christmas Issue • 1993 • Scott 2790–2794



Snowman • 2790



Jack-in-the-Box Toy
2791



Red-Nosed Reindeer
2792



Toy Soldier
Marching • 2794



Stocking Filled
with Toys • 1994
Scott 2872 •



Santa Claus
Holding Gift • 1994
Scott 2873

Victorian Christmas Images • 1995 • Scott 3004–3007



Santa Claus
Entering Chimney
3004



Child Holding
Jumping Jack Toy
3005



Child Holding
Small Tree
3006



Santa Claus
Working on Child's
Sled • 3007



story (children, toys, a decorated tree with gifts, reindeer, etc.) have appeared as well. A collection of Santa Claus-related stamps makes a colorful display and is a pleasure for the child in all of us to assemble.

Although there are a number of towns in the United States with a name reflecting the Christmas season, perhaps the earliest is the town of Santa Claus, Indiana, which was so-named by Swiss colonists in 1852. The story goes that as the settlers sat in church contemplating names for their new community, children began shouting “Santa Claus” and name stuck.

Postmarks from these various communities make popular collectibles and the local post offices receive sacks of holiday mail from around the country, forwarded to be postmarked “North Pole, New York,” “Noel, Missouri,” “Bethlehem, Pennsylvania,” “Christmas, Michigan,” “Christmas, Florida,” “North Pole, New York,” “North Pole, Alaska, or “North Pole Branch, U.S. Post Office.”

First Day covers with Christmas cachets can form an attractive auxiliary part of a Santa stamp collection. Enthusiasts also look for first day covers with Christmas seals featuring Santa Claus. There are endless possibilities in creating a Santa Claus-related exhibit. This album is just the beginning.

Resources in the American Philatelic Research Library:

- Berry, Kathleen M. (compiler). *6 More Years of Christmas Stamps* (Tucson, AZ: Collectors of Religion on Stamps, 1978).
Blair, Arthur. *Christmas Cards for the Collector* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1986).
Foster, Everleigh. *Christmas Stamps of the World* ([Pennsylvania]: American Topical Association, 1991). ATA Handbook 120.
Reed, Robert M. *Christmas Postcards* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2007).
Sager, Waller A. *Putting Christmas in Your Stamp Album, Including 1962–63 Supplement* ([Pennsylvania]: Reprint from *The American Philatelist*, Journal of the American Philatelic Society, 1963).
Sager, Waller A., and Kathleen M. Berry (compilers). *75 Years of Christmas Stamps; A Checklist with Supplementary Notes* (Minneapolis, MN: Collectors of Religion on Stamps, 1972).

American Philatelic Society Affiliates:

- Christmas Philatelic Club; www.hwcn.org/link/cpc/; see their “Christmas Stamps 1991–2007” PDF for an updated list of worldwide Christmas stamps.
Christmas Seal & Charity Stamp Society; www.xmassealsociety.noadsfree.com.



First Day Cover for 1987 Christmas Seals.



