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Christmas in an Envelope

EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
AND U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING
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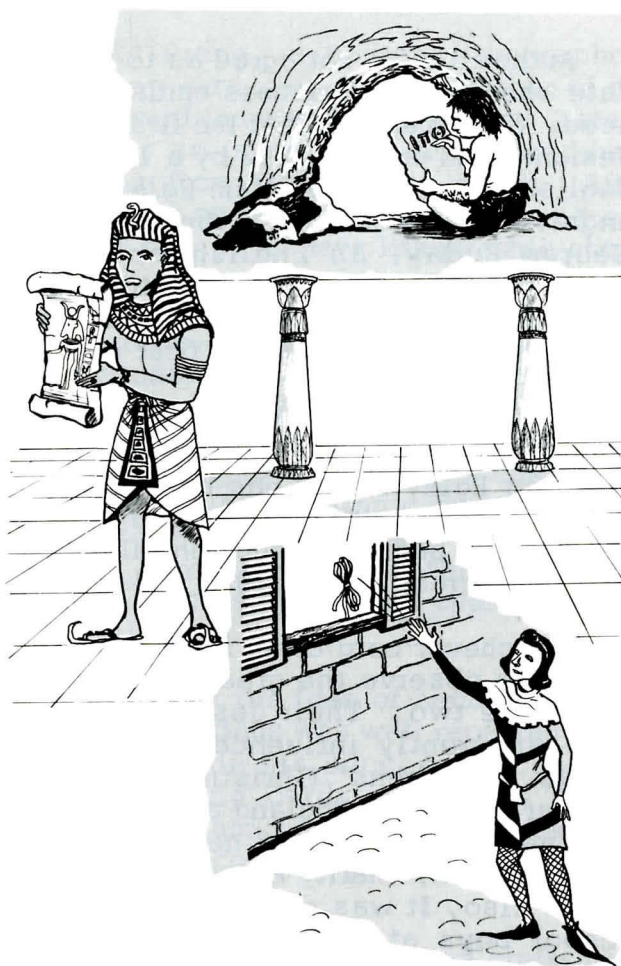
Christmas in an Envelope

By Mrs. Clara N. Leopold
State Extension Specialist,
Home Management

The exchange of greetings between friends is as old as mankind. Research into the history of this practice which led gradually to our modern Christmas card reveals a fascinating history of the social customs, folklore, art and fashion styles of other times and races.

Man has always found some means to express greetings and salutations upon appropriate occasions. The prehistorics left a flower or a bright feather at the entrance to some primitive cave, or, later, scratched their friendly message in signs on stones or pieces of bark. The Egyptians had their gorgeously illuminated papyrus greetings. Medieval European swains conveyed the affectionate thoughts of the sender when they tossed a glove, a kerchief, garters or a knot of ribbon through the window of some fair damsel. The Chinese have exchanged New Year greetings for centuries.

In the 15th century master wood engravers produced inscribed prints which had the same intent as the modern Christmas and New Year cards. One of these woodcuts was found in the Rhine Valley of Germany. It has a religious theme showing the Christ child standing in the bow of an ancient galley, manned by angels, with the Holy Mother seated at the mast. The inscription reads: "Here I come from Alexandria and bring many good years to give generously. I give them for almost no money and only God's love my reward." All these are manifestations of the basic social urge to communicate.



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PERSONAL GREETING CARDS IN ENGLAND

Authorities do not agree as to the exact date when formal Christmas cards were first used. Some maintain that the first card was designed and used in 1842 by a 16-year-old English lad named William Egley, Jr., an engraver's apprentice. Others, including George Buday, an Englishman who has written a book entitled "History of the Christmas Card," contend that the so-called Cole-Horsley card was the first card.

Part of the basis for disagreement has been the fact that the date on the etching plate for Egley's card has been distorted, probably from having fallen and smashing the corner. Buday has substantial evidence that the correct date is 1848 and not 1842.

