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An early secular card

Sending cards a new custom

Unlike many Christmas observances and traditions which are hundreds of years old, the sending of Christmas cards is a relatively modern custom.

According to most sources, the first Christmas card was designed in 1843 by John Calcott Horsley at the suggestion of Henry Cole (later Sir Henry Cole), a well-known London museum director.

The card was a triptych, printed lithographically and tinted by hand by a professional colorer. About 1,000 of the cards were sold by a gift-book company for a shilling each.

The center panel of the card showed a group of merry-makers or possibly a family, facing out from the card. The smaller side panels showed acts of charity normally associated with the holidays — feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.

Beneath the center panel was the familiar greeting card message — "A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year to You."

Most sources credit the Cole-Horsley combination with the first Christmas card, but a card designed by another Britisher, Wil-

liam Egley, may have preceded it. The original of Egley's card is in the British Museum but the date under his signature is unclear and may be either 1842 or 1849.

An authority on women's dress has claimed the costumes in Egley's card are more typical of 1842 than of 1849 and if this is true, Egley likely would have been the producer of the first Christmas card.

However, most historians credit the Cole-Horsley card of 1843 with launching the custom which has grown into a present day multi-million dollar business.

Approximately a dozen Cole-Horsley cards are known to exist today. Two of them, including an unused one, are in the Hallmark Historical Collection in Kansas City, Mo.

Two other Britishers followed Cole in sending Christmas greetings. In 1844, the Rev. Edward Bradley of Newcastle sent lithographed greetings and W. A. Dobson, described in two separate texts as an artist of the Royal Academy in London and head of the school of design in Birmingham,

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