

# December at the Museum!



Dear Editor,  
I am eighty years old  
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?  
Virginia O' Hanlon  
115 W. 95 St.

**Is There a Santa Claus?**  
We take pleasure in answering at once and thus promptly the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of THE SUN.  
- Dean Rogers, I am 8 years old.  
- 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?  
- Virginia O'Hanlon.  
- 115 West Ninety-fifth Street.  
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 insect, no more, to his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.  
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 VIRGINIA. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make intolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.  
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. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.  
You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, VIRGINIA, in all this world there is nothing else so real as this.  
No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, VIRGINIA, may, ten thousand times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.



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## Virginia O' Hanlon - Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.

## December - Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

For our family, Christmas is a time of tradition and ritual. My parents are self-employed, and the build up to Christmas Eve is always very busy in the shop. The store stays open until that evening - they always plan to close early, but customers drift in late, doing last minute shopping and collections. My mother shops all throughout December, snatching ten minutes here and there to visit other neighboring shops to chose the perfect gift. My father is out delivering new beds or sofas to families around the hinterland, and when we finally get home on Christmas Eve, everyone breathes a sigh of relief, looking forward to the next few days when the shop is closed and we can celebrate. Of course, the work had really only begun then, as my grandmother and mother prepared the feast! They had to boil the

bacon (you have to throw off the first boil), before putting cloves in it and then roasting it, peel a seemingly never-ending supply of potatoes, carrots and parsnips, wash the Brussels sprouts, make the stuffing, make the Sherry trifle and jelly, and clean the turkey. Then all the presents have to be wrapped ... and you get the picture! I doubt my mother ever saw bed before 2 am on Christmas Eve! It is a little easier now, even though my grandmother has died. In past years my sisters and I helped if we were home, and even Dad and my brother have been drafted in to do some domestic

chores! This year my parents will have my two sisters and five children (who really make Christmas), my brother and his girlfriend, and myself at home, so many hands will make light work! We will still have a busy Christmas Eve, get up early to open presents, go to mass before visiting my granduncle and family, my aunt and family, and grandmother, then head home for dinner in the late afternoon. I love the fact that Christmas at home has been the same routine since 1976 - the year my parents set up their own home. I look forward to introducing my niece and nephews to our traditions, and celebrating new ones with them as our family grows and changes. I wish you all a happy, safe, and healthy Christmas and New Year.

I wanted to share this quintessential Christmas story below with you all. I am sure everyone knows the story of the little girl who was perturbed at the idea that Santa Claus might not exist. The letter she received in response is as uplifting and life-affirming now as it was when written in 1897, by a reporter who had worked through the American Civil War. Virginia's grandfather, Philip, was born in Ireland and was a founding member of the 63rd Volunteer Regiment of Meagher's Irish Brigade.

"Dear Editor," Virginia O'Hanlon started her letter to the editor, "I am 8 years old." The young girl from New York City penned a letter in September 1897 to the New York Sun, explaining: "Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says 'If you see it in The Sun it's so.'" Then came the pointed question: "Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?" The letter, written in careful cursive, prompted a response so touching and timeless that it has been shared countless times over the past century - and become its own classic Christmas story.

The Sun replied on the editorial page of its September 21, 1897 edition. The response was not prominently featured; it ran in the seventh slot on the page, below editorials on local and state politics and even a piece about the recently invented chainless bicycle. The Sun had a strict policy of not revealing its editorial writers, so it wasn't until his death in 1906 that Francis Pharcellus Church became known as the author.

The letter becomes all the more moving after the identity of the writer was known. As a battlefield correspondent for the New York Times during the American Civil War, Church had seen more than his share of suffering and strife. He went on to found the Army and Navy Magazine and Galaxy Magazine with his brother, William Conant Church. The latter later merged with Atlantic Monthly, and Francis became a lead editorial writer for The Sun. According to his editor at the time, Edward P. Mitchell, Church did not leap to the task when Virginia's letter came in. "At first he bristled and pooh-poohed the subject," Mitchell later wrote, "but he took the letter and turned with an air of resignation to his desk." His response went down in history. It has been the subject of TV specials, cartoons, cantatas, and Christmas window displays.

Laura Virginia O'Hanlon Douglas wed a man named Edward Douglas in 1910, but he deserted her just before their daughter Laura was born. This did not hold Virginia back whatsoever. She powered on to earn her degree from Hunter College, a Master's in education from Columbia University, and her doctorate from Fordham. She was a New York City school teacher for over 20 years and eventually became principal before retiring in 1959. Her doctoral dissertation in 1930 was on "The Importance of Play." The abstract read in part:

Upon reflection, it seemed to the writer that not only the happiest memories of her childhood but many of her most abiding interests and small successes had their beginning in play life. While not analyzing this closely, she seemed to feel, or perhaps to hope, that if the children who are deprived of the heritage of play from the land of their fathers, could only be given it back together with some of ours, they might more truly come into their own that they can ever hope to now.

