

Francis Church, Virginia and Santa live on

"No Santa Claus! Thank God he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to

insert an ant in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowl-

"Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see.

"No Santa Claus! Thank God, he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."

This age is, if anything, more skeptical. The miracles of modern communication bombard us with, literally, a world of troubles beyond our own. It becomes more and

more difficult to remember that we are all, every one of us, capable of the love, generosity and devotion of which Church wrote.

The miracle of Christmas, the miracle of Santa Claus, as so beautifully portrayed by Church in his editorial, is that they put in perspective the tangible realities of our world for the duration of the season. If we could only do that year round!

O'Hanlon grew up to earn a doctorate from Fordham University, and had a long and distinguished career in the New York City school system, specializing in educating handicapped children. She passed away in 1971 at age 81.

Church, a Civil War correspondent for the New York Times, co-founder with his brother William of the Army and Navy Journal, and editor of Galaxy magazine,



Figure 4. Early design sketches of a Girl Scouts stamp were done expecting to print the issue in green, gold and black. This was later changed to red.

characterize the sentiments expressed in artistic form. I think we are left with explicit representations: pictures of Church, O'Hanlon, or children peeking around a corner watching for Santa to appear.

Another possibility is a souvenir sheet reproducing the two letters, perforated horizontally into logical portions. Yes, that could be a bit pricey at 1997 first-class rates, but I'd rather pay for that than for 100th anniversary reproductions of the Trans-Mississippi dollar values that will undoubtedly be available in 1998.

Girl Scouts

One unhappy camper was Floyd V. Stutel-Dean when the United States Postal Service ignored the 50th anniversary of the Girl Scouts in 1962.

So, March 17, 1962, on the last day of the anniversary week, he prepared the cacheted cover shown in Figure 2.

The text, if you find it difficult to read in the illustration, says: "Congratulations Girl Scouts USA Golden Jubilee/The Boy Scouts got a stamp./The Camp Fire Girls got a stamp./The 3 1/2 million Girl Scouts got no stamp./ (Where was their Honorary President?)"

The honorary Girl Scouts president was Jacqueline Kennedy, wife of the president of the United States. Stutel-Dean sent her a copy of his cover.

joined the Sun in 1874 to write on theological and controversial subjects. He died at age 67 in 1906.

The letters by Church and O'Hanlon have given them immortality, and have given to countless generations of readers, past, present and future, a touchstone for the meaning of Christmas.

Richard Church Thompson, a distant cousin of Church, has already begun a campaign to have the 100th anniversary of "Yes, Virginia . . ." honored on the 1997 contemporary Christmas stamp. I support this 100 percent.

If you support this idea, write to the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee, U.S. Postal Service, Room 5800, 475 L'Enfant Plaza S.W., Washington, DC 20260-8352.

The range of possible designs for a "Yes, Virginia . . ." commemoration is not wide. It would be difficult to



Figure 3. Senior Girl Scout Becky Gainey of Charlotte, N.C., with the first announced 1962 Girl Scouts stamp design.

Someone, however, had already gotten the message, because the design of a Girl Scouts stamp had been announced at a Girl Scouts 50th anniversary luncheon March 12, 1962.

Shown in Figure 3 is a photo from that event, featuring senior Girl Scout Becky Gainey of Charlotte, N.C., with Ward Brackett's preliminary artwork for the stamp.

This design represented several steps of evolution, but it was not the final design.

Eight earlier attempts, represented by the three examples shown in Figure 4, had been produced with a 4¢ face value. It was expected that the stamps would be issued in green, gold and black.

The scout and stripes concept in red was prepared as a 5¢ stamp because the Post Office Department expected a rate change by the time the stamp was to be released July 24, 1962, at the third Senior Girl Scouts Roundup at Britton Bay, Vt.

The single color was specified to simplify last minute changes in the design if necessary. Red had previously been reserved for airmail stamps, but no other color would have been appropriate for the flag stripes.

Three major changes were



Figure 5. The final Girl Scouts stamp had a 4¢ face value, but was printed in red, despite the practice of reserving that color for airmail stamps.

made before the final design in Figure 5 was released.

Postmaster General J. Edward Day suggested that the senior Girl Scout in the design presented too old an image to be typical, so the younger image on the final design was substituted.

The wave of the flag was altered to make it more realistic and, finally, the denomination returned to 4¢ when it became clear that the first-class rate hike would not be approved until later in the year.

It has been suggested that the Girl Scouts stamp image is based on a living model. There is no evidence to support that conclusion.

Stutel-Dean has suggested that there is a design error on this issue because the stamp shows the face of an intermediate scout wearing a beret, instead of a senior scout as in Figure 3.

If the stamp were honoring the senior roundup at which it was issued, I'd be inclined to agree. That isn't the case. It is clear from the early rejected designs that it was always intended for the stamp to honor the 50th anniversary of the Girl Scouts.

Thus, the image is entirely appropriate. ■

U.S. Notes

By John M. Hotchner

make glad the hearts of childhood."

We are approaching the 100th anniversary of the date that Francis P. Church, editorial writer for the New York Sun, wrote those lines in response to a letter to the editor from 8-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon who is shown in Figure 1.

O'Hanlon stated: "Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says 'If you see it in the Sun, it's so.' Please tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus?"

Church's classic answer, as follows, is as true today as it was when penned 95 Christmases ago in 1897. It appeared in the Sept. 21, 1897, New York Sun.

"Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere



Figure 1. Virginia O'Hanlon, who at age 8 wrote the now-famous letter asking if there is a Santa Claus.

edge.

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

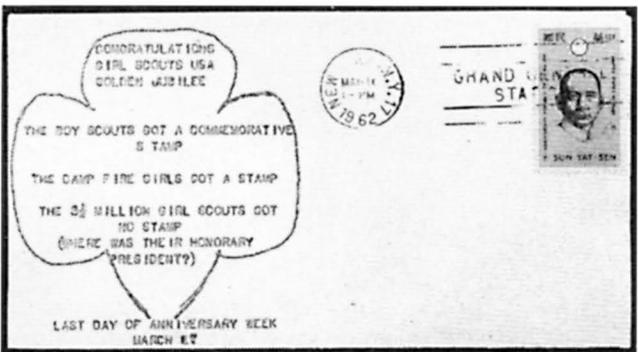


Figure 2. Honorary Girl Scouts of America president Jacqueline Kennedy hadn't yet come through with a 50th anniversary commemorative stamp in 1962 when Floyd Stutel-Dean prepared this protest cachet.

Focus on Forgeries

Azerbaijan

2 ruble-10rub Baku definitives of 1919

Scott 6-8

Forgery Scott 7

Genuine Scott 7

Genuine stamps of this design showing the capital of Azerbaijan are confusing to many collectors because they were first printed on white paper in 1919 and then reissued in 1921 on poor-quality brownish paper. Outright forgeries, prepared by an unknown counterfeiter, subsequently flooded the market. They are printed on an off-white to light tan paper, but there are distinct design differences as well. The forgeries are very numerous and are found in almost all general collections.

Forgeries: The star touches or nearly touches the lower horn of the crescent moon in the top-right corner of the central design. There is a break at lower right in the frameline at the bottom of the box surrounding the Turkish numeral 5 (which resembles an inverted heart) in the top-right corner of the stamp.

Genuine: The star is accurately centered between the horns of the moon. Although the framelines of the box around the Turkish numeral 5 are distinctly thinner than those of the forgery, they are intact and there are no breaks.

Text by Varro E. Tyler