

= Christmas in the post @-@ war United States =

Christmas in the United States during the post @-@ War years (1946 ? 1964) reflected a period of peace , productivity , and prosperity . Americans staged sumptuous Christmases and enjoyed a variety of holiday foods unknown to previous generations . Several films , foods , toys , and television programs of the era have become American Christmas traditions .

Once reliant upon Germany for its ornaments , toys , and even its Christmas customs , America became self @-@ sufficient in the post @-@ War years with Christmas ornaments and toys being manufactured in the United States that were considerably less expensive than their German counterparts . American Christmas customs and traditions such as visits to department store Santas and letter writing to Santa at the North Pole remained intact during America 's post @-@ War years , but the era generated contributions that have endured to become traditions .

NORAD 's tracking of Santa 's sleigh on Christmas Eve , for example , was initiated in 1955 and has become an annual tradition . The stop motion animated film , Rudolph the Red @-@ Nosed Reindeer remains an annual telecast on American television ? almost fifty years after its debut , and Dr. Seuss 's The Grinch Who Stole Christmas of 1957 has become a literary Christmas classic .

Several Christmas firsts mark the post @-@ War era that include the first White House Christmas card , the first Christmas postage stamp , the first opera composed for television (Amahl and the Night Visitors) , the first Christmas Day basketball game , and the first Elvis Presley Christmas album . The era saw the production and manufacture of toys that have become classics such as Candy Land , Mr. Potato Head , and Barbie .

= = Christmas trees = =

= = = Types = = =

During the post @-@ War years , Americans could select their Christmas trees from a variety of offerings . Natural trees had become the preferred choice in America when Christmas tree farms began supplying them to large metropolitan areas in the 1920s . Artificial trees of bristles , aluminum trees , and flocked trees became alternatives to real trees during the post @-@ War period .

= = = = Natural = = = =

In 1900 , only one in five American families had a [Christmas tree] . While America never lacked for real trees , the time and expense of retrieving them from the wild was significant . Early in the twentieth century , however , Christmas tree farms began supplying large metropolitan areas with real trees . In the 1920s , real trees became commonplace , supplanting artificial trees in American homes .

= = = = Artificial = = = =

Artificial trees made of goose feathers were in use in American homes since the 1880s . In the 1930s , however , The Addis Brush Company , an American toilet bowl brush manufacturer , began making artificial trees of green @-@ dyed bristles and then supplied the British (who suffered a dearth of wild trees) with thousands of artificial trees in the post @-@ War years . Americans took little interest in the Addis artificial trees and remained loyal to real trees .

= = = = Aluminum = = = =

In 1950 , the Addis Brush Company patented an aluminum Christmas tree , the Silver Pine , that came with a floodlight and a rotating color wheel . Modern Coatings , Inc. of Chicago manufactured aluminum trees in 1958 , and The Aluminum Specialty Company of Manitowoc , Wisconsin

manufactured more than a million aluminum trees between 1959 and 1969 . The trees , including the company 's flagship product the " Evergleam " , retailed for \$ 25 .

The aluminum tree spectacle could be enhanced with a rotating Christmas tree stand . The futuristic , Space Age look of the trees made them especially suited to the streamlined home decor of the period . Sales of aluminum trees declined after being treated satirically in the 1965 animated Christmas television special , A Charlie Brown Christmas .

== Flocked ==

In the 1960s , flocked Christmas trees in purple , gold , pink , and even black became popular . The trees ' branches were coated in a chemically @-@ created , flame retardant substance resembling snow . Sophisticated style mavens suggested developing a new Christmas tree theme every year and buying color coordinated ornaments . Natural trees would return to favor in the 1970s when country arts and crafts became popular .

== Decorations ==

The post @-@ War period saw changes in the production of Christmas tree ornaments . Shiny Brite and other ornament companies began mass @-@ producing inexpensive glass ornaments . Bubble lights were introduced during the period , and inexpensive , lit @-@ from @-@ within tree toppers were another option for the tree .

