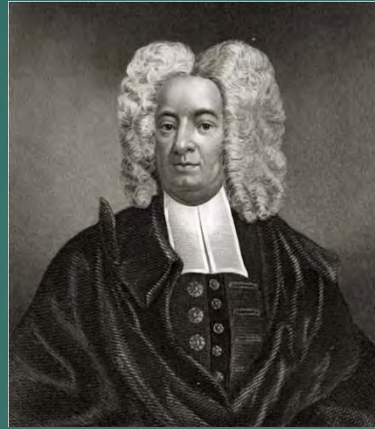


The Civil War and Christmas



Christmas in Pre-Civil War America – Colonial Times



In much of Puritan New England Christmas is shunned because of its association with the Church of England and Catholicism.

From 1659 to 1681 Christmas celebrations are banned in Boston.

On the other hand, in other American colonies such as Jamestown Christmas is joyfully celebrated.

Christmas in the Revolutionary War



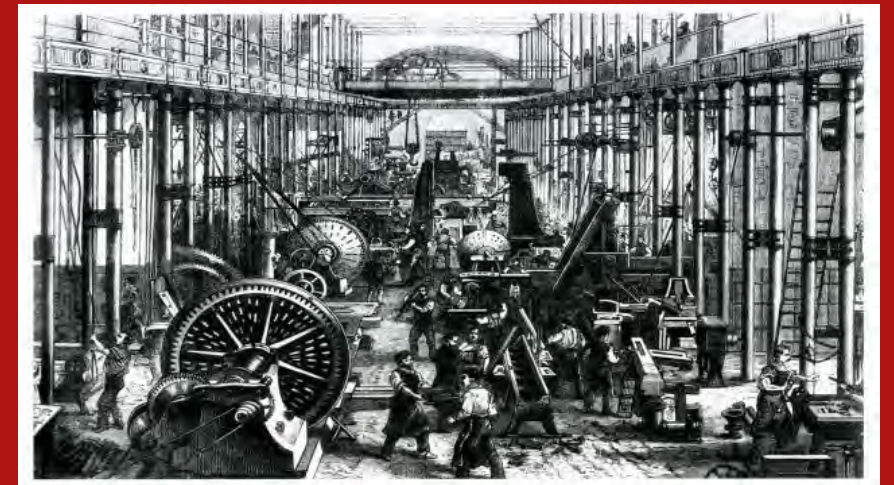
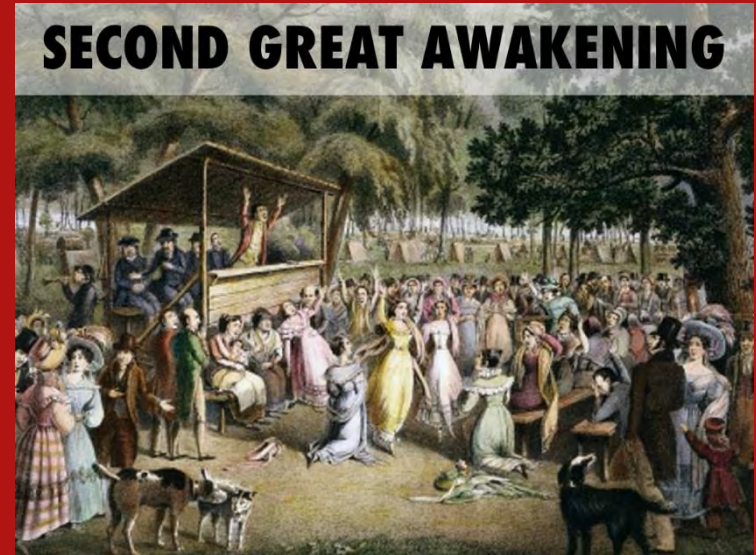
During the Revolution there are still differences among the colonies in how to observe Christmas, but overall it is still not considered a major holiday – some even see it as connected to British rule.

General Washington uses the night of December 25 to launch an attack on the Hessian Barracks at Trenton, New Jersey.

Two Early 19th Century Forces Shaping Christmas

The Second Great Awakening – a religious revivalist movement sweeping much of America starting from the early 1800s.

The Industrial Revolution which is also beginning to hit its stride during this time period – especially in the North.

