**Christmas Trivia**

**In 1647, a law was passed by Parliament that abolished Christmas and stated that it was to be a day like any other day. Some people felt, however, that this law went too far. Sometimes, entire congregations were arrested for protesting the abolishment of Christmas. *(Isaac Asimov’s Book of Facts, p. 373)***

**According to the syndicators, letters to personal-advice columnists drop dramatically during the holidays. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Americans plan to buy an average of nine gifts this year, compared with 16 last year, according to Deloitte’s annual holiday shopping survey. Total anticipated spending per household was $1,455, down slightly from $1,463 a year ago. *(Thge Wall Street Journal, as it appeared in The Week magazine, December 2, 2022)***

**The home of big toys for big boys is surely the Neiman Marcus catalog, which features fashions and furnishings for the fabulously foolish (and rich), along with pricey toys (such as a rebuilt 1940s slot machine for $2,550). But perhaps the ultimate item in garish consumerism was featured in the company’s 2000 Christmas catalog: a personal submarine manufactured by U. S. Submarines of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. At $20 million, the 118-foot Seattle class sub is considered midsize and features accommodations for guests and crew, a galley, and living and dining areas. It has a cruising range of 3,000 nautical miles and can stay below the surface for up to 20 days. Previous editions of the Christmas catalog have featured a private Boeing 737 jet that seats 15 to 50 people ($35 million), personal hot-air balloons, “his and her” Egyptian mummy cases, camels, robots, and a Black Angus steer (on the hoof or cut up into steaks). *(Ben Franklin’s Almanac)***

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**Worldwide, Christmas has been celebrated on 135 different days of the year. *(Uncle John’s Unstoppable Bathroom Reader)***

**Before the 5th century, Christmas was celebrated on January 6th, March 25th, April 19th, May 20th, November 17th, and December 25th. It seems that everyone has a different idea about when Christmas should be celebrated. Maybe we should celebrate Christmas every day, so we don't miss out on anything. (David J. Seibert, Unity Minister)**

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**The reason Christmas colors are red and green is because early Christmas tree decorations consisted of red apples on the green trees. *(Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 228)***

**Frankly, the debate over whether public schools should studiously ignore the existence of Christmas strikes us as kind of silly. Of course, the public schools shouldn't proselytize but Christmas -- and Hanukkah and Kwanzaa -- are facts of American life, and it's condescending to students to assume they are so gullible that exposure to a Christmas tree on the school lawn might be a life-changing experience. If Santa, wreaths, candy canes and Christmas music were that effective, our malls would be places of mass conversion. Somehow, however, teenage shoppers manage to emerge spiritually unscathed. *(Rocky Mountain News, December 23, 2004)***

**Who delivers Christmas gifts in five countries:**

**- Italy – a good witch dressed in black**

**- Spain – the three wise men**

**- Germany – the Christ child**

**- Switzerland – an angel**

**- Sweden – a gnome. *(World Features Syndicate)***

**The Three Kings (also known as the Three Wise Men) -- Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar -- saw the star over Bethlehem where Christ was born. They followed it to find the baby. A feast celebrated on January 6, Epiphany (sometimes called Three Kings' Day), is the climax of the Christmas season and the end of the Twelve Days of Christmas, which are counted from December 25. Epiphany is celebrated as "Little Christmas" in many countries. (*The Daily Chronicle)***

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[**On Christmas Eve, 1223, on a wooded hilltop near the village of Greccio, in central Italy, St. Francis of Assisi set up the first crib, complete with ox and donkey and the infant in the manger (a local ritual enacted to this day), bestowing upon Christmas a new, tender emphasis – the poverty and humanity of Christ. *(Ernest O. Hauser, in Reader’s Digest)***](http://www.bbc.co.uk/)

**In A.D. 336, the first recorded celebration of Christmas on December 25th took place in Rome. *(Associated Press)***

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**A Texas pastor has launched a “Grinch Alert” website to shame businesses that greet customers with “Happy Holidays!” Pastor Robert Jeffress hopes his list of businesses that have “bowed down to political correctness” will help Christians decide where to shop. “I am not willing to wave the white flag of surrender and give the country over to the atheists,” said Jeffress. *(The Week magazine, December 24, 2010 – January 7, 2011)***

