



ALL EARS!!

THE LITCHFIELD FUND WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

"OUR EARS SPAN ALL FIELDS"



THE SPENDING, SHOPPING, TRAVELING, EATING & imbibing season officially began last weekend. With a booming economy, the kickoff to the Christmas & holiday season got off to a roaring start. *Black Friday*, *Cyber Monday* & all the other days of the weekend smashed every previous consumer spending record. A record number of Americans (including *All Ears!!* who is on the road this week) took to America's roads & skies to visit & vacation. Traveling gave us time to think about those wonderful Christmas stories & the true meaning of this season! We are not trying not to sound like Charlie Brown, but "*Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?*"

WHAT 'T WAS AND WILL BE: Our traditional view of Santa Claus or St. Nicholas (or St. Nick for those who claim to have a personal or familial relationship with him) comes from Clement Clarke Moore's 1823 poem, *A Visit from St. Nicholas*. Mr. Moore supposedly wrote the poem after a busy day of errands & shopping driving his horse-drawn sleigh! The imagery & description of St. Nick was similar to other Christmas stories, including works from Mr. Moore's friend, Washington Irving! But it was Mr. Moore who created the ultimate portrayal of both Christmas Eve & the legendary gift-giver. The poem was first published, anonymously, on December 23rd in a Troy, New York newspaper; sent to the paper by a friend of Mr. Moore's. Clement Clarke Moore's authorship was not attributed to the piece until 1837, he himself not claiming the poem until 1844. The authorship has been disputed with some claim given to Henry Livingston, Jr., a distant relative of Mrs. Moore. (For those who find their own family holiday dinners stressful, imagine arguing over Christmas dinner as to who created the definitive *Father Christmas!*) While it is easy to get lost in Mr. Moore's eloquent poetic narrative of Christmas Eve & that Jolly Old Elf, let's not forget the meaning of this story. This is a season of *believing in miracles* & among those miracles, is the simple small miracle of giving from the heart! At the time Mr. Moore penned the poem, the Christmas holiday was under some scrutiny in America. New Year's Day was much more universally celebrated, but well-to-do families began to put more emphasis on Christmas. There were actually already the beginnings of the Good Ol' Charlie Brown laments of Christmas commercialization, with Protestants complaining Catholics weren't properly respecting or celebrating the holiday. To some degree, Mr. Moore's poem offered a secular, non-religious view of the holiday, adding to the poem's & Christmas's acceptance & popularity! At about the same time in England, Christmas traditions were definitely transitioning as Christmas carols, trees & celebrations became more popular. On December 19, 1843, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol (In Prose. Being a Christmas Ghost Story.)* was first published. It sold out before Christmas Eve, with no help from *Amazon*, the internet or a good review from a social media influencer! The social issues portrayed in *A Christmas Carol* were common place as England urbanized in the mid-19th century, Mr. Dickens own father was in a debtor's prison. With all of us familiar with the story, there is no need to recount the plot. But the story remains a classic portrayal of the Miracle of Christmas, the Spirit of Christmas, the redemption of the Human Soul & most importantly, that your own actions & the events of your past do not need to define the you or the path of your future! *God bless us, Every one!*

It is an amazing list of authors who have written about Christmas, beyond Irving, Moore & Dickens (who also borrowed from Irving). Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Twain, Chekov, Milton, Frost, Longfellow, Joyce, Capote, Tolkien, Hoffmann, Hans Christian Andersen, Dylan Thomas, Ellery Queen, Beatrix Potter, O. Henry, Louisa

May Alcott & Lucy Maud Montgomery all lay claim to literary works about Christmas! It is interesting that J.R.R. Tolkien & E.T.A. Hoffmann (besides needing three initials in their names) were writers of fantasy & in Mr. Hoffmann's case, gothic horror! Yet Tolkien wrote *Letters from Father Christmas* for his children & Hoffmann wrote *The Nutcracker & the Mouse King*, which Pyotr Tchaikovsky turned into his beautiful ballet, *The Nutcracker!* And while among Lucy Maud Montgomery's Christmas stories are those of Anne at Green Gables on Prince Edward Island, one of the most popular of all Christmas stories & Christmas heroes was brought to us by none other than retailer *Montgomery Ward!* The Chicago-based store & mail-order catalog retailer *Montgomery Ward* had an annual tradition of purchasing coloring books at Christmas to give away. In 1939, they decided it would be less expensive to create their own book, so they asked Robert Lewis May to write a story for publication. The legend is that a dense Lake Michigan fog covering Chicago gave Mr. May his inspiration! *Montgomery Ward* distributed 2.4M copies of its *Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer* book in its first year of publication! Mr. May's brother-in-law was a songwriter, Johnny Marks. In 1949, Gene Autry recorded Mr. Marks' musical interpretation of Rudolph, which led to a resurgence of our little red-nosed hero's popularity in the 1950s & 1960s. (Mr. Marks also wrote Christmas favorites such as *Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree*, *Run Rudolph Run*, *Silver & Gold*, *A Holly Jolly Christmas* & many other songs, including Bing Crosby's version of *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*. Mr. Autry, after the amazing popularity of his Rudolph recording, recorded *Frosty the Snowman* the next year, an original song by Jack Rollins & Steve Nelson.) Rudolph provides a great message today, especially in this age of cyber & social media bullying, that there is a quiet hero in each of us.

Another quiet hero is the martyred saint of the well-known St. Stephan's day Christmas carol, *Good King Wenceslas!* **Wenceslas I** was a real-life 10th century Duke of Bohemia; posthumously titled a king by Holy Roman Emperor **Otto I**. He is the patron saint of Czechoslovakia. Wenceslas became ruler at age 10 on the death of his father with his paternal grandmother, Ludmila, as regent. His mother, Drahomira, from a pagan tribe by birth, disliked the Christianity of Ludmila, so she had the grandmother murdered. Drahomira then suppressed Christianity until Wenceslas was 18, when with the support of Christian nobles, Wenceslas overthrew his mother. He divided his realm to appease his brother, Boleslaus the Cruel, giving Boleslaus a great deal of territory. Wenceslas reintroduced many Christian beliefs & practices that had fallen into disuse because priests had been persecuted. He was said to view his power with the greatest of piety, rising at night to visit churches in his bare feet to provide alms for the poor. But proving it is never good to have a brother whose nickname is *The Cruel*, Boleslaus invited Wenceslas to a feast for Saints Cosmos & Damien, where Boleslaus & his three companions stabbed Wenceslas to death at age 24! Wenceslas' story circulated Europe for centuries, resulting in the 1853 hymn, written by John Mason Neale & Thomas Helmore. The legend of Wenceslas is so strong in Czechoslovakia that protests against the communists were held beneath the statue of the saint mounted on his horse! There is a belief that in a time of need, the statue will come to life & raise a sleeping army of knights to save the Czech people.

There is the story of another quiet hero that provides the reason for the season. Born into the humblest of means, in a stable meant for animals. He wielded no sword or weapon; he carried only a message of redemption, love & goodwill for everyone. The child comes to be called The King of Kings. No matter your religious beliefs, this message is more important every day, especially in *a world where distance is no longer measured by the miles between us but by the differences in our thoughts*. We wish each of you the best of the season, with hopes that a spirit of love & goodwill remains with you throughout the year!

SEEDS, SPROUTS, GROW, HARVEST!

THE LITCHFIELD FUND – *Tom Malenka*

V6issue25.12.07.19

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