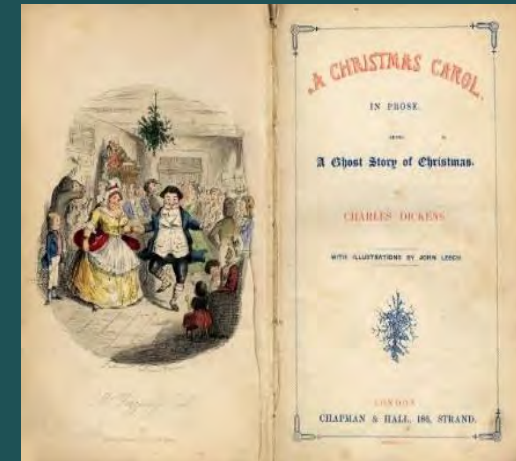
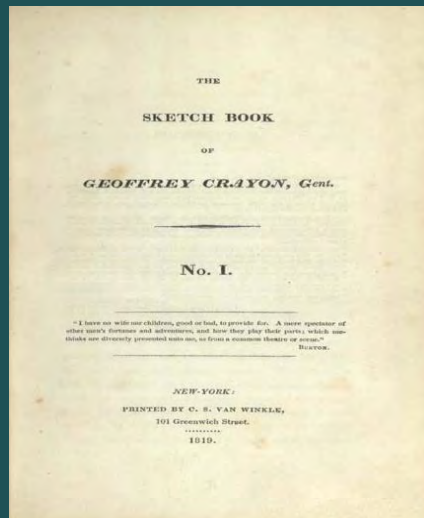


The Early 1800s – Modern Christmas Begins to Emerge

In 1819 Washington Irving writes a series of essays called “The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.” which outlined how Christmas should be celebrated in a proper home.

In 1822 Reverend Clement Clarke Moore publishes the poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” better known as “Twas the Night Before Christmas” – which helps to establish the spirit of gift-giving, family and goodwill of the holiday as well as some characteristics of Santa and his reindeer.

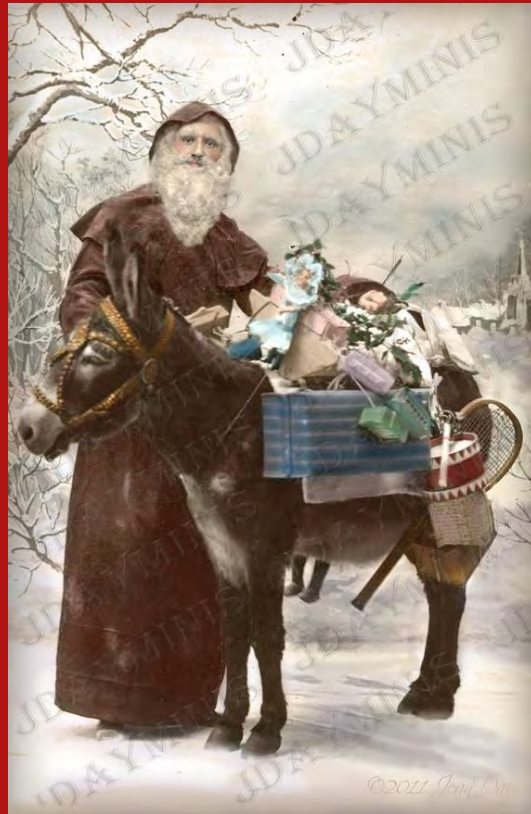
Charles Dickens publishes “A Christmas Carol” on December 19, 1843 which further propels the significance of Christmas in Victorian England and America and institutionalizes many of the traditions associated with it today.



