

ClausNet

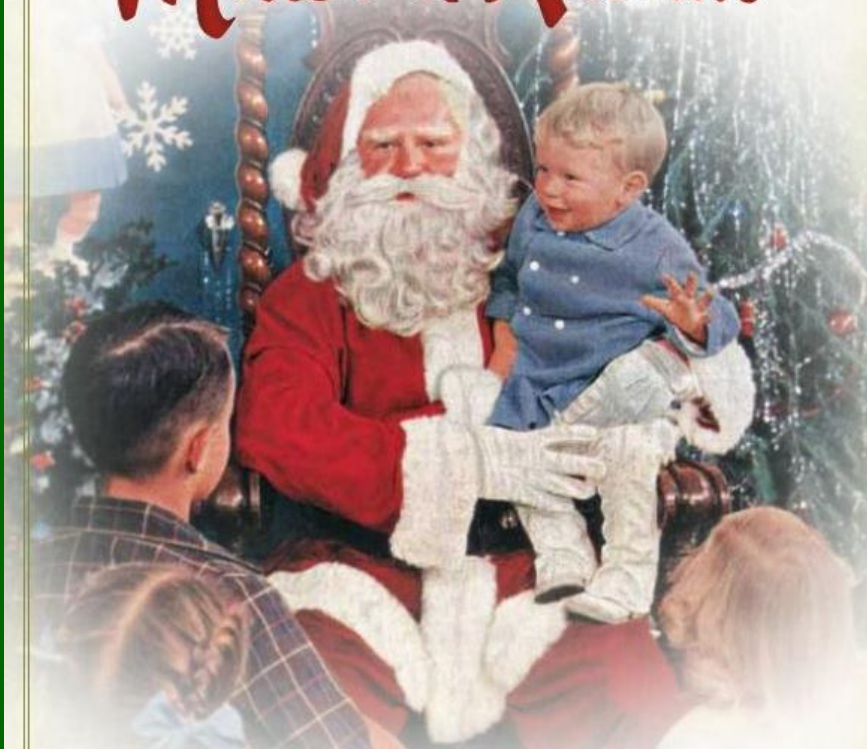
The Santa Claus Network

CLAUSNET GAZETTE

December 24, 2014

THE REAL SANTA OF

Miller & Rhoads



THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE
OF BILL STROTHER

DONNA STROTHER DEEKENS

Foreword by Phillip L. Wenz



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And much, much more!

6th Annual Christmas Eve Edition

Merry Christmas

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

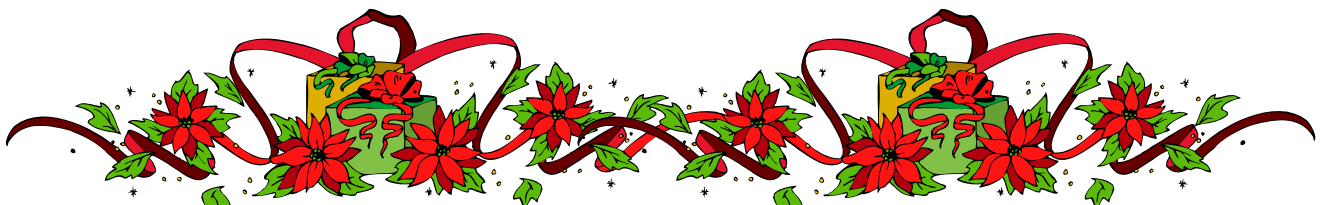


And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. —The Book of Luke



To all the members of ClausNet!



ClausNet

ClausNet is the world's premier Santa Claus Network and the largest Santa, Mrs. Claus, and helpers social group anywhere! Here you will find members from every Santa organization in the world, coming together to build a community of friendship, trust, and fellowship. Together we build unity and common bond for men and women dedicated to the faithful portrayal of Santa Claus (Father Christmas, Père Noël, Kris Kringle, Sinterklas, Baba Noel, Grandfather Frost, Joulupukki...), Mrs. Claus, and all others who devote their time to bringing the magic of Christmas to children and adults throughout the world!

ClausNet.com is the largest resource and social network for Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, Elves, Reindeer Handlers, and Santa helpers for the purposes of sharing stories, advice, news, and information. Most importantly, ClausNet is bringing people together to build friendships that help spread happiness to the true believers of Santa Claus -- the child inside all of us.

Thank you for being a part of this unique and special forum. ClausNet has grown from a dream into the largest on-line community for Santas, Mrs. Clauses, Reindeer Handlers, Elves, and Helpers in the world! The special magic and feeling you get when you are on-line with ClausNet is the result of all the great members! Without each and every one of you, ClausNet would not be possible.

Thank you to all our moderators and contributors. A forum this large needs a lot of people to lend a hand to ensure that the quality and integrity of our community is upheld. Your constant and continued support is truly appreciated!

We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a great New Year!

Sincerely,

Michael Rielly

To Santa Claus

A Santa Claus Poem by Jennie D. Moore

Dear Santa Claus, I'll let you know
The few things that I need,
And if you'll bring them to me
I'll be much obliged indeed.

I want a horse and wagon,
And a boat that's painted red,
An elephant, a jumping-jack
You need not bring a sled,

For I have one very pretty;
But I want a trotting-horse,
A man who wheels a wheel-barrow,
And candy, too, of course.

Now, Santa dear, you'll not forget.
I wish you'd write them down,
And leave them all at my house
When you journey through the town.



An Interview with Snow Queen Donna Strother Deekens



"Almost every little girl dreams of being a princess or a queen at one time or another," begins Donna Strother Deekens' book, "Christmas at Miller & Rhoads: Memoirs of a Snow Queen."

Deekens' dream came true in 1971 when, as a college student, she was hired by Miller & Rhoads department store in downtown Richmond to play Santa's best helper, the Snow Queen.

