

The Changing Representations of Mrs. Santa Claus
in American Children's Literature with Reference to Nineteenth-
and Early Twentieth-Century American Cultural History

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Abstract

Despite the fact that Santa Claus is known to have a wife called Mrs. Santa Claus, not much research on this figure has been conducted so far. It is therefore the major aim of this paper to focus on the hitherto unexplored aspects of Mrs. Santa Claus. By tracing her appearance in American children's literature from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, it is to be expected that some new factors in the changing images of Mrs. Santa Claus may be revealed, chiefly from the perspectives of American cultural history and women's history.

Santa Claus had been considered to be a bachelor until the mid-nineteenth century when a short story named "A Christmas Legend" (James Rees, 1849) came to the fore. It is widely recognized that this was the first instance of Mrs. Santa Claus, his wife, being featured in print. Beginning from this story, various representations of Mrs. Santa Claus have appeared in poems, short stories and illustrations of the late nineteenth century. By analyzing several works related to her between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we demonstrate why and how the images of Mrs. Santa Claus have often been transformed over the ages.

In order to comprehend the transition of the images of Mrs. Santa Claus, the first section investigates the early appearances of Mrs. Santa Claus and narratives about her in juvenile periodicals such as *Harper's Young People* and *Wide Awake* published in the late nineteenth century. Particularly, this section clarifies the former magazine is the essential material on the study of Mrs. Santa Claus due to her frequent appearances.

The second section argues about the representations of Mrs. Santa Claus in early twentieth-century children's literature. Some references to Mrs. Santa Claus in modern times depict her as a woman delivering gifts to children by herself on behalf of Santa Claus. Her methods of delivering Christmas presents have changed; she has metamorphosed from a rider of a bicycle to a driver of a car. Researching the complex relationship between the American vehicular history and American women's history, we understand that the changing images might be a result of the rise of first-wave feminism.

In the last section, we examine a mob cap which is a common attribute to the images of Mrs. Santa Claus through the ages. However, this part suggests

that the significance of the mob cap is ambiguous since it has dual meanings of the attribute of the woman from the upper-classes and the working-classes. It can be said that the attribute enables us to further reveal the features of Mrs. Santa Claus.

To sum up, this paper has attempted to clarify how the American social and cultural background largely influences the impressions of Mrs. Santa Claus; at the same time, it has focused on some female writers who advocated the improvement of women's rights through the narratives regarding Mrs. Santa Claus. Through an examination of the representations of Mrs. Santa Claus in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it has endeavored to redefine the roles of Mrs. Santa Claus.