**In 1659, the Massachusetts General Court ordered a 5-shilling fine to be paid by anyone caught celebrating Christmas. The ban was revoked in 1681. Christmas did not become an official federal holiday until 1870, under President Ulysses S. Grant. New Year’s Day, Independence Day, and Thanksgiving were all made federal holidays as part of the same legislation. *(Harry Bright & Jakob Anser, in That’s A Fact, Jack!, p. 51)***

**From 1659 to 1681, it was illegal to celebrate Christmas in Massachusetts. *(Paul Stirling Hagerman, in It’s A Weird World, p. 63)***

**A Kentucky family was shocked to find a live baby owl nestled in the Christmas tree they’d brought home four days earlier. Nobody in the household – including its three dogs – noticed the owl until a carpet cleaner saw a branch move and investigated. “I was so stunned,” said home owner Michelle White, “We use this room nonstop.” The owl was released back into the wild; White, a needlepointer, plans to stitch an owl ornament to replace it. “Everybody’s going to be able to have a merry Christmas now,” she said. (The Week magazine, December 22, 2023)**

**A Dutch firm is hoping to cash in on the holiday season by selling lonely people a DVD featuring imaginary dinner guests. Single people and the bereaved will be able to liven up their holiday feasts with an assortment of scintillating dining companions, played by actors who eat and drink and converse according to a number of different scripts, from a romantic dinner to a heated discussion. The user can either set up a TV monitor at the dining room table or, as producer Chris Gribling suggests, simply “watch the DVD while sitting and eating in front of the television.” *(The Week magazine, December 12, 2006)***

**What everybody learned but not everybody remembers is that Christmas started out as “Christ’s mass.” *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Early in A Christmas Carol, Mr. Scrooge grouses: “Every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding.” But by the end, he’s shouting the greeting to everyone. Why a merry Christmas? (We don’t say “Merry birthday!”) The answer is murky, but “Merry Christmas” appeared in writing as early as 1534, and it was included on the first commercial Christmas card in 1843 – the same year Dickens published his Yuletide classic, which itself popularized the joyful phrase. *(Reader’s Digest, December, 2022/January 2023 issue, page 110)***

**In 1864, during the Civil War, Union General William T. Sherman sent a message to President Lincoln: “I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the city of Savannah.” *(Associated Press, as it appeared in the Rocky Mountain News, on December 22, 2004)***

***\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\**Mistletoe is a parasitic plant that only grows in the tops of trees. The name “mistletoe” is from the German for “dung on a twig.” This is because the plant’s seeds are spread by the droppings of the birds that eat the fruits that contain them. Mistletoe fruit is poisonous to humans. *(Don Voorhees, in The Super Book of Useless Information, p. 9)***

**The ancient Norse associated mistletoe with their goddess of love, leading to the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe. *(Noel Botham, in The World’s Greatest Book of Useless Information, p. 121)***

**A kiss under the mistletoe is but one of the holiday plant’s boons. Druids and ancient Greeks valued its medicinal properties. Though mistletoe can be toxic, it and its extracts have been used to treat epilepsy, infertility, and arthritis – and its anticancer potential is being investigated. *(National Geographic magazine)***

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**The world is divided into those who open presents Christmas morning and those who open Christmas eve – but not evenly divided. Morning has 45 percent, eve 55 percent. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**In 1659 the General Court of Massachusetts ordered that anybody caught feasting or laying off from work, or in any other way goofing off on any day such as Christmas, would be fined five shillings for every such offense. *(Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 323)***

**In 1647, Christmas was outlawed by the English Parliament. Churches were stripped of ornamentation, and organs carted away; religious singing was restricted to the Psalms – an attitude the Pilgrim Fathers had already brought to the New World. Although the ban was soon forgotten, it took nearly two centuries for Christmas to recover its sparkle.  *(Ernest O. Hauser, in Reader’s Digest)***