Donning a beautiful, flowing white gown and a sparkling tiara, Deekens found inspiration in her own memories of visiting the "real" Santa at Miller & Rhoads as a child. She'd

spend 20 Christmases playing the Snow Queen, bringing the joy and magic of the holidays to thousands of kids who came to sit on Santa's lap every year.

Deekens officially hung up her tiara in 1991, after Miller & Rhoads and Thalhimers department stores closed, but she continues to reprise her role as Snow Queen a few times a year while hosting children's tea parties through her business, Teapots, Treats and Traditions.

We caught up with Donna and asked her about the Snow Queen, Santa, and of course her new book on Bill Strother...

ClausNet: How long have you been portraying Snow Queen and how did you get started?

I have been portraying "The Snow Queen" since 1971. I started at the Miller & Rhoads downtown department store the Christmas of that year. I was a sophomore at Westhampton College of the University of Richmond, and I applied for the position at the store for Christmas employment. (Little did I know then that I would make a "career" out of being The Snow Queen!)

ClausNet: What do you enjoy most about being The Snow Queen?

Seeing the smiles on the faces of wide-eyed little ones... and also "the young at heart!"

ClausNet: What is your most memorable Santa Claus visit?

Visiting a crippled child in her home where her parents and other family members savored the visit from Santa and The Snow Queen and were so joyous to see her reaction and to share in the love and goodness of our "connecting" with her! We were so touched.

ClausNet: Tell us about the Bill Strother and your new book about him.

I am including an excerpt from the book, as I think it answers this question best.

The following is the Introduction taken from the book:

THE REAL SANTA OF MILLER & RHOADS:
THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF BILL STROTHER.



Santa Bill Strother

“I Believe!”

“I believe, I believe...It’s silly, but I believe!”

—Miracle on 34th Street

I recall my very young days growing up as a girl in a small Hampton Roads community known as Cradock in Portsmouth, Virginia, in the early 1950s. It was a wonderful place to spend my formative years. I remember especially the sweet Christmases with our blue spruce tree decked out with the huge multicolored lights and the strands of silver tinsel that had to be hung tediously one by one, according to the instructions of my dad, Mike Strother.

Of course, our dear mom, Evelyn Strother, would offer her suggestions for the tree as well, but her seasonal expertise was wrapping holiday packages and making the delicious Christmas goodies we savored. The finished tree symbol that my sister, Judy, and I had proudly helped decorate and that we thought was so lovely because it “glistened” was erected in the corner of our family room in our modest home on Dahlgren Avenue.

Our house was not big by today’s standards, but it was the kind of house any child would be proud to call home, especially in the 1950s following the tumultuous years of World War II. It was a white, two-storied house with dark green shutters and a white picket fence. There were a few times at Christmas that I recall it snowed, unusual for the eastern section of Virginia, and looking back on those times today, they remind me of the snowy scenes in the classic holiday film *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Indeed, for me, it was “a wonderful life!” And Christmastime brought the visit from the Santa Claus—an event that was so special and so anticipated by me and my family.

Christmas for us was the celebration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and we knew that the true reason for the season was to honor him. And we knew that Santa Claus, sometimes known, too, as St. Nick or Father Christmas, visited good little girls’ and boys’ homes at this festive time of year, specifically on Christmas Eve. The excitement of his annual arrival created much enthusiasm and exuberance—bordering on frenzy in our household. With the exception of Christmas Eve, the one merry holiday event that evoked pure glee from me and my sister and, later, our little brother, John, was the visit to Santaland at the downtown Miller & Rhoads department store in Richmond.

The capital of the Commonwealth of Virginia, located only one hundred miles or two hours from our Tidewater home, was a destination location for all folks seeking the “Real Santa.” Devoted followers in Virginia, and neighboring States, absolutely knew that this Santa Claus was the embodiment of all that is just, right and good. This Santa, our Santa, held court at the famous department store on 517 East Broad Street in the 1940s and 1950s. He had declared that Miller & Rhoads was his home away from the North Pole during Christmas, and he had endeared everyone to him since he took up residence at the popular retailer in the early 1940s.

This Santa Claus was the real deal. Since he first came down the chimney in Santaland in 1942 and made his grand entrance into Santaland on the seventh floor, he magically connected with his audience of jubilant children, happy adults and anyone who simply wanted to be a recipient of the joy he exuded. Besides his gregarious but mild-mannered disposition, his somewhat stocky build and his smiling eyes, one simple fact made him so convincing and believable—he addressed each child by name. We knew he must be the real Santa.

We, the children, knew he was the genuine St. Nicholas from our childhood stories. And, better still, he truly believed he was Santa Claus. This man, Bill Strother, was not only was the beloved Santa of my childhood, but we were also related. My father always said we were, but I did not know for certain until my sister traced our family lineage and discovered that our family and Bill Strother are from the same direct Jeremiah Strother line.

Indeed, he was the Santa Claus in that era for a multitude of children. But there was much more to this man, this almost bigger-than-life individual. Before he donned the red suit and listened to the hearts’ desires of giddy little ones with his warm, infectious smile, he already had lived an amazing, out-of-the-ordinary life.

-Donna Strother Deekens

ClausNet: What' was it like at Miller and Rhodes during the Christmas Season?

A “magical wonderland” ~ not only in Santaland on the Seventh floor ~ but throughout the flagship store in downtown Richmond, VA.

ClausNet: What are your upcoming plans for The Christmas Season?

I have been extremely busy doing book signings in Richmond and parts of Virginia, and also North Carolina. My last book event is December 22, and after that, I will be able to enjoy a little “down time” with my family.

ClausNet: Do you have a favorite Snow Queen gig?

