

## The History of Christmas Cards

*Christmas Card Day is December 9, 2016*



### First Christmas Card

The custom of sending Christmas cards began in Great Britain in 1843 by Sir Henry Cole. Along with his friend John Horsley, a talented commercial artist, the two devised the idea for the first Christmas card.

They began printing cards and selling them for 1 shilling, which was a lot of money in those days as was the cost of posting the cards.

The first card, pictured above, had three panels, the outer two showing people caring for the destitute with the center panel depicting a family enjoying a Christmas feast.

Sir Henry and John Horsley printed and sold approximately 1,000 Christmas cards that first year. Today, one of those original Christmas cards is extremely rare and worth thousands of dollars to a collector.

When England's new post office began public deliveries and selling stamps for a penny, Christmas cards became even more popular.

As printing methods improved, Christmas cards could be produced in large numbers and at a lower cost. In 1870 the price of sending Christmas cards dropped to half a penny, meaning even more people could send and receive them.

By the early 1900s, the custom had spread to continental Europe and had become especially popular in Germany. These early cards usually pictured the Nativity. In late Victorian times, robins and snow scenes became popular Christmas imagery.

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**Prang Christmas Card circa 1890**

Christmas Cards appeared in the United States and Canada in the late 1840s, but were very expensive. In 1875, Louis Prang, a printer who from Prussia, started mass producing Christmas cards in North America. They were an instant hit because most people could afford them.

Prang's cards featured Christmas flowers, rosy cheeked children, and, of course, Santa Claus. Within six years, Prang was selling five million cards annually, an impressive number for the time.

Today, Christmas cards have expanded to include non-religious holiday cards, Hanukkah cards, Kwanza cards, humorous cards, winter landscapes, and bygone Christmases.

Today, we celebrate Christmas Card Day, which falls in 2016 on Friday, December 9, 2016.

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**“Christmas Kitty” by mouth artist Mariam Pare’**

Since its inception 60 years ago, Mouth and Foot Painting Artists (mfpausa.com) have produced Christmas cards as well as greeting cards for all occasions.

MFPA artists have lost the use of their hands through accident, illness or birth and paint with the brush held in the mouth or with the feet.

There are more than 800 MFPA artists in 78 countries who belong to a unique worldwide art movement and commercial cause. MFPA is not a charity. These remarkable painters earn their livings selling their work through MFPA in the form of greetings cards, calendars, prints and illustrated books.

The work of MFPA artists has attracted the attention and support of former Vice President Al Gore, Queen Elizabeth, Prince Harry, actor Pierce Brosnan, and singer Tony Bennett.

Mariam Pare’ of Naperville, Ill., is one of 72 MFPA members in the U.S. She was the victim of random gun violence 20 years ago that rendered her quadriplegic. Her “Christmas Kitty” (pictured above) painting will be among twelve 2016 Christmas cards offered by MFPA.

“It’s such a joy to send or receive a Christmas card,” said Mariam. “And I think when you know you are supporting our cause when you purchase or receive an MFPA Christmas card, that joy is compounded.”