Lots of Influences from the Old World



Father Christmas -
England



Pere Noel - France



Sinterklaas -
Holland and Belgium



St. Nicholas &
Krampus - Germany
& Central Europe

German Influence From Within – the Role of German Immigrants

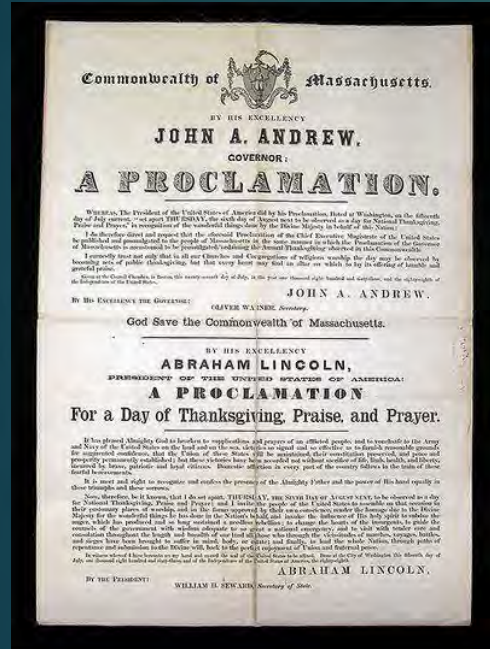


From 1840 to 1860 there is an explosion of German immigrants into the US.

From 1840 to 1860 nearly 1.4 million Germans come to the US.

They brought their deeply rooted Christmas traditions – including Christmas trees, the first modern images of Santa (based on St. Nicholas), the gathering of families and the exchange of gifts (reportedly originated by Martin Luther).

By 1861 there is a Growing Foundation of Support for Christmas



By 1861 29 out of the 34 states had made Christmas a legal holiday.

Perhaps a symbol of a unified nation?

For Four Million Americans Another Christmas Reality

In truth the same divisions that the issue of slavery causes throughout pre-War America affect Christmas as well – particularly among African Americans held in slavery.

Southern newspapers run ads for Christmas items along side ads for enslaved people (including women and children).

The end of the year is a prime time for enslaved families to be torn apart because of the end of leasing contracts for slaves or to make payments for unpaid taxes.

Some slaveholders “treat” their enslaved workers to time off, provide presents or extra food, but former slaves like Frederick Douglas note that these measures are but “safety valves, to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity.”

TO BE SOLD & LET
BY PUBLIC AUCTION,
On **MONDAY the 18th of MAY, 1829,**
UNDER THE TRUSS,
FOR SALE,
THE THREE FOLLOWING
SLAVES,
VIZ.
JANNIBAL, about 80 Years old, an excellent House Servant, of Good Character.
WILLIAM, about 82 Years old, a Laborer.
NANCY, an excellent House Servant and Nurse.
The Bids to be taken at "ELEVEN O'CLOCK" and the WOMAN to be sold at 12 O'CLOCK.

TO BE LET,
On the usual conditions of the ~~day~~ calling them in Feed, Clo' & Coal, Medical
--- THE NEGROES ---
MALE and FEMALE
SLAVES,
VIZ. ROBERT B. LEWIS, about 20 Years old, a good House Servant.
WILLIAM B. GIBNEY, about 21 Years old, a Laborer.
JOHN ALLEN, about 22 Years old, a Laborer.
JACKSON, about 23 Years old, a Laborer.
THOMAS, an excellent House Servant.
HENRY, about 24 Years old, a good House Servant.
MARY, a young woman of good Character, used in House Work and the Nursery.
ELIZABETH, an excellent Washwoman.
CLARA, an excellent Washwoman.
TINNY, about 14 Years old, House Servant.
KATELYN, about 21 Years old, House Servant.

Also for Sale, at Eleven o'Clock,
Fine Rice, Gram, Paddy, Books, Muslins,
Needles, Pins, Ribbons &c. &c.
AT ONE O'CLOCK, THREE CULBRED ENGLISH HORSES
BLUCHER,



The War Begins – the Weaponization of Christmas

The pro-Secessionist Atlanta Chronicle declares the North to be Christmas-haters, and that the South is a “Confederacy of Christmas States.”

The Pro-Union Philadelphia Inquirer calls Christmas a “good old Yankee custom” and says that Confederates are playing the part of Scrooge, and that only the Marley’s ghost of their old patriotism can lead them back to salvation and the Union.



The Propagandist Extraordinaire – Thomas Nast

German-American immigrant.

War correspondent/sketch artist & cartoonist for
Harper's Weekly.

Staunchly pro-abolition, pro-Union and
Republican.



Nast Begins to Shape the Modern Santa

Nast will take the lead in amalgamating different cultures' images of Christmas figures to create and popularize the modern image of the Santa Claus and other aspects of Christmas.

