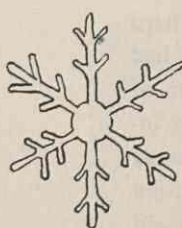




# Christmas



By



# Rockwell



Norman Rockwell could hardly look and act less like Santa Claus if he tried. He is a slim six-footer, remarkably youthful for his 57 years, and he can boast neither merry dimples nor the jolly old elf's temperament.

But he is America's most vivid portrayer of Christmas as well as being its best known and most loved illustrator. His paintings of Santa and his elves and reindeer, and yuletide's fiddlers, dancers, carolers and children have delighted more than a generation of youngsters and oldsters.

"I've never played Santa Claus in my life. I wouldn't dare to," said Rockwell. He was seated at his drawing board in a cluttered studio in back of his Arlington, Vermont, home, reviewing some of the hundred or more paintings and drawings of Christmas he has done.

Rockwell painted his first Christmas illustration 35 years ago—a top-hatted gentleman of the 1916 era in the act of trying on a Santa Claus beard. His latest are two done for this Christmas (Santa and the two children, and the dancing threesome on the music box) for a series of Christmas cards published by the Hallmark Company, whose fine art reproductions on Christmas cards are world famous. The Rockwell series for Hallmark now totals 12 cards, of which 4 are shown on these pages.

"Don't mistake me, though," said Rockwell, "I like Christmas and everything about it. But I don't believe a fellow should have to don a beard in order to paint Christmas."

Rockwell is an inordinately friendly fellow who

talks humorously, if somewhat shyly, about himself and his work. His own Christmases, he thought, had been fairly ordinary. But each of his Christmas paintings called up a recollection.

The boy who posed for his "Christmas Caroler," he said, was Clarence Decker, age 10, a neighboring lad in Arlington. He was fidgety, said Rockwell, and the illustrator could sympathize with him. Norman had been an actual choir boy himself some 40-odd years before.

"At the time I really hated it," he grinned. "Christmas rehearsals seemed to be always taking time from a snowball fight, or sledding or skating. What was even worse, my mother wouldn't let me keep the money I earned from singing. I had to put it into the collection plate every week."

The picture, "Bringing Home the Tree," he thinks may have been inspired by his early effort to locate a Christmas tree in the Vermont woods, mostly for the edification of his young sons, Jerry, Tommy and Peter.

"I learned from that experience," he related, "that nature does not grow big, beautifully proportioned Christmas trees all by itself. You know, the nursery-men train them and pull them into shape and maybe even trim them. The tree we finally settled for was a sadly misshapen one. But the kids thought it was wonderful."

Because illustrators are beset with deadlines, a hot midsummer day may find Rockwell poking through an even hotter attic in search of Christmas tree decorations or beseeching a florist to make a Christmas wreath for use as an inspiration for one of his paintings, he said.

"If these fail me, I conjure up a picture in my mind of a childhood uncle of mine who didn't