

Christmas Symbols and Traditions

Did You Know?

Here is some interesting information about Christmas symbols and traditions!

'Xmas' – the use of the spelling Xmas dates back a long time, and comes from the Greek word *Xristos* meaning Christ. By the 1500s, the term Xmas was used regularly.

Christmas Carols – Carolling dates back to Greece and originates in the word *choraulien*, meaning to “dance to a flute”. Later in the Middle Ages it meant, “to sing and dance together” and become linked to Christmas songs.

Christmas Trees/Yule Log – The Christmas tree began to appear in Germany as early as 700AD and it is said the practice comes from when families would bring in a log known as the Yule Log into their homes. The Yule log would be either lighted twelve days before Christmas or on Christmas Eve. The practice of having and decorating a Christmas tree spread throughout Europe. In 1880, Woolworths sold the first commercial Christmas decorations.

Christmas Cards – This tradition began in England by Henry Cole who sent a printed card to his relatives instead of a letter to save time. The left over cards were sold by the printer but were expensive. With the help of ‘Penny Post’ in 1840, the new railroads that could deliver mail and the development of better printing machinery, the cards could be printed faster and cheaper. The first company to sell cards was Charles Goodall & Sons in 1862 and UNICEF produced the first charity card in 1949.

Who Brings the Gifts? – In Australia, Canada and the United States, Santa Claus brings the gifts to children; in these countries gifts are usually left on Christmas Eve. In many countries of Europe gifts are left on the feast of St Nicholas (Dec 6) , the feast of St Steven (Dec 26) or the feast of the Epiphany (Jan 6). Below is a list of countries with the name of their Christmas gift-bearer.

Belgium: Saint Nicholas

Brazil: Papai Noel

The Czech Republic: Svaty Mikalás

Denmark: Julemanden

Estonia: Jouluvana

France: Pere Noel

Germany: Der Weihnachtsmann

Italy: La Befana (female)

Netherlands: Sinterklaas

Norway: Julebuk

Russia: ДЕД МОРОЗ (Grandfather Frost)

Serbian: ДЕДА МРАЗ (Grandfather Frost)

Spain: Balthazar (of the three wise men)

Sweden: The Tomte (Christmas Gnome)

