

# Santa's roots go way back

SINTERKLAAS to the Dutch, Father Christmas to the English, Pere Noel to the French. The Germans call him Weihnachtsmann, while in Russia they once spoke of the Miracle Maker but now simply refer to him as Grandfather Frost.

The Chinese have Lam Khoong-Knoong, meaning Nice Old Father, and the Japanese have Hoteiosho, who has eyes in both the back and front of his head and carries a big bag of toys.

On Jan. 5, Epiphany Eve in Italy, Santa Claus is a woman called Befana who comes down the chimney bearing gifts for good little girls and boys.

Who is this universally loved magical figure with the power to melt hard hearts and suspend doubts during the season of peace? According to the book "A Family Christmas" by the Reader's Digest Association, the story of Santa Claus begins with the birth of St. Nicholas, approximately 270 A.D., along the Mediterranean coast of northern Turkey.

According to one account, Nicholas was born to a childless couple af-

ter 30 years of marriage and was orphaned at the age of 9. Reared by guardians, he developed a strong sympathy for the poor and needy and devoted a great deal of his time to providing food, clothing and money to the underprivileged. Much of his gift giving was accomplished in secret and, invariably, at night.

While perhaps still in his teens, Nicholas became the bishop of Myra, subsequently to be identified in early manuscripts as a saint and miracle worker. Destined to become patron saint of children, Russia, bankers, sailors, pawnbrokers, vagabonds and thieves, Nicholas was well on his way to becoming universally revered as St. Nicholas of Myra when he died, probably Dec. 6, 340 A.D.

THE PRACTICE of bringing gifts in the name of St. Nicholas probably began in France at the start of the 12th century. Dec. 5, proclaimed the Eve of St. Nicholas, was a time when nuns would leave gifts at the doorsteps for the small

Continued on Next Page

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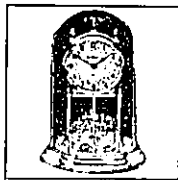


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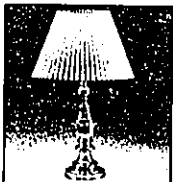
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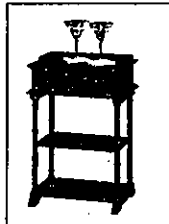
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