Throughout her life, she would continue to receive mail about the letter and diligently replied. She even had a specially printed copy of the editorial, which she included in all of her replies. One of her letters, written when she herself was grown and published on the 40th anniversary of Church's editorial, read:

"Is there a Santa Claus?"

Dear children of yesterday and today, when that question was asked, I, a little girl, was interested in finding out the answer just for myself. Now, grown up and a teacher, I want so much that all little children believe there really is a Santa Claus. For I understand how essential a belief in Santa Claus, and in fairies, too, is to a happy childhood.

Some little children doubt that Santa still lives because often their letters, for one reason or another, never seem to reach him. Nurses in hospitals know who some of these children are. Teachers in great city schools know others. Dear children of yesterday, won't you try to seek out these trusting children of today and make sure that their letters in some way may reach Santa Claus so that 'he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood'? That, I believe, is the best way of proving there is a Santa Claus, for ourselves and for the children."

In December 2012, radio station WGNA-FM in Albany, published a photo of Douglas meeting Santa on Christmas Eve 1969, two years before her death. Douglas died on May 13, 1971, at the age of 81, in a nursing home in Valatie, New York and is buried at the Chatham Rural Cemetery in North Chatham, New York.

Church's editorial is believed to be the most reprinted one of all time. Because dozens of newspapers still reprint it each year, either partially or in full, it is impossible to know how many times it has appeared in print. It reminds us of a simpler and more innocent time, and fills us now with hope, optimism, and joy.

Virginia,

Your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except that which 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 insect, an ant, in his intellect as compared with the countless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

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.

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 you 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. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders that are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which the strongest men, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived could tear apart.

Only faith, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernatural beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus!?

Thank God! He lives and lives forever.

A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

With thanks to Irish Central and the Washington Post.

## **Triskele in a Christmas Show** **Irish American Heritage Museum** **Sunday, December 1st, 2pm. \$10 members, \$15 non-members**

Come out and ring in the Christmas season with music by Triskele, Albany's all-female Celtic band. They are known for their stunning harmonies, singing in the Gaelic language and for their Irish wit. Triskele not only performs, but

educates the audience about Irish, traditional instrumentation, traditions, and Irish history interspersed with stories about growing up in Ireland. They will perform both traditional Irish music along with Irish/Gaelic Christmas selections. This is a family friendly show. Book your seats at the museum now as space is limited.





**I Am of Ireland: The Work of an Honorary Irishman -Bob Blackmon**  
**Thursday December 5th, 5.30pm Opening Reception**







The museum is proud to co-sponsor this gorgeous art show with the Halflight Gallery in Ireland. The show title, "I Am of Ireland," comes from a poem with the same name by William Butler Yeats. Dr. Elizabeth Stack, Executive Director of the Irish-American Heritage Museum will read the Yeats poem at the opening reception. Guests are invited to stay for the Rambling House after the opening reception and enjoy traditional Irish music surrounded by Bob's evocative Irish art.

**Rambling House: Traditional Irish Music**  
**Irish American Heritage Museum**  
**Thursday December 5th, 7pm**





As usual, all are welcome to participate in this free evening of traditional Irish music and song brought to you by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (the Irish Musicians' Association). This will be a special pre-Christmas treat, with some festive tunes included! Bring your party piece or instrument! Audience participation welcome and encouraged by our friendly group. Hear traditional Irish music, and old songs, stories and poems in a traditional format that still happens in many Irish homes (and bars) today.

The motto of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is "ceol agus gaol" (music and kinship), and while headquartered in Ireland, there are branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann all over the world. Light refreshments will be provided.

**Christmas Market**  
**Irish American Heritage Museum**  
**Saturday December 7th, 11 am to 5pm**

**The Irish American Heritage Museum**  
**Invites you to our**  
**IRISH CHRISTMAS MARKET & CAFE'**

**Saturday, Dec. 7th**

**11 AM to 5 PM**

**Free Admission**



**Crafts**  
**Traditional Gifts**  
**Modern Gifts**  
**Food**  
**Music**  
**Santa**





**370 Broadway, Albany, NY 12207**



Avoid the rush and join us at the Museum to get a start on your Christmas shopping. The Market at the Museum has a range of local artisans and crafters selling gifts, kids' toys, beauty products, cakes, jewelry, whiskey, beer, and lots more! We have a range of gently-read books for sale, and the cafe will have corned beef sandwiches and shepherd's pie and other treats to nourish you and heat you up. Our own shop will have Irish clothes, jewelry, food, cds, and soda bread for sale. Pdraig Timoney will sing festive and Irish songs, Bethlehem Traditional School of Dance will perform in the afternoon, and we will have a special visitor from the North Pole too to meet your little ones. All are welcome to enjoy a day of shopping, community, and Christmas spirit. Nollaig Shona Daiobh.

Irish American Heritage Museum | 518-427-1916 | [info@irish-us.org](mailto:info@irish-us.org) | [www.irish-us.org](http://www.irish-us.org)