Whichever card came first, it is interesting to observe the great similarity between the two. Their designs and spirit were apparently influenced by the same things. Dickens' Christmas Carol was popular reading in England about this time, stirring everyone with a new appreciation of the warmth, charity and spirit of Christmas. Also, it was customary for English school boys at Christmas time to write expressions of good will to their teachers and relatives to demonstrate their good penmanship, art and composition. These cards were called "school pieces," and the boys decorated them lavishly with scrolls, curls, cues, and pictures drawn in the borders around the margin.

Egley's card gives a treasury of facts about the customs of that early Victorian period. He must have drawn on his memories of Christmas pleasures for the ten scenes, showing steps of an old English country dance, a happy family group, a woman distributing food to the poor, another giving clothing, top-hatted ice skaters enjoying their favorite sport, a happy pantomime, a puppet show and carol singers--all entwined with vines and fruit to make a single picture of the various scenes. There is space following the words "To" and "From" which would indicate the names of friends were to be filled in and the card was to be signed by the sender.

In 1843 Henry Cole, so the story goes, was faced with the problem of catching up on a lagging correspondence and his personal calls. His solution was to send a printed greeting card in the holiday spirit, so he engaged a rising young artist named John Calcott Horsley to design the card. The cards were delivered by messenger to his friends.

Cole's card seems more attractive than Egley's since it has only three panels and also is hand colored. Again the words "To" and "From" appear for filling in. Leafy trellises, Germanesque style, ornament the panels. As a part of the center panel of both Cole's and Egley's card is the simple caption that probably has become the most famous greeting -- "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You."



This is a facsimile of the first known Christmas Greeting Card published in England in 1842, one hundred years ago. The original is now on display in the British Museum in London.



Published at Sumner's Home Treasury Office, 14 Old Broad Street, London.

From the collection of the British Museum, 1843.

COMMERCIAL BEGINNINGS_____

In 1846, a thousand copies of Cole-Horsley's card were lithographed, hand colored and sold by Felix Summerly's Treasure House in Bond Street, an art shop which Cole had set up.

Much controversy arose over this card, its detractors claiming the central panel showing a large Victorian family toasting absent friends was an incentive to drunkenness. However, the two outer panels depict two of the oldest traditions of Christmas, feeding the hungry and clothing the poor. This helped offset the storm of criticism.

Although individuals designed and gave greeting cards in the first half of the 1800's and Christmas was noted on them particularly by the 1840's, it wasn't until the latter half of the century that the custom of sending such cards obtained a real foothold.

Joseph Crandall, another London artist, is credited with being the first to show Christmas cards on a commercial basis. These cards were lithographed and colored by hand. They were the size of the usual lady's visiting card, probably because it was the custom to make Christmas calls and leave a personal calling card.

The Christmas card, like everything else, has had a history of change and revival. The sending of a Christmas card with a message of affection and cheer did not become a common practice until 1862. Before this they were far too expensive for the general public. The early jeweled and frosted cards resembled Valentines more than they do our modern styles. Nevertheless their novelty and gaiety attracted interest in them to the point where they were often reviewed in the newspapers.

CHRISTMAS CARDS COME TO AMERICA_____

A backward glance at Christmas cards in America reveals that the first cards used here were imported from England. While the custom of sending cards had been practiced here to some extent since the 1860's or be-

fore, it wasn't until 1875 that cards were produced in America.

Louis Prang, a Boston lithographer, is widely regarded as the real father of the greeting card industry in the United States. Prang was an immigrant who arrived here penniless from Germany in 1850. After working for several years as a wood engraver he opened his own lithographic shop.

Prang knew that commercial cards had been exchanged in England since the 1840's. In the middle '70's he began his card venture in Roxbury, Massachusetts. His entire output was sold in England. About 1877 the English company to which Prang's cards were sold put on an advertising campaign in this country to interest Americans in Christmas greeting cards. Not until then did Prang awake to the fact that he had overlooked the home field.

Noting that the idea of sending printed Christmas greetings was well received here, Prang set aside his successful business selling visiting cards, business advertisements and announcements both here and in England to concentrate on the new Yule cards.