== Toppers and stands ==

In the post @-@ War years , translucent , molded plastic , electrified , lit @-@ from @-@ within tree toppers in the shape of angels and stars became popular . Although Santa Claus and other Christmas icons were introduced as electrified toppers , the star and the angel of the Victorian era remained the preferred motif . Glass spire ornaments were also popular as toppers .

The first decorated water reservoir tree stands appeared on the American market in the 1940s . Tin Christmas tree stands decorated with lithographed holiday icons manufactured by National Outfit Manufacturers Association were produced in the 1950s and have become collectibles of the era .

== Lights ==

Bubble lights , a type of incandescent novelty light , were invented by Carl Otis in 1935 , who then sold the patents to the NOMA (National Outfit Manufacturer 's Association) Electric Corporation . NOMA launched the novelty lights on the Christmas market in 1946 when war shortages ended . Bubble lights became hugely popular . Their main feature was a sealed glass tube with a colored bubbling liquid inside .

Other companies followed with their own bubble light versions and other lighting novelties . In 1946 , Sylvania introduced fluorescent pastel lights . In 1955 , NOMA manufactured flashing lights . In 1958 , GE launched Lighted Ice Bulbs , blue bulbs covered with ' ice ' crystals . Fairy Lights were imported from Europe in 1950 and eventually morphed into the inexpensive mini @-@ lights popular in the last decades of the 20th century .

== Ornaments ==

German glass ornaments were introduced to America by Frank Woolworth in the 1880s but such ornaments were produced under labor @-@ intensive conditions and were expensive , with few Americans being able to afford more than one or two ornaments per year . On the eve of World War II , however , American companies began manufacturing inexpensive , mass @-@ produced ornaments that made it possible for almost any American to have an extensive collection of Christmas ornaments for little cost within moments . With a few modifications , Corning Glass 's light

bulb machine could spit out 2 @, @ 000 blank glass ornaments a minute that were then bought by ornament companies to be decorated , packaged and sold by the dozen .

= = = = Shiny Brite = = = =

Max Eckhardt 's Shiny Brite company manufactured colorful glass ornaments in a variety of sizes and shapes through the era . Packed in boxes by the dozen or half dozen , glimpses of the ornaments could be caught through the cellophane windows of the boxes ' covers . The reds and greens of the past were supplemented with turquoise , chartreuse , orange , purple , and other vibrant colors .

Glittery bands of mica decorated some balls while others were silk screened with seasonal motifs such as snowy scenes , sleigh rides , carolers , and poinsettias . Some balls featured silvery indents on their surfaces that reflected the surrounding light . In the early 1950s , clear glass balls appeared decorated with bands of color or glittering sparkles . Molded plastic Santa Clauses , angels , snowmen , and other holiday icons were inexpensive , mass @-@ produced , and readily available .

= = = Outdoor lighting = = =

McAdenville , North Carolina claims the distinction of being the first community to use outdoor Christmas lights . The Library of Congress notes that " the tradition of decorating evergreen trees with Christmas lights dates back to 1956 when the McAdenville Men 's Club conceived of the idea of decorating a few trees around the McAdenville Community Center . "

While the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree has had " lights " since 1931 , the Rockefeller Tree did not have real electric lights until 1956 . Philadelphia 's Christmas Light Show and Disney 's Christmas Tree also began in 1956 . Though GE sponsored community lighting competitions during the 1920s , it was not until the mid @-@ 1950s that outdoor Christmas lighting was adopted by most Americans . Strings of lights gradually began adorning mantles and doorways inside houses , and trimming the rafters , roof lines , and porch railings outside .

= = = National Christmas Tree = = =

The tradition of having a National Christmas Tree in Washington , D.C. began in 1923 when a 48 @-@ foot Balsam Fir from Vermont was placed in the Ellipse outside the White House . On Christmas Eve , President Calvin Coolidge lit the 2 @, @ 500 red , white and green electric bulbs on the tree .

In 1941 , President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had the tree moved from the Ellipse to the White House grounds , where it remained until 1954 when it was returned to the Ellipse . In 1946 , the lighting ceremony became a televised event , though not with widespread telecast . From 1948 to 1951 , President Harry S. Truman signalled the lighting of the tree by remote control from his Independence , Missouri home , but in 1952 , he stayed at the White House for the lighting ceremony . In 1953 , the ceremony was widely telecast and President Dwight David Eisenhower 's address was radio broadcast through the Voice of America in thirty @-@ four languages .