Anytime I am interacting with children is a very special time and a favorite “gig.” But, it is especially fun and “magical” for me if I am singing! I feel I am at my best!

ClausNet: What is your Dream gig?

Appearing in a national Christmas event such as the Macy’s parade or the lighting of the national Christmas tree in Washington, D.C., and also singing at the event, if possible!

ClausNet: What keeps you busy when you are not being the Snow Queen or writing books?

I am the owner/party director of a traveling tea party business, “Teapots, Treats & Traditions,” and host specialized tea parties for children and adult ladies’ groups.

ClausNet: What are your hobbies / interests?

Singing, acting, writing, antiquing.

ClausNet: What is your favorite color?

Pink!

ClausNet: What are your favorite foods?

Chocolate, cheese, coffee, Chinese” food, “comfort foods” such as soups and pizzas.

ClausNet: Coke or Pepsi?

Coke

ClausNet: What is your favorite cookie?

Chocolate Chip

ClausNet: What is your favorite movie?

Casablanca

ClausNet: Do you have a favorite Christmas movie?

Miracle on 34th Street



Santa and the Snow Queen - 1972



Santa and the Snow Queen today

ClausNet: What is your favorite Christmas song?

"Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas"

ClausNet: What was the last book that you read?

The Prophet

ClausNet: What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

More concentration on my acting

ClausNet: What profession would you not like to attempt?

Medical Doctor

ClausNet: What were some of your favorite toys as a child?

Madame Alexander Dolls; Costumes for "dress-up"



Donna and her older sister Judy with Santa Bill.

ClausNet: What is your most memorable experience of Santa while growing up?

His genuine nature and believability and the fact that indeed he was "The Real Santa!" He was so beautiful, both inside and out!

ClausNet: What is the hardest question you've gotten as the Snow Queen and what was your response?

The children do not ask the Snow Queen questions, usually. She asks the children questions such as if they have been good, and what is it they want for Christmas. The Snow Queen is the preview to the main event ~ the visit to see Santa Claus! She attempts to be calming and reassuring to the children before they go up to see Santa.

ClausNet: Is there a Santa or Santas, besides Bill Strother, over the years that you admire or has inspired you?

Can you tell us a little bit about them? I have had the pleasure of working with many Santas over the years, but all of the Santa Clauses I worked with at Miller & Rhoads (four of them) were the most devoted and inspiring.

ClausNet: What advice can you give to a first time Santa or Mrs. Claus?

Talk to the child as if he or she is the most important person in the world at that moment. Do not go into being Santa Claus for the money, but for the passion of giving and sharing your love and embracing the joy of Christmas!

ClausNet: Anything else you would like to add?

For me, the most rewarding part of being The Snow Queen is I feel I have received more from children and "the young at heart" than I can ever give back in return. It is a cherished gift.

ClausNet: Thanks Donna!

To purchase a copy of Donna Strother Deekens' new book: THE REAL SANTA OF MILLER & RHOADS: THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF BILL STROTHER...please visit her website at

<http://www.snowqueenmagic.com/>



Charles W. Howard

Legendary Santa Claus Conference

April 16, 17, 18, and 19, 2015
Albion, New York



Santa Claus Oath Foundation
Preserving the History and Legend of Santa Claus



Charles W. Howard and Santa student - 1961

Charles W. Howard was a talented man who touched the lives of millions of people around the world. He is most known as being the creator and dean of the world's first Santa Claus School and appearing in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade; but, Charlie was a lot more than just his Santa persona. Throughout his life, he had a wide variety of interests that blended together to help make him a truly unique individual.

His list of endeavors includes making handmade toys at the Medina Toy Factory, creating the world's largest apple pie, organizing county fair exhibits, creating his own Ice cream recipe, and a strong participation in community theatre. The village of Albion, New York was Charlie's home. He was born in Albion, married in Albion, raised a family in Albion and created magic from Albion that spread the world over. No matter where Charlie traveled, Albion was always carried in his heart and he always lovingly promoted his hometown.

Charlie's partner in life was his wife Ruth. Together they formed a remarkable couple who supported each other in good times and rough times. Ruth was Charlie's strength and she contributed to his successes in so many ways. It was her needle and thread that created his Santa suits. It was her devotion to their dreams that kept her husband's creative energies flowing. Ruth also sacrificed many things. As Charlie traveled each Christmas Season, she stayed in Albion to run the household and monitor Christmas Park.

Charlie and Ruth had two children William and Gale. The Howards taught their children the values of family, honesty, and friendship. William and Gale were raised in the same farm house that had been in the Howard family for over 100 years. The community of Albion would be hard pressed to find a more loving family than the Howards.

Besides being a family man with a creative spirit, Charlie was a man who lived each day with the goal of bringing a little bit of happiness to others. He did everything from the Heart. Charlie once stated that Santa Claus enters though the heart...Well the spirit of love and kindness that he exhibited in his life enters though the heart also. So we honor and remember Charlie at the Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference with local community leaders, friends, family, and ...the four people, Charles, Jane, Doug, and Susan... who simply knew him as Grandpa.

Greetings!

Charles W. Howard was truly an American original. He was born on June 15, 1896 in the house that he would live in his entire life. As a boy he did chores on the family farm and had little time to play, but when he did his imagination would take him to far off magical places. As an adult he got to travel all over the country making magical memories for others. No matter how or where Howard roamed, his heart and home were always in Albion, New York.

Howard's Santa career is that of a Legend. He first played Santa Claus in a 4th grade school play. Later as a young man, he played Santa for his church and was asked to help out a friend by being Santa in a store front window display in a local furniture store. These experiences prompted Howard to think about what Santa meant to the children. During the course of the next few years, Howard continued to think about the Santa experiences and the smiles it brought to children's faces. In November 1935, Charles W. Howard took a step with fate and officially embarked on a career as Santa Claus in a Rochester department store.