Prang was a patient, gifted craftsman, and although he perfected a process of reproduction that led to inexpensive mass production, he was determined not to let quantity debase art. Beginning in 1880 he organized a series of competitions whose generous prizes attracted the best art and design talent of the country. One of the art events of the year was a Christmas card exhibition arranged by Prang, shown in the American Art Galleries.





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About 1895 Prang discontinued his greeting card business. The influx of inferior cards from European publishers proved to be overwhelming competition. He refused to lower his standards of quality in workmanship and design so there followed a decline in the making of greeting cards in England and the United States.

German-made cards dominated the market until World War I, when German imports of any kind became taboo. Most popular was the colored postcard which cost only a penny and could be mailed with a penny stamp. Before this, Christmas cards were rarely signed or mailed. American cards reasserted themselves in the 1920's when the impersonal postcard was superseded by more formal engraved cards, with sentimental verse, enclosed in an envelope.



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TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS SYMBOLS

Many people feel that, the trend away from religious themes is a modern one. Not so. The first Christmas cards had no religious significance. Even when scriptural texts were used, few if any Nativity scenes were printed on the 19th century cards.



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Many of the traditional Christmas symbols appearing on early Christmas cards had their origin in ancient mythology and pre-Christian religions. The mistletoe, through which Baldur met his death in Scandinavian mythology, became the symbol of the kiss of peace and good will. The yule log is a survival of the fire festival of worshippers of the Scandinavian God, Thor. Holly is a relic of the Roman worship of Saturn.

The poinsettia, a Mexican and Central American flower, has little if any connection with Christmas except its color. Its brilliant red is the same as that associated with the feast of the sun and the beginning of the lengthening days that were celebrated from earliest times.

Candles have been associated with many religions. Candles of the Jewish Feast of Lights quite naturally were incorporated into the early Nativity celebrations. There were scenes of families enjoying the holidays, flowers, kittens, and every kind of robin was depicted, in every imaginable human situation. There were even robin stamps for sealing envelopes. "Voiced" cards that squeaked when you squeezed them came on the scene in 1878.

From the '70's on, cards were much elaborated. They had padded or frosted surfaces, tassels and fringes, layers of lace paper, and even were sacheted and perfumed. Victorians had an almost insatiable appetite for trick and animated cards and for cards with "hidden messages" secreted under bouquets and laces.

Trick cards were of many kinds: figures that looked like another face when the card was turned upside down; landscapes that appeared to be human profiles when viewed at a different angle; complicated cards that folded flat but opened up to reveal intricate designs; tableaux cards that opened up for three-dimensional effects.

Santa and his reindeer were popularized by the famous Clement Moore poem, "A Visit from Saint Nicholas," and soon were picked up as a Christmas card theme. And it wasn't uncommon to use the works of favorite authors and poets. One example,

3/

A JOYOUS CHRISTMAS
AND
A BLITHE NEW YEAR!

3/

CARDS FROM THE ARTISTS' PALETTE_____

Well known writers are constantly trying to conceive clever ideas for cards. Among the famous authors who have written texts or their writings are used for Christmas cards are James Whitcomb Riley, Kate Douglas Wiggin, J. P. McEvay, Edgar Guest, Boris Pasternak, William Carlos Williams, Archibald MacLeish, Mark Van Doren, Norman Vincent Peale, T. S. Elliot and many others.

JOY WITH UNICEF CARDS_____

The first UNICEF card was drawn by a seven-year-old Bohemian girl. Jitka Samkova's drawing was her spontaneous thank-you for the postwar help given the starving children of her village. The picture of happy youngsters dancing around a Maypole "expresses joy," she wrote. "The wreath at the top is to show that the line of children being helped is endless."

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but also by the contribution made to the welfare of the world's needy children.* Proceeds from these cards have bought badly needed milk, medicines and supplies for children in over one hundred countries. Maternal and child welfare centers are supported from these funds and they supply vitamins for children and mothers, and vaccine to protect a million children from tuberculosis.

"I'M FRAMING YOUR CARD!"_____

Many people enjoy creating their own cards to suit their personality and taste. There is no greater tribute or thrill than to be told "I'm framing your Christmas card," --especially one of your own design and imagination.

