

Forward

There was a time when Christmas greetings were hand written letters of holiday expressions. Then came the Christmas Card:

The Christmas Card: Christmas cards originated in England over 150 years ago. Richard Armour wrote that "You cannot reach perfection though you try however hard to, there's always one more friend or so you should have sent a card to." Sir Henry Cole knew exactly what Armour was saying. The founder of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London had so many Christmas greetings to send that handwriting them was impossible. Yet he wanted to make his friends aware of the need to help the destitute on that holiday.

The answer: In the year 1843, Sir Henry commissioned John Calcott Horsley to paint a card showing the feeding and clothing of the poor. A center panel displayed a happy family embracing one another, sipping wine and enjoying the festivities. (So much for good intentions. The card drew criticism because showing a child enjoying a sip of wine was considered "fostering the moral corruption of children.") "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You" was printed on that first card. Legend says Sir Henry didn't send any cards the following year, but the custom became popular anyway.

Holiday cards designed by Kate Greenaway, the Victorian children's writer and illustrator and Frances Brundage and Ellen H. Clapsaddle, were favorites in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Most were elaborate, decorated with fringe, silk and satin. Some were shaped liked fans and crescents; others were cut into the shapes of bells, birds, candles and even plum puddings. Some folded like maps or fitted together as puzzles; other squealed or squeaked. Pop-up Cards reveled tiny mangers or skaters with flying scarves gliding around a mirrored pond.

For more than 30 years, Americans had to import greeting cards from England. In 1875, Louis Prang, a German immigrant to the U.S., opened a lithographic shop with \$250 and published the first line of U.S. Christmas cards. His initial creations featured flowers and birds, unrelated to the Christmas scene. By 1881, Prang was producing more than five million Christmas cards each year. His Yuletide greetings began to feature snow scenes, fir trees, glowing fireplaces and children playing with toys. His painstaking craftsmanship and lithographic printing have made his cards a favorite of collectors today. Christmas Cards have changed since the days of Sir Henry and Louis Prang. They now sport comics, jokes and clever verses. But those that picture timeless and simple settings such as excited children around a Christmas tree, Nativity scenes, nature scenes and carolers singing in the snow are still in the highest demand today. - (Juddi Morris, Vivian Hotchkiss www.emotionscards.com).

And then came the written Christmas letter again. It seems as families and friends spread apart and lived many miles from one another, the annual Christmas letter was a time of “catch-up” to let everyone know the whereabouts, the what's-happening, and some-times the where-with-all. Christmas letters run the gamut of children, grandchildren, latest babies, marriages, divorces, deaths, illnesses, vacations, cruises, retirements, and what-
evers. But one thing is certain, they keep family and friends informed.

Yes, some people just prefer a card and not the latest gallbladder surgery information, but along with the good is the not-so-good. After all, you don't have to read it! Just be thankful that you were thought of and were wished a Merry Christmas! That is the essence of the greeting: Merry (celebrate) Christmas (the birth of Jesus Christ). Of the many ways to celebrate His birth (gifts, greetings, festivities) the sharing of our lives with one another is one of the most meaningful acts of life – it is called love. *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).*