In 1954 , businessmen in the Washington , D.C. area became involved and greatly expanded the program with the Christmas Pageant of Peace . The Pageant centered around the lighting of the Christmas tree , and included various elements such as a life @-@ sized reproduction of the nativity scene . Every year from 1954 to 1972 , a tree was cut and brought to the White House from a different US state and installed at the Ellipse . The ceremony of the tree lighting was then followed by Christmas presentations through the holiday season .

= = Santa Claus = =

Rituals surrounding Santa Claus such as department store visits to the " jolly old elf " , and letter

writing to his North Pole workshop remained intact during the post @-@ War era . New to the mix was Santa 's Workshop (one of the first theme parks in the US) , and NORAD 's tracking of Santa 's sleigh via radar on Christmas Eve . In Cleveland , Ohio , a costumed character called Mr. Jingeling entertained shoppers annually at Halle 's Department Store during the season .

= = = Santa 's Workshop = = =

In 1949 , one of the first theme parks in the United States , Santa 's Workshop , was constructed near Whiteface Mountain in New York State . The park was designed by Arto Monaco , of Upper Jay , New York , and built by the site 's owner Harold Fortune , of Lake Placid , New York . The idea for the park originated in a story that Lake Placid businessman Julian Reiss told his daughter about a baby bear who visits Santa Claus 's workshop at the North Pole .

The park features tame deer , storybook characters , and similar attractions . Single day attendance at the park peaked at 14 @,@ 000 on September 2 , 1951 . On December 16 , 1953 , the U.S. Postal Service awarded North Pole , New York status as a " Rural Postal Station " . In the same year , the park 's Santa Claus and his reindeer participated in the Pageant of Peace in Washington , D.C. as well as Macy 's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City . The Nativity Pageant was introduced at the park in 1954 .

= = = NORAD tracking of Santa 's journey = = =

In 1955 , an advertisement encouraging children to call Santa Claus over a special telephone number was printed in Colorado Springs , Colorado . Due to an error , the phone number that was printed was that of the Continental Air Defense (CONAD) . Colonel Harry Shoup was on duty on Christmas Eve 1955 and took many calls from children inquiring about Santa . He told his operators to give a current location for Santa Claus to any child who called in . Three years later , the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) was formed and the NORAD Tracks Santa service continued .

= = = Mr. Jingeling = = =

Mr. Jingeling , the Keeper of the Keys to Santa 's Workshop , was created in 1956 as a radio spokesman to promote the toys sold at Halle 's Department Store in Cleveland , Ohio . Mr. Jingeling was immediately popular and became an annual fixture at Halle 's where he prowled the seventh floor toy department entertaining shoppers . The costumed character was first played by Max Ellis , a Cleveland Play House actor , and then by Earl W. Keyes , a television producer and director , who remained with the role for many years . In addition to his department store duties , Mr. Jingeling appeared on a local children 's television program telling stories , singing songs , and reminding viewers to visit Halle 's .

= = Toys = =

The post @-@ War Christmas toy extravaganza had its seed in Clement Clarke Moore 's A Visit from St. Nicholas . There , Saint Nicholas is depicted not as the thin , somewhat forbidding , charity dispensing character of European lore but as a dimpled , " jolly old elf " whose stomach shakes like " a bowlful of jelly " when he laughs , and who enters a dwelling through the chimney with a pack of toys on his back .

In the nineteenth century , Germany was the toy making capitol of the world , but high importation costs made German toys relatively expensive in America . Toy costs were lowered when German toymakers began mass @-@ producing toys under the direction of Frank Woolworth and shipping their products to Woolworth 's warehouses for packaging and distribution .

With the loss of German toys on the American market during World War I , toy manufacturing in the United States began in earnest . The Great Depression was a temporary setback but WWII proved a

catalyst . In the aftermath of the war , American couples were eager to settle down , have kids , and lavish the sumptuous Christmases they never had on their offspring .

