

Coca-Cola® and Santa Claus

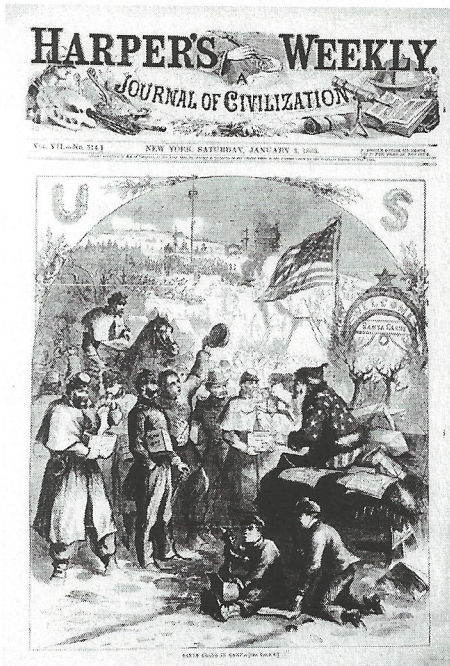
Taken from www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/cokelore_santa.html

Most people can agree on what Santa Claus looks like -- jolly, with a red suit and a white beard. But he did not always look that way, and Coca-Cola® advertising actually helped shape this modern-day image of Santa.

Before the 1931 introduction of the Coca-Cola Santa Claus created by artist Haddon Sundblom, the image of Santa ranged from big to small and fat to tall. Santa even appeared as an elf and looked a bit spooky.

Through the centuries, Santa Claus has been depicted as everything from a tall gaunt man to an elf. He has worn a bishop's robe and a Norse huntsman's animal skin. The modern-day Santa Claus is a combination of a number of the stories from a variety of countries.

The Civil War cartoonist Thomas Nast drew Santa Claus for Harper's Weekly in 1862; Santa was shown as a small elf-like figure who supported the Union. Nast continued to draw Santa for 30 years and along the way changed the color of his coat from tan to the now traditional red. Though some people believe the Coca-Cola Santa wears red because that is the Coke® color, the red suit comes from Nast's interpretation of St. Nick.



The Coca-Cola Company began its Christmas advertising in the 1920s with shopping-related ads in magazines like The Saturday Evening Post. The first Santa ads used a strict-looking Claus, in the vein of Thomas Nast.

At this time, many people thought of Coca-Cola as a drink only for warm weather. The Coca-Cola Company began a campaign to remind people that Coca-Cola was a great choice in any month. This began with the 1922 slogan "Thirst Knows No Season," and continued with a campaign connecting a true icon of winter -- Santa Claus -- with the beverage.

In 1930, artist Fred Mizen painted a department store Santa in a crowd drinking a bottle of Coke.



Archie Lee, the D'Arcy Advertising Agency executive working with The Coca-Cola Company, wanted the next campaign to show a wholesome Santa as both realistic and symbolic. In 1931, The Coca-Cola Company commissioned Michigan-born illustrator Haddon Sundblom to develop advertising images using Santa Claus -- showing Santa himself, not a man dressed as Santa, as Mizen's work had portrayed him.

For inspiration, Sundblom turned to Clement Clark Moore's 1822 poem "A Visit From St. Nicholas" (commonly called "'Twas the Night Before Christmas"). Moore's description of St. Nick led to an image of Santa that was warm, friendly, pleasantly plump and human. For the next 33 years, Sundblom painted portraits of Santa that helped to create the modern image of Santa -- an interpretation that today lives on in the minds of people of all ages, all over the world.

From 1931 to 1964, Coca-Cola advertising showed Santa delivering (and playing!) with toys, pausing to read a letter and enjoy a Coke, playing with children who stayed up to greet him and raiding the refrigerators at a number of homes. The original oil paintings Sundblom created were adapted for Coca-Cola advertising in magazines, store displays, billboards, posters, calendars and even plush dolls. Many of those items today are popular collectibles.

Sundblom continued to create new visions of Santa Claus through 1964. For decades after, Coca-Cola advertising has featured Santa's image based on Sundblom's original works.

These original paintings by Haddon Sundblom are some of the most prized pieces in the art collection of our Company's Archives Department, and have been on exhibit around the world, including at the Louvre in Paris, the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, the Isetan Department Store in Tokyo and the NK Department Store in Stockholm.

The Coca-Cola Santa has had a powerful, enduring quality that continues to resonate today. Many of the original paintings can be seen on display at World of Coca-Cola Atlanta or touring during the holiday season.