Howard would become famous portraying Santa Claus over the next 30 years. In 1937 he founded the world's first Santa Claus School at his farmhouse in Albion after a local newspaper reporter suggested he train others to handle the demand for his services. The next year he gave his growing fame a boost by teaching Santa classes in Santa Claus, Indiana. Eventually he would teach students from all over the country and became one of the most sought after Santas in the nation. Howard eventually appeared at department stores in Buffalo, Kansas City, and Dallas during different times in his career.

In the late 1940s, Howard started to convert three large barns on his farm into what became Christmas Park. This small attraction became known all over the Northeastern United States. Part of his concept in creating Christmas Park was to give the Santa Claus School a working campus with a classroom, dressing rooms, and extensive props to help better educate the student Santas.

In 1948 he became Santa for the Macy's Parade in New York City and continued with the Parade until 1965. His Santa career led to appearances on television, in magazines, and newspapers; including: What's my Line, To Tell the Truth, The Tonight Show, Life Magazine, and The Saturday Evening Post. He was also hired as a consultant for Miracle on 34th Street.

Howard's life cannot be captured in his Santa work alone. As a young boy he got a coping saw as a gift. His woodworking skills eventually led him to handcraft toys for the Medina Toy Company. Making toys was just one of Howard's passions. Always one with a sweet tooth, he developed his own ice cream recipe and went into business with Howard's Ice Cream.

Howard was well known for his work in the Albion community. He belonged to many civic organizations, served on many social committees, and was a member of the First United Methodist Church. Howard was also very active in many regional theatre productions. He wrote, directed, and starred in many plays and reviews in Western New York State. His work with county and state fairs was also extensive. Efforts to publicize the produce of local farmers led Howard to make the world's largest apple pie and build a scale replica of Niagara Falls with apple juice.

Whether he was promoting one of his many projects or being Santa Claus, Howard never forgot what was really important. He was first and foremost Charles W. Howard... a son, a husband, father, grandfather, church elder, friend, and community minded citizen. He loved his family, his friends, his town, and he loved to smile and make people happy. Sadly, Howard passed away on May 1, 1966 at the age of 69.

During his life, Charles W. Howard never forgot the little boy inside himself that smiled at the world. He thought everyone should smile and nothing gave him more pleasure than when he could bring a smile to the face of another person, especially a child. It was a simple gift that he gave to everyone he met.

We invite you to join the Howard Family and the Santa Claus Oath Committee at the Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference in Albion, New York in April of 2015.

Sincerely,

Phillip L. Wenz

Phillip L. Wenz

Welcome - The Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference is open to all who wish to participate no matter what your association is with any Santa group or organization. Presented as an interactive forum instead of a school, the event is designed to complement other existing Santa seminars, schools, and gatherings. The Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference is presented and is produced free of charge to the Santa Claus Community by the Santa Claus Oath Foundation. Just pay for your personal lodging...if needed, your food, and your travel expenses.

The Conference is not a "Santa" convention or a for profit organization - The Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference has been designed as a community wide event in the town of Albion, New York. Unlike any previous large Santa gatherings where a certain footprint designed has been used...i.e. Branson, Missouri or Gatlinburg, Tennessee; the Conference will take place in and around the town of Albion. We encourage all attendees to explore Charles W. Howard hometown and enjoy the unique history that can only be found in Albion, New York! Since there is no fee to attend the Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference, there is no money exchanging hands to any Santa organization. Attendees spend their money only as they see fit to do so.

How it is possible for the Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference to be a Free Event? - Why there are certain costs to the Conference that the Santa Claus Oath Foundation is covering, the majority of the event is being provided by Conference Partners and Sponsors.

Film Crews - Since the Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference is a free event and open to all Santas and Mrs. Clauses, various film crews will be filming all or part of the activities. Plus the general media will be allowed at the event. Note: At no time has the Santa Claus Oath Foundation accepted any monies, funds, or any type of gratuities from any social, network, media or film organizations/companies.

Vendors - The Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference appreciates the vendors that serve the Santa Claus Community and it our pleasure to say thank you with *free vendor spaces*. We value the products and services that individual businesses bring to the Santas at the many gatherings they attend. *We also feel that charging a fee for a vendor space to sell their goods and services is not necessary.* The Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference Vendors Area features Santa suits, wig and whisker sets, Mrs. Claus outfits, Christmas props, Santa Schools information, marketing opportunities, photographic agencies, and much, much more! To register for your vendors space please contact Santa Bob Elkin at 813-230-9254 or e-mail santa@santatb.com

Thank You - The Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference is the Santa Claus Oath Foundation's way of giving back and saying thank you to all Santas, Mrs. Clauses, and helpers for the Christmas magic they create for children of all ages. We are presenting this free as we have been very fortunate to be able to have a great network of people that believe in giving back. It has been our pleasure to help plan this Conference and to produce the production aspects of it. Albion, New York is a very special place and is such an historic place for the Santa community. No other town in North America, with the exception of Santa Claus, Indiana, has as much rich history as Albion, New York. We hope you enjoy your visit to Charles W. Howard's hometown. Thank you for this opportunity for us to give back to the Santa Claus world that we all treasure so very much.

Official Accommodations – Special rates have been secured at the following hotels;

[Clarion Hotel Batavia](#) 8250 Park Road Batavia, New York 14020; phone 585-344-2100 (password Santa Charlie – rate \$99.00 per night) 100 rooms non-smoking (Double-Double) Thursday 4/16, check out Sunday 4/19.

[Holiday Inn Express Batavia](#) 4356 Commerce Drive Batavia, New York 14020; phone 585-344-0001 (password Charles Howard Santas – rate \$99.95 per night - Continental Breakfast included) 30 rooms non-smoking (Double-Double) Thursday 4/16, check out Monday 4/20. Can add more rooms when these are booked.

