16 Innovative Origins of Holiday Traditions - mental_floss - List Show (Ep. 237)

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Hi, I'm John Green, welcome to my salon, this is Mental Floss on YouTube, and did you know that artificial snow dates back to 1950?

That's when three engineers from Milford, Connecticut attached a garden hose to a compressor and used a spray nozzle to cover a hill in twenty inches of snow.

Before that, ski slope owners used ice. In 1949, for instance, the owner of Mohawk Mountain in Connecticut spent $3,500 on 500 tons of ice, which he broke up with a pick, then spread the chips over a slope.

And that's just one of many origins of holiday traditions that I'm gonna share with you in this video today brought to you by Intel.

(Christmas intro!)

The Christmas tree in Manhattan's Rockefeller Center is 65 feet tall, 555 pounds, contains 30,000 LED lights, and costs the city of New York over $1.5 million.

To find the perfect tree every year, the city sends out helicopter crews on surveying flights all over New England.

In 1851, Mark Carr because the first logger ever to set up a Christmas tree stand on a New York City sidewalk. He paid $1 to rent the space for that season. He was so successful that the next year, his rent was up to $100.

Christmas trees in 18th century Germany were often lit with candles fixed to the branches with wax, making them fire hazards. In 1882, Edward Johnson, vice president of the Edison Electric Light Company made the first electric Christmas lights for his family tree.

In eighty walnut-sized electrical individual bulbs were red, white, and blue.

Oh, so they looked kinda like our Nutcracker, red, white, and blue... and Picard.

Holiday lights went commercial in 1901, but you had to plug each light in, meaning you probably couldn't have more than a couple on your tree. Ever-Ready solved that problem two years later, selling strings of lights with up to eight little bulbs in a row.

While mistletoe has been linked to fertility in lots of ancient cultures, the practice of kissing under it really took off in Victorian England, where some jerks circulated the myth that girls who refused to kiss under the mistletoe wouldn't receive any marriage proposals in the following year.

Speaking of mistletoe, it isn't native to the United States, but unwilling to let the tradition die, American entrepreneurs sourced the plants from France and began shipping the clippings over by steamship in the 19th century.

The most popular place to eat on December 25th in Japan is KFC. It's so common that you have to make reservations months in advance, despite the fact that only 1% of the population even celebrates Christmas.

The tradition goes back to 1974 when the fast-food chain launched a commercial offering foreign visitors their next best thing to a traditional turkey, but instead, it unexpectedly caught on with locals.

Festivus from *Seinfeld* actually existed long before the TV show. The holiday, which features traditions like using a stark aluminum pole instead of a Christmas tree, and the Feats of Strength, where someone had to wrestle the head of the household, is credited to staff writer Dan O'Keefe.

But O'Keefe's father actually invented it when he began researching obscure European holidays and bundled them together as an excuse to gripe about his magazine job he worked for, Reader's Digest.

According to Dan, the family was forced to attend the celebration for years and it was much stranger than anything he could write about for the sitcom.

The first Christmas cards were designed by the Englishman John Callcott Horsley in 1843. He printed up a thousand cards with three little drawings side by side, none of which were, like, Santa or reindeer— instead, his cards featured a family sitting together at a table in the middle with two images of them helping the poor on either side.

That's lovely, but I don't understand where it has to do with holidays. Where- where was the Xbox?

Dr. Seuss' How The Grinch Stole Christmas is loosely based on Seuss himself. The day after Christmas in 1956, Seuss (a.k.a. Theodore Geisel) realized he never enjoyed the holidays.

So he wrote the book in an attempt to remind himself about the true spirit of the season. According to his stepdaughter, there's a little Seuss in all of his characters. As she put it: "I always thought that the cat was Ted on his good days, and the Grinch was Ted on his bad days."

Christmas pickles are not supposed to be a thing. The idea comes from a German tradition where families hide a dill in their Tannenbaum's branches— The lucky child who finds it the next morning gets an extra gift from Saint Nick.

But the story is actually completely untrue! Before F.W. Woolworth, Americans used to trim trees with candy and fruit and paper, but on a trip to a little town in Germany, Woolworth noticed an opportunity— people had started to make and use glass ornaments.

Once he started importing the glass trinkets, Woolworth's team concocted the idea of Christmas pickles, along with the fake tradition story to boost sales of their new line at department stores.

Huh, can I start a Christmas tradition of playing Nintendo games all day?

Advent calendars first took off in America when a picture of President Eisenhower opening one up with his grandkids showed up in newspapers across the nation. But unlike the Christmas pickle, this tradition actually is German!

The calendars were first produced by the German printer Gerhard Lang was inspired to recreate the handcrafted calendars his mother had made for him in the early 1900's.

Before Lang, most Germans used to mark the advent by lighting candles or hanging pictures on advent clocks.

Now obviously, American customers want the postal service to make holiday stamps, right, because that's the only time we ever send mail anymore. But the service always struggled to figure out how to make a stamp that pleased everyone without offending anyone.

In 1962, Jim Crawford came up with a simple design that worked, featuring two candles and a wreath. It was very popular. The postal office sold out its first run of 50 million stamps in no time.

By the end of 1962, it had distributed over 1 billion of the stamps.

In 2007, the sport Major League Dreidel was formed in New York City. The tournaments occurred during Hanukkah, and the winner is the Dreideler with the longest time of spin.

And finally, I return to my salon to tell you that in 1951, artificial trees started outselling natural trees in the United States. But artificial trees aren't new.

If fact, the first ones came from Germany in 1913 as a way to lessen deforestation. They were originally made out of goose feathers dyed green and fixed to a wooden pole.

But goose feathers are messy and shed all over people's houses, so the toilet brush company Addis Brush Company stepped in, and using the exact same technology as brings toilet brushed into the world, made artificial Christmas trees.

Thanks for watching Mental Floss here on YouTube, which is made with the help of all of these nice people, and thanks again to Intel for sponsoring this video. Intel will soon be releasing real-sense 3D cameras that will be able to bring you together in cool new ways, and as we say in my hometown: Don't forget to be awesome.