

Odd facts about "The Night Before Christmas"



THE man who wrote the most celebrated of all Christmas poems wasn't proud of it.

Clement Clarke Moore, Ph.D., did not care to have his name identified with the jingles that were, in spite of his wishes, to make him immortal.

His "A Visit to St. Nicholas," better known as "The Night Before Christmas," was not published under his name for more than 20 years after he composed it, on the spur of the moment, on Christmas Eve, 1822.

A graduate of a divinity school who was never ordained, Dr. Moore was then professor of Greek and Oriental Literature in the (Episcopal) General Theological Seminary and the author of the first Hebrew-English lexicon.

He lived in a colonial mansion on a steep

just west of 9th avenue, between 22nd and 23rd streets, Manhattan. The name of the estate, Chelsea, is still borne by that whole district of New York.

The professor's wife, Catharine Taylor Moore, was making up baskets for the poor of Trinity Parish that Christmas Eve when she discovered she didn't have enough turkeys. She coaxed the professor from his library and sent him to the store to get more.

The streets through which he passed had real Christmas Eve dress—snow and moonlight. The cheeriness of the crowds in the streets and everything warmed up the usually aloof 43-year-old scholar. As he walked in the street he suddenly had the vision of Christmas as all children see it, and a poem about it formed in his mind.

When he reached home, he wrote down the lines and he read them that evening to his seven children.

He had no thought of publishing the jingles, or indeed, of the poem ever going beyond his family hearthside. But it so happened that a young relative, Sarah Harriet Butler, visiting the Moores that Christmas, delightedly put a copy in her diary, and read it to her father, the Rev. David Butler, when she returned to her home in Troy, N. Y.

The minister sent it next year to a newspaper, where it appeared among the miscellany, Dec. 23, 1823. The author's name was not given. Other newspapers printed the jingles. They

were placed on Christmas giveaways of merchants. They quickly became known all over the country, to the embarrassment of Dr. Moore, who feared to have it known he was the author. He considered it undignified for a man of his scholastic standing, to be the author of children's jingles. Also, at that time, Christmas merriment of any kind was frowned upon by religious sects; and the professor had to be mindful of his position in the church.

Twenty-two years later, when he had finally acknowledged authorship publicly, and "A Visit to St. Nicholas" was brought out in book form under his name for the first time, the jingles had become a classic in the public domain, and he could not reap royalties from all the publications.

Ironically, the professor's serious works are forgotten today. He is mentioned in encyclopedias because he wrote the celebrated Christmas verses.

Numerous direct descendants of Dr. Moore survive today; several are in New York's Social Register. None live in Chelsea now, but Chelsea still has a link with the author: there is an annual Clement Clarke Moore Memorial Service at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, which he founded, endowed and served for years as warden and organist. His residence no longer stands, but the childhood home where he himself hung up Christmas stockings and waited for visits from St. Nicholas, survives in what is now Elmhurst, L. I. His grave, in upper Trinity Cemetery, at 185th street and Broadway, is decorated each Dec. 24th by persons who remember with affection his now deathless lines:

*'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;*

*And mamma in her kerchief and I, in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters, and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave the luster of mid-day to objects below,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.*

*More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled and shouted, and called them by name:
"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! on, Comet! on, Dunder and Blitzen!"
To the top of the porch! To the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!*

*As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas, too.
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.*

*He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;*

*A bundle of toys he had slung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.
His eyes-how they twinkled! His dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a round little belly,
That shook when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.*

*He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;*

*He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle;
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"*

*—Courtesy N. Y. Public Library
Prof. Moore's Home in the Chelsea Section of New York City.*

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Christmas Greetings



A GAY "HELLO"
RINGING WITH
GOOD CHEER

And Full of Wishes for Good Luck as you go through the year.

Howard McInnis

"Fitted Footwear"
QUEEN STREET



Scout News and Notices

International contacts which showed that world Scouting was in a very healthy condition, were outlined by Col. John S. Wilson, O. B. E., Director of the Boy Scouts International Bureau, when he recently addressed the annual conference of the Scottish headquarters of the Boy Scouts Association in Edinburgh. Following are some extracts of his address as reported in the Scotsman.

"In those countries which are really free," he said, "Scouting is absolutely on its feet. They don't want very much in the way of help now. Immediately on the liberation of their countries they did need some aid, but that time has passed. The tendency now is to say, 'We don't want financial or material assistance; we want to stand on our legs.'"

In Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and one or two more countries where Scouting had once existed, he continued, it was now out of the picture. In Hungary it had been banned, but there were signs that permission might be given for its revival. He thought they would

probably have a very healthy Scout Movement in Italy, and application for recognition from the Boy Scouts of Austria had been approved by the International Committee.

There were difficulties in Germany, not only because of the previous regime, but because the country was divided into four zones. In the Eastern Zone there was no likelihood of Scouting being allowed at all. It was, however, permitted in the U. S. Zone, but no uniform was allowed. The position was a little indeterminate in the French Zone, and in the British Zone it was banned. He was hopeful that that ban might be removed, and it was important that it should be in view of the fusion of the U. S. and British Zones.

The War Office had particularly asked that Scouting should be brought to the British boys who were going out to the B.A.O.R. and there would be a natural longing among the younger German boys to be allowed to Scout too.

"We want Scouting to help the regeneration of Germany," said Colonel Wilson. "It will take a long time, and it can be done with German boys as a British institution under British officers, you will kill any chance of Scouting helping Germany in the future and helping the peace of the world."

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PROCLAMATION

Council Chambers,
City Hall,
Charlottetown, P. E. I.
December 23, 1946.

By Resolution of the City Council of the City of Charlottetown, Thursday the 26th day of December, 1946, will be a public Civic holiday.

B. EARLE MacDONALD,
Mayor.
JAMES A. FULLERTON,
City Clerk.

BEST WISHES FOR A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ONE AND ALL

Maritime Electric Co. Limited

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A VERY REAL WISH FOR VERY REAL FRIENDS!

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Greetings



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