One of the secrets to a successful card of your own is to plan far enough ahead so you have time to dream about it and to develop several ideas from which to choose. Before one holiday season is over you may have the spark of an idea for next Christmas once you've tried making your own. It's great fun to know no one else can possibly send the same card, and a personal card carries with it a mark of affection that is special to itself. It is personal, original and exclusively yours.

In September or thereabouts, begin to pull your thoughts together. Make a sketch to show an artist, a printer or craftsman who can help you produce it. Make sure that you can buy suitable envelopes of correct shape and size before you complete your design. If you do not find exactly what you need, get the nearest size and then redesign your card to fit the envelope.

*Free illustrated brochures available from UNICEF Greeting Cards, United Nations, New York, New York. Designs are new each year.

A photo of the family is usually the first kind of "personal" card we think of for it is both intimate and unique. It could be a snow scene of your house, a shot of the front door wreathed for the holidays. It is possible, of course, to simulate a holiday picture with decorations or wreaths that are saved from year to year, and arranged to form a background that seems authentic.



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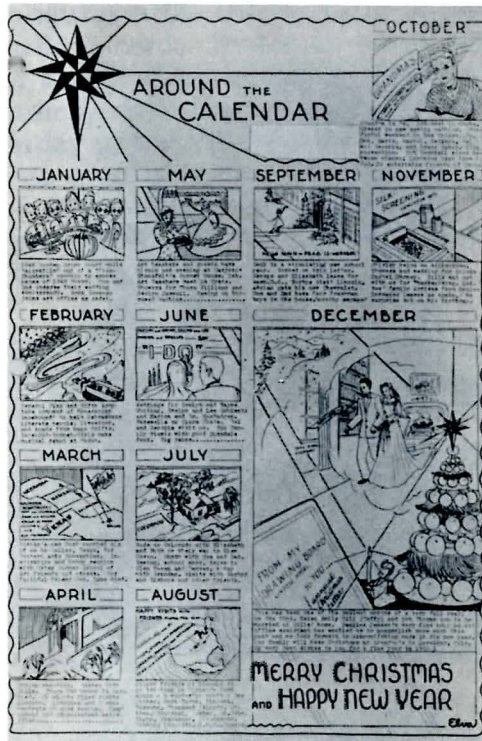


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A glimpse of family Christmas preparations is fun, too -- with children writing to Santa, everyone in the kitchen making gingerbread cookies, dad and the children checking strings of tree lights (which are lit) to see if they're ready for the big day. Let your photographic imagination guide you, and take a picture that speaks best for your own family life.

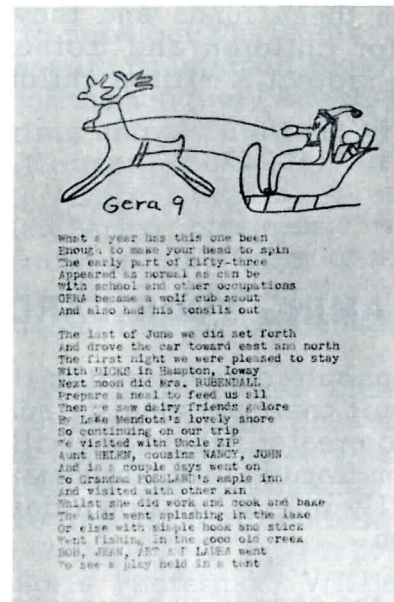
If you have never had your photo cards printed instead of mounting a snap shot on a purchased folder, try it. Although this calls for a cut for printing the picture onto the card, you can embellish it with your own designs and express your greeting with something to say that sounds more like you.

Another year you might like a family letter patterned after a feature in a magazine to tell about you and your family's activities. There is always plenty of news that your friends and relatives enjoy hearing at Christmas. Again there can be either sketches or snapshots to highlight your written "conversation."



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A simple sketch can make an interesting card. Even your own children or grandchildren can make delightful drawings for a card that becomes a treasure for the members of the family.