The post @-@ War years saw the creation of toys that are still in production today and include Candy Land , Cootie , the hula hoop , Barbie , and Etch A Sketch .

Television cultivated the American Christmas toy extravaganza . Manufacturers sidestepped the parent in selling a toy and went directly to the child . Mr. Potato Head was the first toy advertised on television and retail sales topped \$ 4 million in the toy 's first year . Play @-@ Doh 's sales skyrocketed after being advertised on influential children 's television programs such as Ding Dong School and Captain Kangaroo .

= = Christmas cards = =

The first White House Christmas card was sent during the administration of Dwight David Eisenhower in 1953 . President Eisenhower was an amateur artist and personally consulted with the head of Hallmark Cards on the project . Over the course of two terms , the Eisenhower White House issued 38 different cards and prints with many of them bearing the President 's own artwork . The tradition was continued during the Kennedy years with Jacqueline Kennedy 's artwork featured on a 1963 card issued to raise funds for a national performing arts center .

Early in the post @-@ War years , cards exhibited traditional sentiments and art that reassured war weary Americans . As the 1960s neared , however , sophisticated , adult @-@ oriented cards called " Slim Jims " began appearing on the market . The cards displayed Santas driving fin @-@ tailed convertibles and beatniks delivering greetings in hepcat lingo . The highly stylized cards remained popular well into the 1960s , poking fun at fads and world events . Family photo cards and newsletters (meticulously handwritten or typed by busy moms) became commonplace during the 1960s as well .

Hallmark brought African American culture to greeting cards in the 1960s as well as contemporary cultural images such as elves sporting Beatle haircuts and psychedelic Christmas trees in Warholesque colors . " Happy Christmas " replaced " Merry Christmas " here and there after clergymen decided the traditional greeting was associated with inebriation . In 1961 , 50 billion Christmas cards were mailed by Americans , and , in 1962 , America 's first Christmas postage stamp was issued ? causing a mild firestorm by those who felt the stamp violated separation of church and state .

= = Foods = =

Mamie Eisenhower 's Million @-@ Dollar Fudge Recipe was a favorite holiday treat of the Eisenhower White House years. and first appeared in Who Says We Can 't Cook ? , a spiral @-@ bound collection of recipes published in 1955 by the Women 's National Press Club of Washington , D.C. Mamie 's husband Ike named the recipe .

1955 saw the culinary debut of Green Bean Casserole , a dish that remains a holiday favorite in America . Its ingredients include green beans , cream of mushroom soup , and , as a topping , French 's Fried Onions . The casserole was created by Campbell Soup Company in order to promote its cream soups . French 's reports that 50 % of all French 's Fried Onions consumption occurs over Thanksgiving , Christmas , and Easter .

Cookie cutting and decorating reached its cultural zenith during the boomer years with Christmas cookie cutouts of reindeer , trees , stars , and bells providing sustenance for kids and dads . Moms packed their favorite home baked cookies into Tupperware containers and carried them to cookie swap parties with friends and neighbors . Red plastic cutters replaced tin cutters during the war years when metal was scarce and can be found today at garage sales and flea markets .

A snack hit of the 1955 holiday season was Chex Party Mix , a combination of Wheat Chex , Rice Chex , and Corn Chex , nuts , pretzels and a dressing of melted butter , Worcestershire sauce , and onion and garlic powders . The treat remains a popular holiday snack .

= = Teenagers = =

= = = Gifts = = =

Gifts for teens in the post @-@ War years included face powder , radios , telephones , and cars . In the early 1950s , Angel Face powder was advertised as " the perfect girl @-@ to @-@ girl " Christmas gift . The first transistor radios hit the market just before Christmas 1954 and were a luxury item at US \$ 49 @.@ 95 (\$ 322 in 2000 values) . A leather case and earphone cost an additional \$ 11 @.@ 45 (\$ 73) . By the end of the decade however , prices dropped so quickly that an 8 @-@ transistor radio could be had for less than \$ 10 .