**To think that this day that we foolish Christians have been celebrating as Christmas for about 1,650 years is, in fact, a pagan holiday, celebrated as such for just a bit over 80 years! In fact, it's almost as if two-thirds of the Roman year were already holidays, because they were an early quasi-socialist state that needed every day off they could get their hands on! The shame of arriving too late in history to find a place in the calendar untainted by pagan holy days, so that we could not choose to celebrate the birth of Jesus on a pure day. And one might almost think we were adopting another tradition by celebrating Jesus's birth on a regular day without particularly caring about the precise anniversary of his birth. *(Nicholas Gaul, in Rocky Mountain News)***

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**Poinsettias and Christmas seem almost inseparable. But in fact, the bright red plants are relative newcomers to the holiday scene – it wasn’t until 1825 that Joel Roberts Poinsett, who helped found the Smithsonian Institution and was the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico and an amateur botanist, introduced this colorful Mexican plant to the U.S. *(Steve Frowine, in Country Woman magazine)***

**Are poinsettias poisonous? Despite rumors that the slightest nibble on this Christmas flower will result in death, poinsettias are not poisonous to humans. The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission determined in 1975 that the toxicity of poinsettias is a myth, though the flower is a nonfood substance and, if eaten, could cause some discomfort. *(Barbara Berliner, in The Book of Answers, p. 290)***

***\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\**The U.S. Postal Service delivers 20 billion cards and packages each holiday season between Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve. (Noel Botham, in The Amazing Book of Useless Information, p. 18)**

**An informal survey shows that what most people want for Christmas is two more weeks to prepare for it. *(Bob Stanley, in Columbus, Wis. Journal Republican)***

**Among quarrelsome families, Christmas is the most quarrelsome day of the year. That’s indicated by domestic dispute reports in police records. Next are Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day, which run about even in the quarrelsome category*. (L. M. Boyd)***

**At a bank in Bellevue, Washington, a robber took $1,200 from a teller’s drawer, ran outside, stood by the door and acted as if he were a Salvation Army bellringer. Police ran right past him and he escaped. *(Bill Flick, 1995)***

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**Salvation Army officials don't know who has been dropping gold coins into their holiday kettles, but they hope the donations continue. More than 300 gold coins have been collected since the early 1980s, with an average value of about $200 each, said a spokesman for the charity. Chicago bell-ringers have brought in 10 gold coins this year. In Kirksville, Missouri, some donated a gold coin that was minted 20 years before the Civil War, worth nearly $1,000. Also, a $400 South African Krugerrand was dropped in a kettle in Bloomington, Illinois. *(Rocky Mountain News, December 20, 2004)***

**The Salvation Army’s tradition of ringing bells to feed the impoverished at Christmas time reached Colorado in the 1890s. In 1950 the Kiwanis Club in Denver, under the presidency of Charles Schoelzle, joined the effort. Service clubs all over the world have become bell-ringers. Salvation’s Army kettles now are used in such distant lands as Korea, Japan, and Chile. *(Rocky Mountain News)***

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**Alfred C. Gilbert (1884-1961) started his company in 1909 and invented his Erector set in 1913. His inspiration reportedly was the steel construction girders used on a nearby railroad. After the U.S. entered WWI, authorities contemplated a ban on toy production. Gilbert went to meet with them, accompanied by several men carrying bulky packages. The packages contained only toys, including his Erector sets. The U.S. secretaries of commerce, war and the interior were invited to play with them and soon were on their hands and knees. Gilbert told them his toys helped build “solid American character.” The officials played and talked for 3 hours before voting down the ban on toys. The press called Gilbert the “man who saved Christmas.” (Reminisce magazine)**

**Mr. Einar Holboell worked in a post office in Denmark. He was always trying to help people who didn’t have enough food or clothes. One Christmas, he had the post office print up some special stamps, and he sold them along with regular stamps. He asked his customers to buy them and put them on the letters they mailed. The money raised from these special stamps went to help poor people. This happened in 1904, and the stamps were the world’s first Christmas Seals. *(Holy Childhood Ass’n newsletter)***

**Some sociologists say the “holiday season” has grown much longer now – from Thanksgiving through the Super Bowl. You buy that? *(L. M. Boyd)***