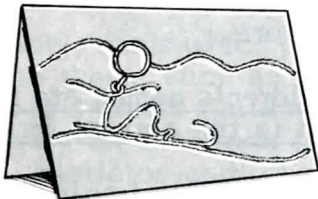
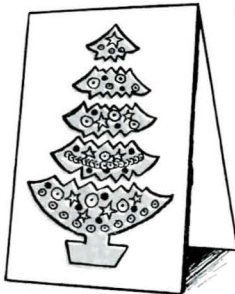
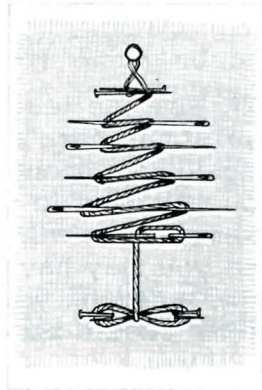
Block printing is simple to do and gives a handmade look. The linoleum blocks can be purchased where school art supplies are sold. The only other tool you need is a sharp knife. Make a simple silhouette type design -- but remember to make it backwards (see illustration). You can ink the block and do the printing yourself or any printer will run off as many as you need and save you the tedious part of the making. You could cut only the design and have the lettering added by the printer (See illustration).



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Perhaps you have some materials in your yard that would lend themselves to making attractive cards. Ferns make perfect little Christmas trees. Snip off the fronds from the left side, leaving the main stem intact to serve as a little lane at the base of the trees. If you'd like to decorate the tree, tiny colored sequins are showy. Glue to a folded parchment card, and stick little gold and silver stars at the tip of each frond. Add your greeting inside either by lettering, writing or by having it printed.

Perhaps your personal interests can suggest materials or designs, such as the card with needles and thread forming a Christmas tree. This was made by a Nebraska extension specialist whose job and interests are clothing and textiles.

Scraps of felt can be converted to designs for cards. Felt needs no hemming and can be cut with either a smooth or pinked edge. A combination of edges were used for the cards illustrated at the left.

Pipe cleaners and construction paper are another happy set of materials. Since pipe cleaners can be bent and rebent until the design is satisfying, these are wonderfully simple to do. Pipe cleaners can be bought in a wide variety of colors; they can also be dyed to any shade. When they are ready to be attached to the card, use a bit of casein glue here and there. Press down gently. Too much glue will soak nap of cleaner and smear.

Not only the method of reproduction, but the kind of material can vary. Paper offers the widest possible choices in weight, texture and color. Deckle edge cards or note-paper, with envelopes to match, can be had in beautiful colors and a number of sizes from the department stores. But you are not limited to paper.

Cards can be made of cloth, leather, metal, clay, cork and even wood. The size and shape are by no means standardized although there are some limits in sizes for mailing and for ready-made envelopes. Use your own imagination and treat yourself to the satisfactions of creative accomplishment.

GUIDES FOR SELECTION_____

Whether you send a card chosen from the endless choices in the store or make it yourself, the same guiding principles for selection apply.

A Christmas card should be appropriate for both the recipient and the sender. Test your choice with questions like:

What purpose is it to serve: to share the joy or the beauty associated with the religious significance of the birth of Christ; to enhance the festive mood of the holidays, or renew friendship with a note? Is the humor the type that will appeal to the recipient? Does it reflect your taste and personality?

Does the size and shape of the design fit the size and shape of the card? Are the margins and divisions arranged to avoid an overcrowded or lopsided effect?

What distinctive quality does it have that sets it apart from the rest? It need not be different just for the sake of being different.

Whatever the style of Christmas card that appeals to your taste, that card is really a slim little present which makes it possible to extend greetings beyond the limits of your giving a real gift. Moreover, it can be sent without imposing an obligation on the receiver.

SHOULD YOU??

OR

SHOULDN'T YOU??_____

Never let the sending of a Christmas greeting -- one or many -- become just one more time-consuming chore in an already overcrowded season. Some of the joy of sending cards may be lost in the etiquette involved. Here are a dozen pointers to assure you that your cards are being sent in the best of good taste:

1. Must you send a Christmas card to everyone who sends you one?

No, say the leading etiquette experts. A Christmas card does not need a reply. It should be a spontaneous, friendly greeting. You may want to reply to certain ones. For example, you will delight to hear from someone you may have lost track of and so you send a "thank you" with a brief note. The theme should be: Our late wishes are just as merry.

