



Christmas Curiosities: Odd, Dark, and Forgotten Christmas

John Grossman

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Oh, by gosh, by golly. It's time for . . . rowdy bands of drunkards roaming the streets, lighting firecrackers, and firing off guns. Gangs of masked youths invading people's houses, demanding food, drink, and money—and threatening to break the windows (or worse) unless they're given what they want?

Welcome to Christmas, circa 1800. Yes, the season of light, joy, and gift-giving was once regarded as a time of darkness, dissipation—and celebrated with all-too-public displays of noisemaking, inebriation, and gluttonous overeating. (Well, maybe everything has changed.) And though we tend to imagine Victorian-era Christmases as sentimental gatherings around the Christmas tree, blazing hearth, and festive punchbowl, the 19th-century evidence tells us quite otherwise.

Drawing from his extensive collection of antique postcards, greeting cards, advertising giveaways, and other ephemera, John Grossman presents a picture of Christmas past that, frankly, looks a lot more like Halloween. Broomstick-riding witches and bat-borne cupids deliver New Year's greetings. Fur-clad fairies gather 'round a campfire to roast their Christmas dinner—on a dead rat. And Saint Nicholas? He's that skinny guy in the bishop robes who arrives with his dark companion, the Devil-like Krampus, brandishing switches to punish the badly behaved.

With *Christmas Curiosities*, STC wishes you a very merry, very scary Christmas.

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