**It is commonly thought that suicides increase around Christmas. However, this is not the case, according to Paul Quinlan, professor of psychology at American International College in Springfield, Mass. “Data collected over many years by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest that some holidays may be associated with increases in suicide, but Christmas is not one of them,” he said. Quinlan said the daily suicide rate is lowest in December and second lowest in November. *(Rocky Mountain News, December 10, 2002)***

**The first text message was sent 20 years ago this week. It read, “Merry Christmas.” Last year, more than 8 trillion texts were sent worldwide, or about 15 million a minute. *(The Guardian (U.K.), as it appeared in The Week magazine, December 14, 2012)***

**Unmerry Christmas:**

**\* American colonies -- banned Christmas (17th century)**

**\* England -- banned Christmas (late 1640s)**

**\* Scotland -- banned Christmas (1583)**

**\* Philadelphia -- banned Christmas Eve Carnival (1868)**

**\* Peru -- banned Santa from TV and radio (1972)**

***(Gerry Bowler, in World Encyclopedia of Christmas)***

**The odd way we celebrate Christmas: For young Namibians, Christmas means a trip back to the village, said Anna Ingwafa in the Windhoek New Era. Young people who have been studying or working in the city head back home for the annual visit to the parents. But our parents barely get to see us. They know “they have to slaughter the goat the day we arrive,” because we’re going to be spending every subsequent evening catching up with old friends, and certainly won’t be feasting at home. Reunited with our friends, “we have to show each other that we were not wasting time where we were for the whole years – by buying loads of beer” in a display of wealth and conviviality. When it’s time to leave, the cash that we gave our parents as a Christmas gift will be ruefully borrowed back, for bus fare to the city. We always promise to deposit it into their account upon arrival in Windhoek, but they well know that’s “an empty promise that never gets fulfilled.” Why is it, again, that our parents are so happy to see us? *(The Week magazine, December 22, 2006)***

**A year after conservative groups boycotted Wal-Wart for emphasizing secular greetings during the yuletide, the retail chain has announced a change in policy. “The Holiday Shop” in each store has been renamed “The Christmas Shop,” and many items will be branded with “Christmas” instead of “holiday.” *(Minneapolis Star Tribune, as it appeared in The Week magazine, November 24, 2006)***

**On one occasion a song temporarily halted a war, making neighbors out of enemies. That took place in France on Christmas Eve, 1914. At that time, British and German soldiers were huddled in muddy trenches mercilessly killing one another. Late on Christmas Eve, when the darkness made it impossible to continue shooting, an eerie calm descended. No doubt the young men in the trenches were thinking about home and family. Suddenly, a German soldier began to sing “Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht.” Of course the British immediately recognized the tune as “Silent Night, Holy Night.” Spontaneously, several British soldiers began to join the German soldier. Little by little, more voices were added on both sides. Soon the battleground became common ground as the troops sang the great hymn in unison. What occurred next is one of the most extraordinary events in military history. One by one, soldiers on both sides put down their weapons and ventured into no-man’s-land to shake hands, exchange gifts, and sing more carols. When morning came, the war resumed when an order was issued forbidding contact with the enemy. “We are here to fight, not fraternize,” was the command. Nevertheless, for a brief moment, “Silent Night, Holy Night” was the instrument which reminded two opposing forces that ultimate loyalty belongs neither to king nor kaiser, but to the Prince of Peace*. (Victor M. Parachin, in Unity magazine)***

**Household waste increases by 25 percent between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day. Most of this extra garbage in the United States is made up of 4 million tons of discarded wrapping paper and shopping bags. (Noel Botham, in The Amazing Book of Useless Information, p. 18)**

**The dry truth is the word Christmas didn’t turn up until the year A.D. 1038. *(L. M. Boyd, in Boyd’s Book of Odd Facts, p. 2)***

**Where and when did skiing get started as a sport? In Norway, about 1843. Also that year, the first YMCA was set up in England, Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” turned up in print, Londoner Henry Cole sent out the world’s first Christmas cards, and 24-year-old J. I. Case came up with a threshing machine that really worked. *(L. M. Boyd)***

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