2. Whose name is signed first - a husband's or a wife's?

It is courteous for the person who signs the card to write his or her name last. Thus, if the wife signs the card for herself and her husband, her name comes last. However, if the card is engraved or printed the wife's name appears first.

3. Should "Mr. and Mrs." or "Miss" be used in signatures?

No. Presumably you are sending Christmas cards to friends and don't need to refer to yourself as "Mr. and Mrs." but rather by your given names. Like all good rules, there is an exception: If you want to use the prefixes "Mr. and Mrs." they should be at the top of the card, such as: Mr. & Mrs. Frank Tee wish you a Happy Holiday Season. Prefixes used at the bottom might seem like a signature.

4. When children's names are included, what is the correct form?

Family signatures always begin with the father's name, then the mother's with surname, followed by or underneath the parents' names the names of each of the children. Or, "The Five Tees - Frank, Helen, Jon, Sara and Luci." If you prefer, you can simply say "The Tees" or "The Frank Tees." Don't use the lazy term "and family." The birth of a new baby, rather than being named at the end of the list, can be "announced," such as "and our new daughter, Leslea Kay, born October 8, 19__."

5. Is it proper to write a message on Christmas cards?

Yes. An added handwritten message gives the card a special warmth of friendship, especially when it comes or goes to friends who have not heard from one another for some time. Use some of that blank space to keep the friendship flourishing, even though the message is brief.

6. If you know only one of a couple, how should the card be addressed?

Address the card to both husband and wife.

7. How should a widow or divorcee be addressed? How does she sign her name now?

Use the first and last names she prefers.

8. Should a Christmas card be sent to someone who has had a recent death in the family?

Yes. People don't shut off contacts with friends during periods of mourning. Actually there are special Christmas cards with messages of sympathy just for this purpose. Neither is there anything wrong with using your own card and adding a note of sympathy and understanding.

9. Are Christmas cards appropriate to send to friends who are Non-Christian?

Obviously, cards which portray the Christian religion theme such as the Nativity, Holy Family and Christ Child would not be appreciated by an Orthodox Jew. Gay Santas, holly, mistletoe and other holiday symbols can be sent to most Americans.

10. Does return address on the envelope look like a bid for a return card?

Indeed not! It is both practical and proper to give a full return address. It may be on the back flap of the envelope or on the upper left corner of the front. Printed stickers or having an address printed on the envelope will help to insure the card's safe arrival - or return if it cannot be delivered. It also

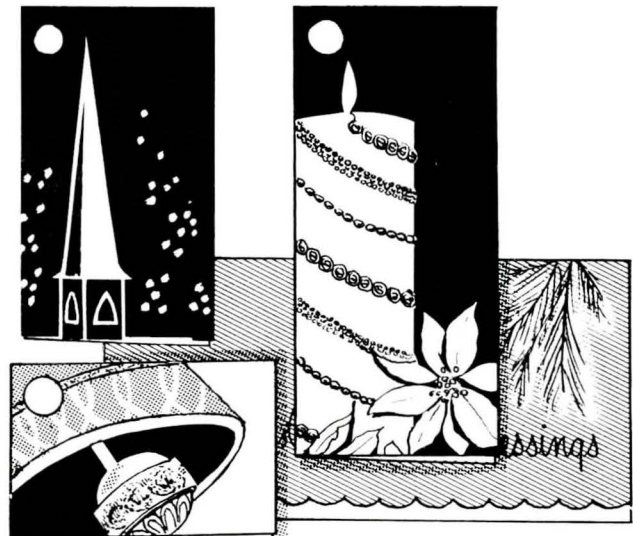
enables your friends to update their address book if you have moved. And don't forget to include your ZIP code number to hasten delivery service.