[Best Western Batavia](#) 8210 Park Road Batavia, New York, 14020; phone: 585-344-8882 (password Santa Charlie rate \$89.00 for King and \$79.00 for Double-Double per night- Continental Breakfast included) 10 rooms of each Thursday 4/16, check out Monday 4/20.

Event Registration – Registration is easy...simply e-mail Santa Everett Johnson at tnsantaclaus@aol.com with you real name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and who will be attending with you.

Agenda – The full agenda is currently in the final stages of preparation. Basic outline is as follows; April 16th arrive and check in, vendors show, and activities. April 17th and 18th full day activities and vendors show. April 19th special church service, vendors show, and check out. Complete agenda will be made released as soon as possible.

Location, Airports, Albion Accommodations, Restaurants, Attractions, and Places of Interest



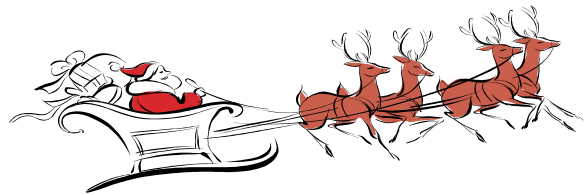
Albion is a village in Orleans County, New York. It is located midway between the cities of Buffalo and Rochester in Western New York State.

The town is located north of [Interstate 90 on NY Route 98](#).

The Christmas Park Property is located just east of downtown on NY Route 31 at Phipps Road.

Airports near Albion include [Buffalo Niagara International](#) and [Greater Rochester International](#).

Local accommodations [Dollinger's Motel and Dollinger's Motor Inn – Albion](#).



[Local restaurants](#) include many fine family owned establishments and national chains.

Attractions-

[Cobblestone Society Museum](#)
[Orleans County New York](#)

Places of Interest-

[Mount Albion National Cemetery](#) is the final resting place of Charles W. Howard and many of the Howard family members. Information on visiting the grave site will be available at the Ceremony at Christmas Park with requested rules of etiquette set forth by the family and Mount Albion cemetery officials. Thanks you in advance for your cooperation.



Albion Public School System

Beautiful Anderson Auditorium will be the home for the Charles W. Howard Legendary Santa Claus Conference. The state of the art facility seat 750 on its main floor and balcony. The vendor show will be located in the gymnasium and will have space for 100 Santa Claus Community Industry related vendors and regional crafters who deal in Christmas type items.



Merry Christmas Everyone.....This is my favorite time of the year.

This is my favorite time of the year and being in my twilight years, the “Spirit of Christmas” is all the more cherished in memories of the past and present.



I have previously mentioned in my writings of growing up in Cleveland, Ohio and how watching the movie, a “Christmas Story” is reminiscent of my own childhood. Growing up in Cleveland you knew we would most certainly have snow on Christmas Day. It would be cold and our Moms wouldn’t let us out of the house unless we were bundled up in clothes looking like an Eskimo.

There’s something about the quietness of falling snow that brings a silent calm, which is hard to describe, unless you have experienced it. Sometimes, the stillness is broken by the snapping of a tree branch, unable to sustain the weight of the snow upon its outstretched limbs. The monotonous scraping of a snow shovel against the pavement or the occasional bark of a dog bring warm memories of my childhood.

I remember the first Christmas my wife and I spent together, which was in Tampa, Florida. That first Christmas we were poor, away from home, and missing the traditions we knew so well. I awoke early and looking out our window viewed a landscape distorted by an extremely heavy fog. I called my wife to the open door and said, “Look it almost looks like we’re back home.” It may well have been our circumstances however; the fog viewed through squinting eyes was reminiscent of a snowy landscape.

No matter where you live, Christmas Time brings back memories and an atmosphere of happiness. Have you noticed strangers are more receptive to saying hello or neighbors waving their hand to you? Wouldn’t it be nice if every day could bring this magical feeling into our lives?

Unfortunately, when the tree lights are dimmed and Christmas Day is over, the holiday atmosphere clears. About six pm, the radio has gone back to hip hop programing and the advertising begins for after Christmas sales. There’s something about the abruptness in which Christmas ends which leaves us wanting. It’s like the parting of a dear friend knowing it will be awhile before you see them again.

As Santas and helpers we have the greatest opportunity to spread good will beyond the end of the season and into the coming year. Let’s be quick to give a cheery hello and great big smile to those we meet. It’s contagious and I’ll bet you will spread happiness from one person to another. Let’s become “Good Will Ambassadors” of the North Pole!

Let’s celebrate the meaning of Christmas every day of the year

I wish you all a most wonderful Christmas. May you be filled with the Spirit of Christmas and be surrounded by those you love. Christmas Day closes this year’s season however may the joy, laughter and happiness you have brought to so many, live in your memory and warm your heart every day of the year. Merry Christmas Everyone!

Santa Lou is the creator of the Legendary Santas Mentoring Program and may be contacted at
www.lengendarysantasmentoringprog.com

A person you should know...Carol Myers

Carol Myers is the person behind St. Nicholas Center and the creator of www.stnicholascenter.org. She's also developed the Center's traveling exhibit and the display and activity kits available for use by churches, schools and organizations.

She first became interested in St. Nicholas when her children were small. She wanted them to understand that Santa Claus had been a real person—a real person who served God and gave gifts to help others. She hoped that understanding who Santa really was would help them connect faith and giving. And, just maybe, it would help avoid some seasonal greed.

