

The Jolly Old Elf

by Lynne Belluscio

Last week, the second grade students visited LeRoy House to learn a little about the history of Christmas at LeRoy House. I think the students were surprised to see the picture of Santa Claus that I showed them. He was not the big, jovial Santa that they envision. Instead, a “chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf” who could fit into a “miniature sleigh” pulled by “eight tiny rein-deer.” In fact, Santa might have appeared to be a little scary “in spite of himself.”

The pictures that I showed them were drawn by Thomas Nast, a young German immigrant who became a well-known cartoonist. Nast drew many cartoons and illustrations of Santa. Several of them were included in a book “Santa Claus and His Work.” It was written by George Webster and was published in 1869. The story expands on Clement Moore’s “A Visit From St. Nicholas,” written in the 1820s that we know as “The Night Before Christmas.”

If you remember “The Night Before Christmas,” you know that the jolly old elf is never once called Santa Claus. How St. Nicholas became Santa Claus has a lot to do with the Dutch, who called Saint Nicholas, “Sinterklaas.” It’s easy to see how Sinterklaas became Santa Claus. And it’s more interesting to know that the LeRoy family were Dutch immigrants, who probably knew St. Nicholas as Sinterklaas.

Thomas Nast changed the image of Santa Claus, through the years. In “Santa Claus and His Work” Santa appears as a small round elf, who is dwarfed by the Christmas tree. And Webster mentions that Santa lives in the city of Santa Clausville, near the North Pole. Previously, Nast had drawn Santa in a variety of coats and hats - - some brown, some blue, others green, but in “Santa Claus and His Work” Santa finally has his red fur coat, but he looks like a furry bowling ball.



The image of Santa dramatically changed in the early 1900s. He seemed to become friendlier and taller. In 1931, Haddon Sundblom was hired by Coca Cola to show Santa enjoying a Coke. It’s interesting to note that Coca Cola wanted to promote their drink to children, but at this time, it was illegal to show kids drinking Coke, so Coca Cola decided it would show Santa - - not the kids - - - having a coke - “The Pause that Refreshes.”

By 1934, the Santa Claus that we have come to know, was defined by Sundblom. His ads appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Ladies Home-Journal*, *National Geographic* and *The New Yorker*.

“Give and take,”
say I

One thing which makes Old Santa so popular is that he gives so much and asks so little. Ditto for ice-cold Coca-Cola. It gives you America's Favorite Moment . . . the pause that refreshes . . . for only 5¢.

You're invited to "The Song Shop" . . . at your radio. Listen! You'll be glad you did. Columbia network—10 P. M., E. S. T., Fridays.

SO . . . ENJOY A FROSTY BOTTLE OF ICE-COLD COCA-COLA FROM YOUR OWN REFRIGERATOR.