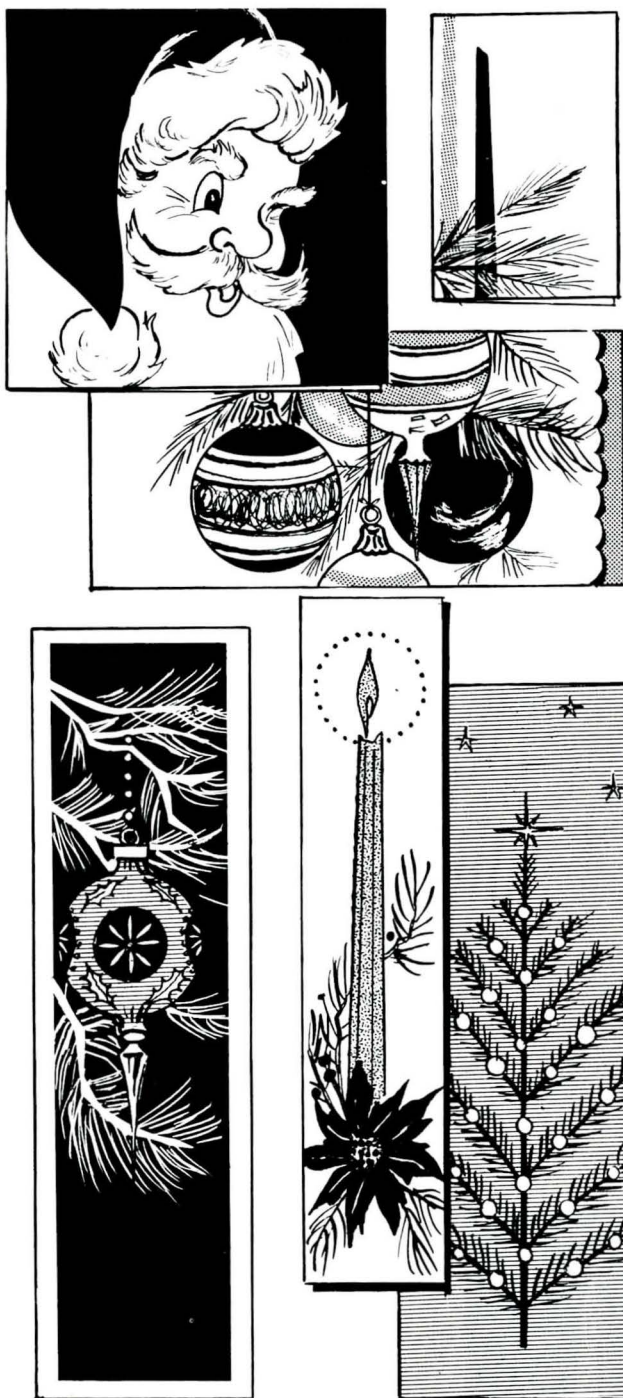
11. Is it proper to send the cards in an unsealed envelope?

Etiquette authorities agree that any enveloped communication to a friend should always be given the dignity of first class postage. Have you tried using the colorful new five cent stamps that are issued at Christmas time? Furthermore, under 5¢ postage, you may include personal messages, your cards will be delivered quicker, will be forwarded or returned to you, if undelivered, without additional postage.

12. Is there anything useful you can do with Christmas cards after the holidays instead of throwing them away?

Many children's wards in hospitals appreciate having them. The children browse through them, and enjoy them for cutting and pasting. Or have you tried snipping and clipping them into various sizes according to the pictures to make attractive gift enclosure cards, folded or flat? Some can be square, some long and slim, tall or wide. Some may be punched in the corner to make them easy to tie into the bow of the ribbon tie. Many designs lend themselves to becoming bookmarks, single or double.





Many changes have taken place since 1842. Although the exchange of Christmas cards in the United States is on a scale beyond that in any other country, it is happily becoming an international custom to send "Christmas in an Envelope." The thought behind the famous line on the first Christmas cards has not changed -- it is still "A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year."

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Lincoln, Nebraska
- 7/ Mr. and Mrs. Don Lentz
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- 8/ Miss Elva McFie,
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