Living in Holland, Michigan, she added Dutch touches to her St. Nicholas Day. On the evening of December 5th, her three children put their wooden shoes, filled with carrots, on the hearth. In the morning the boys would find two matchbox cars and a mesh bag of gold Dutch chocolate coins. Her daughter might find a piece of jewelry or special barrettes. Simple things, but they brightened an Advent day and gave an opportunity to talk about St. Nicholas.

She wanted to have a figurine of the good bishop for St. Nicholas Day. But there wasn't one to be found. Years went by with no success (this was before Santa collecting had become popular and different kinds of Santas were hard to come by). In the early 1980s she finally found a corn husk St. Nicholas in a half-price bin. She purchased several—for friends who also celebrated the good saint. He was okay, but not quite what she really wanted. And so the search continued. As time passed, many wonderful Bishops Nicholas have been found—and that is how it all began. She often said, had the first one been different, he might have also been the last one!



Believe it or not!

“Xmas” came into general use from the church! X is the Greek letter Chi, which is the first letter of Christ’s name in – so “Xmas” is every bit as religious as “Christmas.”

The cross so overshadowed the manger-and the resurrection so overshadowed the incarnation-that neither scripture nor tradition has passed down a firm date for Christmas.

Christmas didn’t gain widespread recognition among Christians until quite recently. In some protestant-dominated areas, such as the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the celebration of Christmas was even legally banned!

As late as the last century, Christmas wasn’t even a legal holiday! This explains why nineteenth-century readers found it credible that Scrooge could require Cratchit to come to work on Christmas Day and why in the nineteenth century the US Congress could meet on Christmas Day.

Alabama was the first in 1836.

A caroling we will go!

Christmas carols began as an old English custom called “wassailing,” in which one would toast their neighbors to a long life. So when you sing Christmas carols, you’rebringing joy AND wishing good health to everyone you come across!

“Jingle Bells” was originally written for a Thanksgiving Celebration.

It was also the first song to be sung in space–on December 16, 1965 by astronauts Tom Stafford and Wally Schirra.

After “A Christmas Carol,” Charles Dickens wrote other Christmas stories annually–although none would be as successful as the first.

Santa Claus is Comin’ to Town!

Due to international time zones, our modern day Santa Claus actually has 31 hours to deliver presents to all the children of the world.

But to do so, he’ll need to travel at a rate of 4,796,250 MPH! So that’s how he does it!

Saint Nicholas Day (December 6) was the traditional day for giving gifts to children. It is still the day on which children receive gifts from St. Nicholas in the Netherlands.

Santa Claus is the American pronunciation of Sinter Klaas, which was colloquial Dutch for Saint Nicholas.

Christmas Tree, Oh Christmas Tree...

The Christmas tree is a Christianized pagan custom that originated in Germany. German settlers introduced it in America. It became popular during the nineteenth century, and then later spread to Britain and Japan from the US.

The world’s largest Christmas tree was a Douglas Fir standing 221 feet tall! It was displayed at the Northgate Mall right here in Seattle in 1950. We sure know how to do Christmas right in the Pacific Northwest! Can you imagine all the tinsel?

Franklin Pierce was the first president to place a Christmas tree in the White House.

International Santa Claus Hall of Fame



The Santa Claus Hall of Fame is an ongoing project that studies, celebrates, and preserves the historical documentation of the many men and women who have greatly contributed to the Legend of Santa Claus. The Hall is dedicated to Nicholas of Myra, the 4th century bishop known for his great deeds of generosity. His true life story is the basis for the Santa Claus Legend. Inductees for the Santa Claus Hall of Fame can be nominated by various sources. Many come from the professional Santa Claus community and their many on-line social groups. Others come from department stores, shopping centers, chambers of commerce, and families of the deceased. Nominations are then reviewed and researched for accuracy.

The nomination procedure can take up to 18 months to be verified, reviewed and to be delivered to committee for the selection process. Once a year, each December, the successful candidates will be announced and enshrined into the Santa Claus Hall of Fame. www.santaclaushalloffame.com

International Santa Claus Hall of Fame Class of 2014



Bruce Templeton



James F. Martin



Sam Militello



Haddon Sudblom



Ron Robertson



Tim Cavender

Class of 2014

Bruce Templeton
"Rotary International Santa"
St. John's, Newfoundland
1945-Current

For over 35 years, Bruce Templeton has enjoyed assisting Santa and St. Nicholas in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada. Each year, with a team of helpers from the business community of his area, a massive good will operation takes place. With over 50 visits, starting with the Santa Claus Parade and ending on Christmas Eve in the Children's Hospital, Bruce is pivotal to the collecting of over 20 tons of food. With the assistance of his helpers, he works to fly 18 children on a real plane to meet Santa in the North Pole. Seventeen of the children are selected by a radio station and one child is selected from the hospital, as this will likely be his or her last Christmas. As volunteer Santa, all revenue and a portion of revenue from the sale of his memoirs (*The Man in the Red Suit* and *The Man with the White Beard*) goes to Rotary International and has bought polio vaccines for more than 240,000 children in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria.

James F. Martin
"Santa Claus Postmaster"
Santa Claus, Indiana
1874-1935

The first post office in Santa Claus, Indiana, opened in 1856. However, the town became famous under the direction of its fourteenth postmaster, James F. Martin. In 1914, Martin began to answer the letters addressed to Santa Claus that were received from children. Because of this act of kindness, people began to flock to this little Indiana town – so much so that in the early 1930s the United States Postal Department unsuccessfully sought to change the name of the town. Martin and the town of Santa Claus even caught the attention of cartoonist Robert Ripley and appeared in his "Believe It or Not" column in the 1930s. In the early days, Martin would sometimes dress in the famous red suit to the delight of post office patrons who flocked in for that special postmark. Today, a non-profit organization called Santa's Elves, Inc. carry on the wonderful tradition; keeping James F. Martin's and the town of Santa Claus' historic legacy alive.