He contributed 33 Christmas drawings to *Harper's Weekly* from 1863 through 1886, and Santa is seen or referenced in all but one.

At the behest of President Lincoln Nast creates his first Santa – solidly pro-Union and surrounded by joyous Union Army soldiers.





THE CHRISTMAS TREE OF THE FEDERAL ARMY

The War Intensifies Attitudes Towards Christmas

For the first time millions of families are separated from loved ones.

Millions of lives shattered by death and dismemberment.

As the War drags on, Christmas time becomes more poignant for soldiers in the field and the families left behind.



The Growing Disparity of the War's Impact on Christmas between the Union and the Confederacy

-- The Union Flourishes

The ever-growing industrial and economic might of the Union allows for the material celebration of Christmas to expand in civilian life and on the front lines.

Union troops are increasingly provided with extra-rations, gift parcels and other holiday comforts as the War goes on.



For the South Increasing Deprivation on the Battlefield and on the Homefront

The War's strain on the Confederacy's far-smaller economy and the Union naval blockade increasingly hamstrings the South's ability to celebrate the holiday.

Many Southern children are told that Santa was a Yankee or that Santa had been shot by Yankees and therefore would not come to leave them presents.



Lincoln Promotes Christmas and Thanksgiving to Advance the Union Cause

To highlight the spiritual/religious underpinning's of the Union cause.

To fortify and lift the moral of the Union.

To showcase the affluence and power of the Union to the Confederacy and other nations.

To entice the Confederates back-into-the-fold by appealing to common cultural themes.



The Greatest “Christmas Present” of the War – General Sherman’s Capture of Savannah

General Sherman’s forces capture the port city of Savannah on December 21, 1864.

Marks the culmination of his devastatingly successful “March to the Sea.”

Many consider the fall of Savannah to mark the death knell of the Confederacy.

Gen. Sherman telegraphs Lincoln: “I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the city of Savannah with 150 heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, also about 25,000 bales of cotton.”

Lincoln’s response begins, “Many, many thanks for your Christmas-gift — the capture of Savannah...”



The War's End – A Christmas of Unity and Goodwill for All



Unifying the Nation -- Christmas becomes a National Holiday

On June 28, 1870 once Union General, now President, Grant signs into law a bill declaring Christmas, the 4th of July and New Years Day and another day as national holidays.

Although considered by many to be of religious significance, much of the impetus is to create a Christmas holiday for all Americans to share.



Nast's Enduring Legacy

For his part Nast continuously transforms the image and myth of Santa into the universally-loved figure we know today.



Nast's 1880's Santa



Coca Cola's 1930's Santa

Santa and Christmas Remain Continuing Symbols of American Patriotism and Goodwill



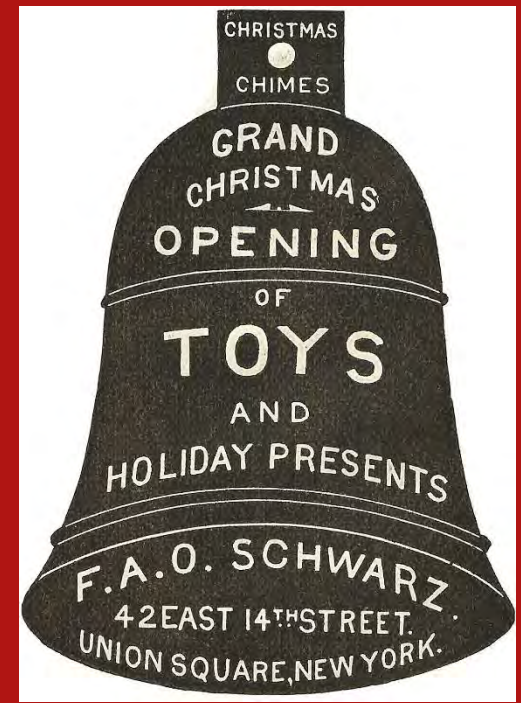


SANTA IS ON THE RADAR SCREEN

The US and Canadian North American Aerospace Defense Command has been tracking Santa's flights since 1955.