Another gift in demand was the streamlined , oval @-@ shaped Princess telephone introduced in the early 1960s . The phone came in a variety of colors , including pink , turquoise , and cream . When one of Mattel 's Barbie doll outfits included a Princess phone as an accessory , a fashion trend was born . By 1963 , many Baby Boomers had reached driver 's license age and , for the first time , middle @-@ class families splurged on cars for their offspring .

= = = Films and music = = =

Twentieth Century Fox 's 1956 Christmas offering was *The Girl Can 't Help It* , a musical film originally intended as a vehicle for sex symbol Jayne Mansfield , with the subplot being a satire of teenagers and rock ? n ? roll music . The unintended result was the " most potent " celebration of rock music ever captured on film .

In December 1961 , Disney Studios released *Babes in Toyland* , a film version of Victor Herbert 's 1903 operetta starring teen heartthrobs Annette Funicello and Tommy Sands . Though new songs with jazzy tempi were incorporated into the film and one critic was delighted with the film 's colorful numbers , *Babes in Toyland* was neither a success nor a complete box office flop . Its gigantic toy soldiers became members of the Disneyland and Walt Disney World Christmas Parades .

Two rockabilly / rock and roll style songs of the late 1950s became hugely popular . " Jingle Bell Rock " , written by Joe Beal and Jim Boothe , was recorded by Bobby Helms in 1957 . The song is regarded as the first rock and roll Christmas song , and has hit the Billboard charts a record six times since its original release . It is second in popularity only to " White Christmas , " with 120 million copies sold . " Jingle Bell Rock " hit # 6 in its first year , despite having been released only two days before Christmas .

" Rockin ' Around the Christmas Tree " , written by Johnny Marks and recorded by Brenda Lee in 1958 for Decca Records , was another rockabilly / rock and roll flavored Christmas tune . While it was neglected in its first two seasons , the song hit # 16 on the Billboard pop chart during the Christmas season of 1960 . Eight million copies were sold over thirty years .

= = Music = =

Elvis ' Christmas Album was released in October 1957 , the first of only two Christmas albums Elvis recorded . The album featured eight Christmas songs , and four gospel songs . " Santa Claus Is Back In Town " and " Santa Bring My Baby Back (to Me) " were both commissioned expressly for the album . Elvis ' reading of Ernest Tubb 's 1949 hit , " Blue Christmas " made the tune a holiday staple .

His version of " White Christmas " brought calls from the song 's composer Irving Berlin to have the song , and the entire album , banned from radio airplay . Berlin thought Elvis 's rendition a " profane parody of his cherished yuletide standard " . Most US radio stations ignored Berlin 's request , though at least one DJ was fired for playing a tune from the album . As of 2007 , Elvis ' Christmas Album is the top @-@ selling holiday release of all time with 9 million in sales , according to the RIAA .

" Rudolph the Red @-@ Nosed Reindeer " was composed in 1948 by Johnny Marks after a 1939

poem by Robert L. May who created Rudolph as part of his employment with Montgomery Ward . The song tells the story of a reindeer whose shiny red nose guides Santa 's sleigh through the fog on Christmas Eve . Gene Autry 's 1949 recording remained at # 1 for a week and brought the song widespread fame . Only " White Christmas " has sold more copies .

Autry had another hit in 1950 with " Frosty the Snowman " , written by Jack Rollins and Steve Nelson as a direct attempt to create a success in the vein of " Rudolph The Red @-@ Nosed Reindeer " . The song tells the story of a magical snowman who has playful adventures with children . In 1963 , " Frosty " hit its highest position ever at # 13 in a version by The Ronettes .

Spike Jones 's rendition of " All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth " hit # 1 on the pop charts in 1951 . The tune was composed in December 1944 by elementary school music teacher Don Gardner when he noticed most of his students were missing their front " baby " teeth . Inspired , he dashed off the song in thirty minutes . In Spike Jones ' original hit recording , a grownup pretends to be a lisping kid who cannot whistle . Nat King Cole also covered the tune .