UNITED STATES SANTA CLAUS AND SANTA-RELATED STAMPS, 1996–2003

Family at Christmas • 1996 • 3108–3112



Family at Fireplace
with Wreath and
Candles • 3108



Family Decorating
a Tree • 3109



Children Dreaming
of Santa Claus
3110



Mother and Child
Holiday Shopping
3111



Father and Child
Skating • 3112

19th Century Chromolithographs • 2001 • Scott 3541–3544



Santa Holding
Holly, Rocking
Horse • 3541



Santa Dressed
in Blue • 3542



Santa in Dark
Fur-Trimmed Robe
3543



Santa with Holly
Wreath on His Head
3544

2003 • Scott 3821–3824 • Christmas Issue, 37-cent



Reindeer with
Pan Pipe • 3821



Santa Claus
with Drum • 3822



Santa Claus with
Trumpet • 3823



Reindeer with
Horn • 3824



UNITED STATES SANTA CLAUS AND SANTA-RELATED STAMPS, 2004-2007

Santa Ornaments • 2004 • Scott 3883-3886



Purple Santa • 3883



Green Santa • 3884



Blue Santa • 3885



Red Santa • 3886

Christmas Cookies • 2005 • Scott 3949-3952



Santa Claus • 3949



Snowmen • 3950



Angel • 3951



Elves • 3952

Christmas Issue 2007 • Scott 4207-42010 •



Knit Reindeer
4207



Knit Christmas
Tree • 4208



Knit Snowman
4209

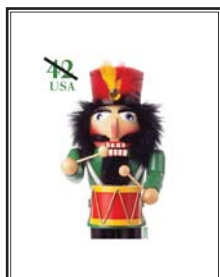


Knit Teddy Bear
4210



UNITED STATES SANTA CLAUS AND SANTA-RELATED STAMPS, 2008–2009

Nutcrackers • 2008 • Scott 4360–4363



Drummer • 4360



Santa Claus • 4361



King • 4362



Soldier • 4363

Gift Wrap Images • 2009 • Scott No. 4429–4431



Reindeer • 4429



Toy Soldier • 4432



Snowman • 4430



Gingerbread Man
Cookie • 4431



The Travels of Santa

There are many ways to enhance a thematic collection of Santa stamps: cachets, postmarks, postmarks, and stamps featuring toys, Christmas trees, stockings, reindeer, etc. But perhaps the most entertaining specialized collection that can be put together is one that shows how Santa Claus travels on Christmas Eve. Because the legend of Santa Claus is a compilation — a distillation, really — of many traditions, he can be found employing every imaginable form of transportation to make his rounds. In the tradition of St. Nicholas, he might ride a white horse (Canada Scott 1340); in the tradition of the Christkindel, he might ride a donkey (Anguilla Scott 1131). He might travel by a horse-drawn sleigh in the snow-covered north (Canada Scott 520), or by a wagon or cart in more temperate climes (Trinidad da Cunha 365). Island children might be visited by Santa in a speed boat (Cayman Islands Scott 841) or an outrigger canoe (Marshall Islands Scott 199).

Some of the most enchanting and creative stamps to be found are those drawn by children. Perhaps because of the close connection between children and Santa Claus, the postal services of many countries have used children's art as the basis for their Christmas stamps. In a child's eyes the magic of Christmas is without bounds: Santa might fly through the air on the back of a dove (Portugal Scott 1715) or travels in a flying saucer (Chile Scott 937); he might even appear riding on the back of a giant tortoise (Seychelles Scott 292). And of course, there is the traditional arrival on the rooftop by flying sleigh (Isle of Man Scott 726). One particularly lovely blue and white stamp from Finland (Scott 685) shows Santa driving his sleigh through a starry (or perhaps a snowy) night sky.

Of course, not all Santa stamps are created by children. The ubiquitous Disney stamps show Santa arriving by parachute (Gambia Scott 936) and by train (St. Vincent Scott 1128), in addition to the traditional sleigh and reindeer (Marshall Islands Scott 195). Other stamps show Santa on skis (Canada Scott 1628) or in a fire truck (Norfolk Island 422). When the automobile was a new and exciting invention, Santa Claus began delivering gifts by car (Chile Scott 1488b). One early picture postcard shows him parking an early jalopy, instead of a sleigh, on a snow-covered rooftop.

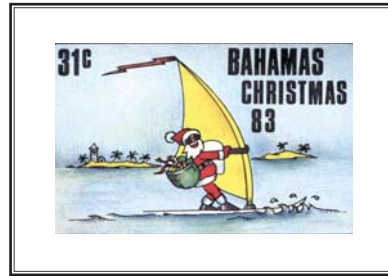
What follows is just the barest sampling of the variety of stamps showing the travels of Santa Claus around the world.



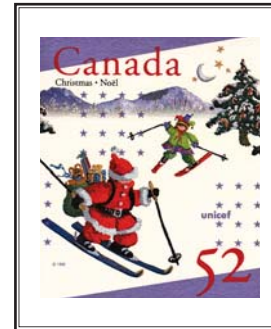
THE TRAVELS OF SANTA



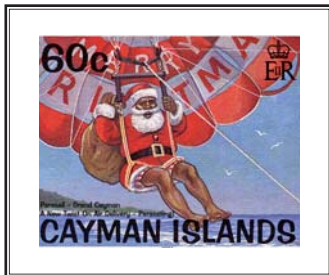
Australia
Santa on Surfboard
1977 • Scott 669



Bahamas • Children's art: "Santa Goes a-Sailing," by Sabrina Seiler
1983 • Scott 550



Canada • Santa on Skis
1996 • Scott 1628



Cayman Islands • Santa Arriving by Parasail • 2001 • Scott 842

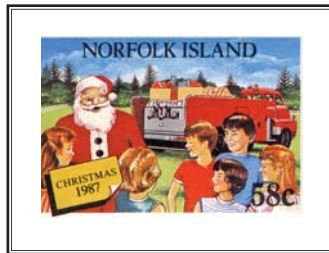


Christmas Island • Santa in Speedboat • 1986 • Scott 189

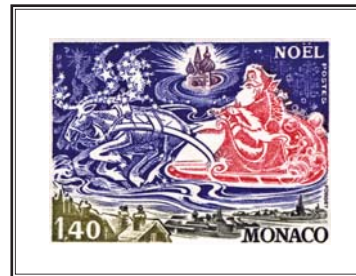


Portugal • Children's art: "Santa Flying on a Dove" • 1987
Scott 1715

Norfolk Island
Santa Distributing Presents by Fire Truck
1987 • Scott 422



Monaco • Santa in His Sleigh
1977 • Scott 1082



Marshall Islands • Se-tenant Strip Showing Santa Flying Over the Islands • 1998 • Scott 195-199



SANTA CLAUS AND SANTA-RELATED STAMPS



SANTA CLAUS AND SANTA-RELATED STAMPS





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