Major Ways in Which the Civil War Helped Produce the Christmas of Today

- It unified the observance of the holiday by transforming it into a national holiday.
- It took many of the aspects of Christmas that came from different cultures and blended them into a uniquely American form of Christmas – both in terms of customs and images.
- It helped develop a Christmas that balances the celebration of the spiritual and material.
- It promoted a Christmas with an all-inclusive character.
- And it established America as the arbiter of all things Christmas for much of the world.

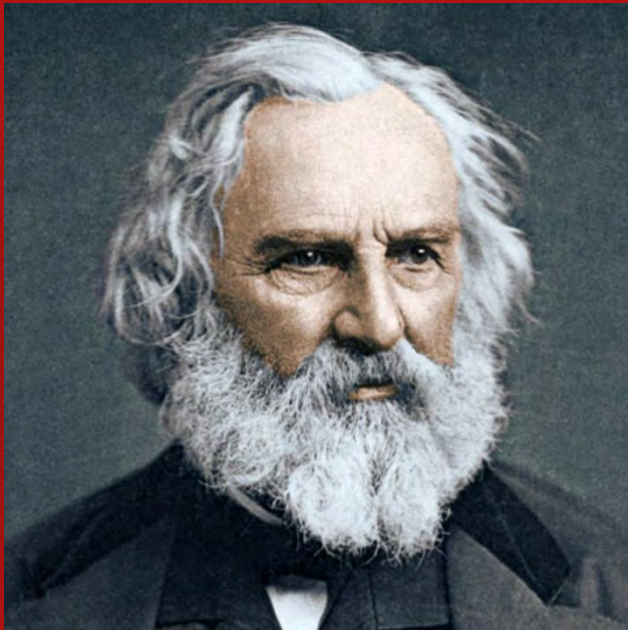


Postscript – But was there one crucial aspect of Santa that Nast left out?





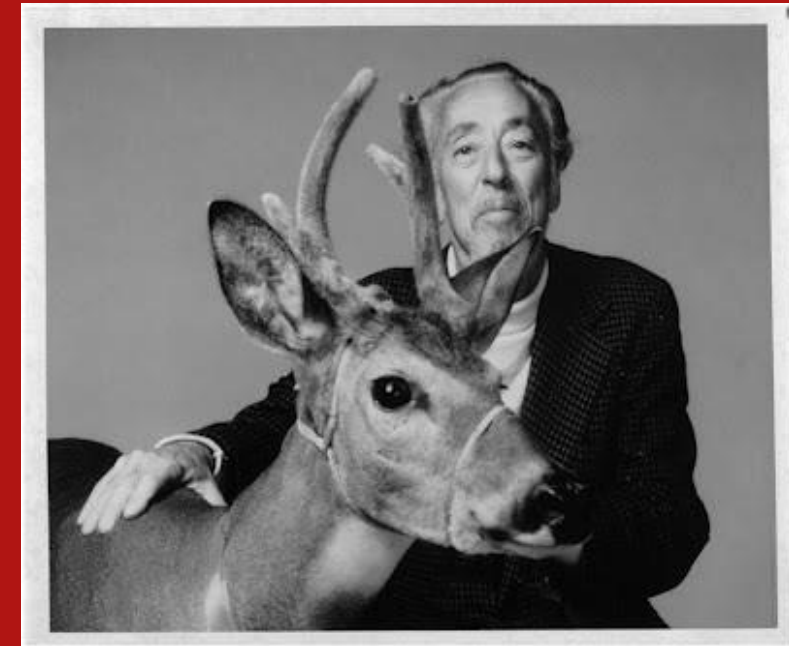
Continuing Links to the Civil War



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Charles Longfellow



Johnny Marks

Sources:

“Disunion – The Civil War,” The NY Times Press

“Christmas in America: A History,” by Penne Restad, Oxford University Press

“Christmas During the Civil War,” The American Battlefield Trust website

“How the American Civil War Cemented Modern Christmas Traditions,” The Conversation website

“Christmas in the Civil War,” HISTORYNET website

“The History of Christmas in America,” The Voice of America

“The History of Christmas,” The History Channel

“The War on Christmas Predates Trump, SNL and Fox News by 400 Years,” The Washington Post, December 18, 2017

Contact –

Brad Stone

stonepigs@gmail.com