

Christmas Cards



Christmas cards were partly inspired by Valentine's Day cards and New Year's cards, the oldest surviving of which was printed in 1466. Home-made cards were fashioned by children even during the reign of Queen Anne, but the popularized Christmas card as we know it wasn't invented until the mid 1800s.



The First Egley Christmas Card

Who Created the First Christmas Card?

There is some debate over who was the "inventor" of the Christmas card. **The oldest Christmas card created for general distribution probably was created by William Egley Jr.; a 16 year-old British youth.** His 3 1/2-inch- by 5 1/2-inch, preserved in the British Museum, depicts four holiday scenes and a "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year" greeting with blanks after the word "To" on the top and "From" at the bottom. Industrious kid! The date on his card is clearly 1842... or 1849. The last figure is obscure, so it's difficult to say who was first.

In the year 1843, Sir Henry Cole commissioned John Calcott Horsley to paint a card showing the feeding and clothing of the poor. A centre 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 Christmas card. Legend says Sir Henry Cole didn't send any Christmas cards the following year, but the custom became popular anyway.

Others say the date of this story was in 1847. They agree that the first Christmas card was produced by Sir Henry Cole who worked for the British Postal Service, and an artist he hired named John Horsley. Cole was too busy to write his own greetings, so he hired Horsley to design a card for him. One thousand of these cards were printed and could be mailed for a penny a piece.



The criticism it drew may have contributed to its popularity. By the Christmas season of 1847, a number of people were giving out Christmas cards of their own. Had it not been for the controversy over Horsley's card, many of these new card givers may never have considered it. The early card manufacturers thought Christmas cards to be a fad that would soon pass. They did not bother to document the cards they produced. However, the

Christmas card was destined to become an integral part of the holiday season. By 1880 their manufacture was big business, creating previously unknown opportunities for artists, writers, printers, and engravers.