Sam Militello
"Santa Suits and Reindeer"
St. Clair, Michigan
1948-Current

For over 30 years, Sam Militello has been entertaining the heart of childhood as Santa Claus. Sam has enjoyed the chance to visit with thousands of children along the way. A veteran of both print and media appearances, Sam has appeared often in America's Thanksgiving Day Parade, traveling through the streets of downtown Detroit via sleigh and reindeer. For over a decade Sam assisted with the launching of the Good Fellows annual charity drive, as well as Toys for Tots and other local charities. Through it all he has brought his own unique character to the red suit. Sam is also the owner of Santa and Co. LLC, which is the producer of the original Santa Claus suit – as designed by Charles W. Howard, made famous by Howard's Santa Claus School, and continues the tradition from Elizabeth W. Babcock. To date, the suit has been featured in media, print, and on countless Santas around the world. Sam also raises and tours as Santa with his own reindeer.

Class of 2014

Haddon Sundblom
"Coca-Cola Santa"
Chicago, Illinois
1899-1976

Since the artist known as "Sunny" painted the iconic Santa Clauses for the Coca-Cola Company, beginning back in the 1930s, Santa portrayals the world over had tried to emulate the iconic look that he created. Born to a Swedish family, Haddon Sundblom studied his craft at the American Academy of Art. From there he began to create paintings with such warmth and style that he was a natural choice for many advertising agencies and products, including Coca-Cola. Sundblom's Santa solidified the modern image of Santa Claus. In classic red and white, his larger than life representation of the warm, gentle Santa was different to the other interpretations of the time. These vibrant, lifelike paintings were an instant hit with the general public. Though he is most remembered for these wonderful illustrations, he also created Sprite Boy for the Coca-Cola Company and the famous Quaker Oats Man. For his works, Haddon Sundblom has a solid place as one of the 20th Century's most influential painters of popular culture.

Ron Robertson
"Santa Claus Emeritus"
San Juan Capistrano, California
1943-Current

With a resume as long as Santa's List, Ron Robertson has been the embodiment in every type of media from print to film. In advertisements for Best Buy, Pet Smart, Rosetta Stone, and the Travel Channel to guest spots in series such as "Castle," "The Mentalist" and "The Tonight Show", Ron's natural, gentle manner and jovial smile are perfect for the camera and on screen. But there is a deeper side of Ron, a man who holds such high regard for the role of Santa Claus and the traditions linked to him that he is willing to share and to educate his fellow Santas. Ron is Director and President Emeritus of the International Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas. In that capacity he has stood not only for excellence in the portrayal of Santa Claus among that body of Kringles, but for excellence throughout the entire Santa Claus community. An advocate for the traditions of Santa Claus, Ron is willing to share his love and attention to the character with all who wear the red suit.

Tim Cavender
"Ball Ground's premier Santa"
Ball Ground, Georgia
1958-Current

Georgia native Tim Cavender first put on the red suit when he was fourteen years old. Since then, Tim (whose wife Pam is ever by his side as Mrs. Claus) has devoted himself to an authentic and loving portrayal of the Jolly Old Elf. Every year he devotes much of his time to local charities, Toys for Tots, and a canned food drive for a local television station. From parades and work with photographers to the annual tree lighting at the Governor's Mansion, Tim carries two integral traits with him – his love and concern for children and a deeply rooted faith in the Reason for the Season. Tim is not only a giver to the children and community that he serves as Santa but he is also a giver to the brotherhood of Santa Clauses as well. Driven by his own childhood experience with a less than magical interpretation of Santa, Tim has a desire to share the best possible image of the Jolly Old Elf. The need for preserving and defending the image of Santa Claus is something that he also shares with fellow Santas and has brought him many admirers within the brotherhood.

An Excerpt from "The Christmas Park Story" circa 1960.

Santa Clothed As He Should Be-And so it began. A Santa Claus School founded on the deep-rooted belief that Santa Claus could surmount the difficulties of ignorance, absurdity and disbelief . . . and surmount them he did. The School was a success! But training Santa was not enough. Charles Howard was next faced with outfitting and equipping his "graduates". How?

When the Santa Claus School began, Santa outfits were of light, shoddy red fabric. Sleazy velvets, cotton cambries, cotton batting trims. Masquerade outfits that made Santa look like a comic character. Typically, Charles Howard set about drawing up specifications for a Santa suit that would do justice to the men he trained in his School. The outfit must be handsome and of high quality. His man must look as well as feel the part. Santa was a character of dignity, a man of years and wisdom, a rugged outdoors man who dealt daily with reindeer, multitudinous gifts, and physical labors. Velvet? Satin? Howard thought it was silly to outfit Santa in a fabric of the aristocracy. Santa was neither Lord nor Prince, King nor Ruler. Santa was a man of the people. The fabric was to be wool . . . rugged, heavy enough for outdoor appearances, practical and handsome. Red wool of a shade exactly right for Christmas . . . neither maroon nor orange, but a vivid scarlet that would typify Santa as all children pictured him. And the lining would be of a firm silk that would withstand Santa's long appearances indoors and out.

So the fabric was determined, the color, and the practicality. Now for the trimming. White fur -- wide and generous. Howard winced at the narrow white bindings on ordinary suits. White fur six inches wide used for a lavish shawl collar, for an all-around border, circling the sleeves. Details were carefully developed for comfort. Rubber bands to keep the sleeves tight (for warmth outdoors, for appearances each time Santa moved an arm). A wide patent leather belt with a polished aluminum buckle. Leather boots of a simple design or boot tops to withstand any weather. All in all the finished turnout was handsome, dignified, strong, commanding . . . a storybook Santa suit to leave youngsters wide-eyed.