" The Little Drummer Boy " , based on an ancient Czech folksong , was written by Katherine K. Davis in 1957 . The song tells the apocryphal story of a poor young boy who , unable to afford a gift for the infant Jesus , plays his drum with Mary 's approval . The baby smiles at the boy in gratitude . The 1958 version by the Harry Simeone Chorale is the standard , and hit the unparalleled record of placing in the Top 40 for five straight Christmases in a row . Simeone recorded the song in a Greenwich Village cathedral to give it a hushed respect . Its highest position on both the US and UK charts was # 13 .

" Silver Bells " was composed by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans , introduced by Bob Hope and Marilyn Maxwell in the film , The Lemon Drop Kid and recorded by Bing Crosby and Carol Richards in 1952 . The song was inspired by Salvation Army bellringers and is one of the very few songs about Christmas in the city . The song was originally called " Tinkle Bell " , but Livingston 's wife reminded him that " tinkle " had another association . " It was something you did in the bathroom , " Evans recalled years after the song 's composition , " but that 's a woman 's word and I 'd never thought of it . " " Silver Bells " ranks # 13 on ASCAP 's list of most @-@ played holiday songs .

" I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus " was written and composed by Tommie Connor in 1952 and originally recorded by thirteen @-@ year @-@ old Jimmy Boyd . The song reached # 1 on the Billboard charts in 1952 , and on the Cash Box Magazine chart at the beginning of the following year . Boyd 's record was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church in Boston on the grounds it mixed sex with Christmas . Boyd was widely photographed meeting with the Archdiocese to explain the song .

" Santa Baby " was written by Joan Javits and Philip Springer in 1953 . The song is a tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek look at a Christmas list of a woman who wants the most extravagant gifts for the holiday . " Santa Baby " was originally sung and recorded by Eartha Kitt and became a huge hit at # 4 in 1953 .

Jackson 5 Christmas Album was the only holiday album released by Motown family quintet The Jackson 5 . Released in October 1970 , the album showcased the brothers ' harmonies and vocals . Lead singer Michael Jackson is prominently featured on the album tracks . Included on the Christmas Album is the Jackson 5 's hit single version of " Santa Claus Is Coming to Town " . Rendered with a pop @-@ soul feel , the Jackson 5 's versions of " I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus " and " Santa Claus Is Coming to Town " remain frequent radio requests during the holiday season .

The album spent all four weeks at the number one position on Billboard magazine 's special Christmas Albums chart that the magazine published in December 1970 , making it the best @-@ selling holiday album of that year . It has sold over 3 @. @ 5 million copies worldwide . [2] In 2003 , Universal Motown re @-@ released the album with " Little Christmas Tree " (from A Motown Christmas) . In 2009 , this configuration was released as Ultimate Christmas Collection with Christmas messages , remixes , and a Christmas medley , and again as Merry Christmas Jackson 's. [http : // www.allmusic.com / album / r9998](http://www.allmusic.com/album/r9998) [edit]

= = Literature = =

In 1957 , Dr. Seuss 's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas !* was published by Random House . The tale 's rhyming verse accompanies illustrations by the author , and follows a disagreeable character called the Grinch and his attempts to thwart the arrival of Christmas by stealing the gifts , trims , and other trappings of the holiday from the happy Whos of Whoville . In spite of his attempts , Christmas arrives all the same .

The Grinch realizes then that Christmas is something more than its trappings . The book criticizes the commercialization of Christmas and satirizes those who exploit the holiday . The tale was adapted into a 1966 short animated film for television with a screenplay by Seuss and narration by Boris Karloff . Later adaptations include a Broadway musical and a feature film in 2000 starring Jim Carrey .

At 100 years of age in 1960 , Grandma Moses illustrated Clement Clark Moore 's Christmas poem , *A Visit from Saint Nicholas as The Night Before Christmas* for Random House . The book was published after her death in 1961 .

