

The history of Frosty the Snowman



During the Christmas season of 1950, a new holiday song was introduced that told the tale of an inanimate snowman that came to life to spread good cheer. Written by Steve Nelson and Jack Rollins, "Frosty the Snowman" became an international hit recording and a permanent part of many people's Christmas celebrations. The lovably jolly snowman, which possessed "a button nose, and two eyes made out of coal," became as recognizable as other nonreligious Christmas symbols like Santa Claus and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (see entry under 1940s—Print Culture in volume 3).

In the Nelson and Rollins song, the snowman comes alive when a magical silk hat is placed upon his head by a group of children. The newly energized snowman and kids proceed to enjoy a winter day devoted to sledding and ice-skating. Their adventure ends as a warm spell forces Frosty to leave for a colder climate, but he promises to return when the weather again becomes cooler. Although Frosty is closely associated with Christmas, the holiday is never mentioned in the song. Still, the song has been included on dozens of Christmas albums by a wide variety of musical artists over the years.

The popularity of the 1950 song led to the publication of a Golden Book (see entry under 1940s—Print Culture in volume 3) featuring the character a year later. The children's book, which was written by Annie North Bedford (1915–) and illustrated by Corinne Malvern (1905–1956), was a great success and further increased Frosty's popularity.

In the 1960s, Frosty leapt from the printed page and landed on television (see entry under 1940s—TV and Radio in volume 3). The first, and most popular, Frosty-based holiday TV special was simply titled *Frosty the Snowman* (1969). It was narrated by comedian Jimmy Durante (1893–1980). The TV script expanded upon the original song's premise: Frosty is

confronted by a washed-up magician who wants the silk top hat that gave Frosty life. The special also teaches children a message about the power of friendship and kindness. Santa appears at the conclusion to take Frosty to his new home at the North Pole. Comedian Jackie Vernon (1925–1987) provided the voice of Frosty on this and other holiday programs.

In 1976, Frosty returned to TV in Frosty's Winter Wonderland. In this special, the lonely snowman's friends, who are children, make him a wife named Crystal. The voice of Crystal was provided by actress Shelley Winters (1922–). Andy Griffith (1926–; see entry on The Andy Griffith Show under 1960s—TV and Radio in volume 4) served as the narrator of the story. The 1979 holiday season saw the first showing of Rudolph and Frosty's Christmas in July. This TV special teamed the snowman with Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer in an adventure in which they confronted the evil wizard Winterbolt. In this Frosty episode, it is revealed that Frosty and Crystal now are the parents of a snow-family. Included among the celebrity voices in this program are Red Buttons (1919–), Ethel Merman (1908–1984), and Mickey Rooney (1920–). In 1998, Michael Keaton (1951–) starred in Jack Frost, a live-action film that was based partly on the Frosty tale. The film tells of a neglectful dad who dies and comes back to life as a snowman in his son's front yard, leaving cookies and milk out for Santa Claus—and perhaps a few carrots for his reindeer—on Christmas Eve is a popular practice among American children. But how did the tradition begin?

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