It was the make-up that presented the most serious problem. The usual false faces terrified children and nearly smothered the Santas who were brave enough to wear them. Charles Howard began endless experiments with wigs and beards. His specifications were rigid. It must look natural; it must be easy to keep clear; easy to curl; easy to comb; comfortable to wear. He found human hair too expensive, nylon and synthetics too perishable and too hot to wear. Finally, Yak hair filled the bill. Light, fluffy, and white. Easy to handle, practical to maintain . . . the wig and beard problems were settled.

At last the School for Santas pridefully displayed a Santa outfit that was natural and convincing, completely comfortable and happily long wearing. An outfit so well made, so carefully constructed, of such materials that it would withstand cleanings and emerge looking next to new. It was expensive but worth it. Each was painstakingly made-to-order for Charles Howard had not anticipated what would happen next.

Fame Spreads-Amos Parrish, one of the most famous figures in retailing, upset all of Howard's happily settled systems. He invited him to make an appearance at his 1948 Executive Clinic to be attended by store managers from all over the country. Howard traveled to New York's Waldorf Astoria, appeared in costume, and talked for some thirty minutes of his Santa beliefs. His audience of hard-headed merchants, most of whom had regarded Santa either as a joke or a necessary evil, listened with rapt attention. Here was a man who made Santa real, heartwarming, and believable. Not only that here was a man who made cash registers ring and cemented public relations. Howard's ovation was tumultuous. But the real clamor came when buyers stormed the platform with orders for his Santa suit. Who made his outfit? Where could they get one? How much was it? How soon could he deliver? Suddenly the Albion Santa School was firmly entrenched in the business of supplying not only Santas, but Santa equipment and Santa suits!



Elizabeth W. Babcock of Albion, New York took over the Christmas Park Suit Business in 1965. Currently it is run by Sam Militello of Santa & Co LLC in St. Clair, Michigan.

Materials were stocked, hair imported from China, leather secured from a firm that for generations had made theatrical footwear for the Ringling-Barnum-Bailey Circus. Metal buckles came from a Long Island silversmith, bindings from varied sources. And all was delivered to seamstresses, who following special patterns and instructions, worked with pride and zeal for they were no ordinary workers. Each woman was enlisted for her special talents and knowing the high standards and special qualities, she stitched far more than fur and fabric. Into each garment was sewn a spirit and a contribution to the Santa legend that the School proudly fostered.

Today the list of customers for Santa outfits reads like the blue book of retailing. J.L.Hudson, Altman, Gimbel, Hecht D.H.Holmes, Higbee, Abraham and Strauss, and scores more. Many a store has twenty suits in use. Many a store outfits the main building and numerous branches, regular and relief Santas, keeps outfits in constant circulation for store and public appearances. The Santa suit business has become a major branch of the Christmas Park enterprises for the making and selling of equipment led to the establishment of an auxiliary service section.

One Thing Leads To Another-The stores started it with requests for refurbishing and replacement. Who could clean a Santa suit? Who would replace a fur border? Who would renew a wig and beard? Albion inevitably became a service center, a year-round capitol for renewing and reviving Santa apparel for equipping and outfitting. Today, scores of stores ship Santa suits to Albion for storage, cleaning, renewal and repair. The work is done by skilled experts. When a Santa pulls some fifty thousand children across his lap his suit, come Christmas, is sadly in need of attention. It emerges refreshed and renewed. Fur fluffed, fabric cleaned, replacements and repairs put it in perfect condition. Then it is stored to await Santa's coming the next year. Such a complete one-stop Santa Service is a boon to department stores all over the country who are thus relieved of work and worry and most of all, saved loss and hazard at the hands of unskilled workers or cleaners who do not know the intricacies of handling Santa suits.

Quite naturally, the introduction of the Albion Santa suit led to other Santa equipment ideas. Today Christmas Park supplies an outfit for "Mrs. Santa", for Santa's helpers (young girls who assist Santa, looking charming in their blending frocks), special Santa stationery, a Santa guest book, files for children's letters, mailboxes and more. Each is authentic, each is the result of research and the meticulous standards Charles Howard has applied to every phase of his Santa Claus domain.

The once expensive Santa Claus equipment is now, thanks to large-scale production, available to stores, shops, supermarkets, clubs, lodges, organizations, schools everywhere. Cheap? Howard will be the first to tell you that you can undercut his prices, obtain a far less expensive Santa suit . . . at the outset. But, in the long run, no one has been able to produce a finer, more inexpensive suit when it is measured in terms of success and results. A Christmas Park suit is used and reused, looks well to the last appearance. If ever the term "best is the best buy" were true it is in the case of good Santa equipment. The shrewd buyers who pick for big stores, who seek and compare, check and recheck have established the economy of quality, the special quality of an Albion Santa Suit! And that quality, that dedication to the finest is one of Howard's most treasured boasts.

The True Gift of Christmas

*What started two thousand years ago with a gift from above,
was given to all mankind with unconditional love.
It was given to all who would accept its mysterious beauty and joy,
when a young mother gave birth to a little baby boy.*

*The little boy's life was like no other ever recorded on stone, paper or clay;
he taught us many a lesson on life as he went through his days.
During his Passion he fully gave of himself to all others,
as he laid down the gift of his life for the sins of his sisters and brothers.*

*Long ago his birth was made a day of mass and commemoration,
which is celebrated by men, women, and children of every nation.
His simple birth is a reminder of what is true, pure, and believed;
that it is genuinely better to give than to receive.*

*Centuries have come and gone; with man adding secular traditions to his birth;
there are Santas, sleigh bells, candy canes and gatherings with much mirth.
Sometimes we forget what was given from above,
Keep CHRIST in CHRISTMAS; THE TRUE GIFT OF GOD'S LOVE.*

-Phillip L. Wenz

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