= = Film = =

The years immediately following WWII saw the release of two of the most popular Christmas films in US history : *It 's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947) . *MovieFone* listed the two movies as number two and three respectively in their " 25 Best Christmas Movies of All Time " . The *Times of London* , in a similar ranking , had the two in tenth and eight respectively , while placing fourth 1942 's *Holiday Inn* , the movie that launched Bing Crosby 's *White Christmas* . Particularly Frank Capra 's *It 's a Wonderful Life* , starring James Stewart has been called " a testament to the family values of small @-@ town America just after WWII . "

Santa Claus Conquers the Martians (1964) regularly appears on lists of the worst films ever made . Paul Jacobson , the film 's producer and a former unit manager for the television program , *Howdy Doody* , described his film as a " Yuletide science fiction fantasy " , and with the best of intentions , hoped to bring something to movie theaters at a time of the year when there was a paucity of children 's entertainment other than the annual Disney feature .

In Jacobson 's film , Martians kidnap Santa Claus in a plan to bring fun to their listless , TV @-@ obsessed children . Once on Mars , Santa mass @-@ produces toys using a computerized machine , foils a sourpuss saboteur , and generates fun for all . *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians* has been novelized , adapted to musical stagings , and has taken its place as a holiday cult classic . Child actress Pia Zadora played one of the Martian children and years later commented , " It was very well done , considering it was shot twenty years ago - gimme a break - and really is very entertaining . It 's become a Christmas classic , really . "

= = Television = =

Christmas television is predominantly secular and focuses on the ethical message of generosity through gift giving and Santa Claus , or the psychological message of home , nostalgia and childhood , or both . The theological message of the holiday ? the Incarnation ? is rarely encountered in Christmas television . Such a message would be inaccessible to many Americans .

In 1949 , Gian Carlo Menotti was commissioned by NBC 's Opera Theatre to write an opera for television . After a year and a half of delay , he set to work , completing *Amahl and the Night Visitors* five days before its scheduled airing on Christmas Eve 1951 at 9 : 30 to 10 : 30 p.m . . Menotti 's work was inspired by Hieronymous Bosch 's painting , *The Adoration of the Magi* . The composer himself appeared on @-@ screen to introduce the opera and give the background of the events leading up to its composition . He also brought director Kirk Browning and conductor Thomas Schippers on @-@ camera to thank them .

An estimated five million viewers tuned in ? to this day , the largest audience for a televised opera in America . Skeptic Olin Downes declared in a *New York Times* front page review that " television , operatically speaking , has come of age " and *Newsweek* called the telecast , " the best production

of opera yet seen on TV . "

The opera 's appeal lay not only in its story about a crippled shepherd boy healed on the first Christmas Eve but in its wedding of opera and the limitations of television . The broad effects of theater were eschewed and instead an intimacy appropriate to the television studio and home viewing was cultivated . The production starred Chet Allen as Amahl and Rosemary Kuhlmann as his mother . Kuhlmann reprised her role annually for many years .

In 1953 , Amahl was colorcast . The opera claims the distinctions of being the first opera written for television , the first presentation of the teleseries Hallmark Hall of Fame , and the first Christmas television special to become an annual tradition . The opera was telecast on NBC from 1951 to 1966 with many of the original cast and crew participating .

On December 18 , 1962 , NBC aired the first animated Christmas special created specifically for television , Mister Magoo 's Christmas Carol . Based on Dickens ' novelette , A Christmas Carol , the animated special featured a score by Broadway duo Jule Styne and Bob Merrill .

On December 6 , 1964 , NBC aired Rudolph the Red ? Nosed Reindeer , a stop motion animated special produced by Rankin / Bass . The special was based on a 1949 song by Johnny Marks , which was based in turn on a 1939 poem by Robert L. May . The program has aired every year since 1964 , making it the longest @-@ running Christmas television special .

= = Christmas clubs = =

Christmas clubs were savings programs first offered by banks in 1909 . The concept was simple : bank customers deposited a set amount of money each week into a special savings account , and received the money at a later date for Christmas shopping .

One radio program episode used Christmas clubs as a background . The December 23 , 1949 episode of Life of Riley saw the show 's protagonist Chester Riley attempting to withdraw his US \$ 2 Christmas club money but discovering his account has accumulated a variety of fees including one for the passbook , another for early withdrawal , and yet another for the bank 's mailed reminders . The luckless Riley owes the bank 25 cents .