

Alexandria Times

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Holiday celebrations with Historic Alexandria

Historic Alexandria offers two holiday celebrations Saturday: Christmas in Camp at Fort Ward Museum and a Kwanzaa Workshop at the Alexandria Black History Museum. For more information on the celebrations, please visit alexandria.va.gov/Historic.

Christmas in Camp

Thomas Nast first drew Santa Claus for Harper's Weekly in the winter of 1862. Throughout the war, Nast often depicted Santa Claus celebrating Christmas with Union soldiers. President Abraham Lincoln later designated Nast's depictions of the war, especially his annual feature of Santa Claus "as the best recruiting sergeant the North ever had."

Nast cartoons first publicized other details about Santa Claus. For instance, Nast revealed Santa's residence at the North Pole to readers in 1866. Later, Nast's cartoons introduced the workshop and the naughty and nice list.

While Nast portrayed Christmas in camp as rather idyllic, the soldiers remembered the experience differently. Kevin Rawling's book, "We Were Marching on Christmas Day: A History and Chronicle of Christmas during the Civil War," includes the accounts of Alfred Bellard when he was stationed along the Potomac:

"On Christmas Day, Co. H of our Reg. were well supplied with good things as their friends had sent them about 18 boxes containing plenty of poultry and various other good things, making mouths of the less fortunate companys water. In order to make it look much like Christmas as possible, a small tree was stuck up in front of our tent, decked off with hard tack and pork, in lieu of cakes, oranges, etc. Our band of 15 pieces arrived about the time and the boys were highly elated at the prospect of plenty of music."

Rawlings also includes a let-

ter from Frederick Pettit, of the 100th Pennsylvania Infantry, who wrote in 1863:

"Perhaps you would like to know how we are spending our Christmas in the army. Last night I was on picket and caught a bad cold and as you may suppose do not feel very funny. Last year I think I told you I had a mess of beans and pork for Christmas dinner. This year I am not so fortunate. We have been furnished nothing but a small piece of boiled beef."

You can get in the holiday spirit and learn how Christmas was observed during the Civil War at Fort Ward Museum's annual Civil War Christmas in Camp program on Saturday from noon to 4 p.m.

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a vibrant seven-day celebration of African heritage and African American culture, observed annually from Dec. 26 to New Year's Day. Created in 1966 by Pan-Afri-

canist Maulana Karenga, Ph.D., Kwanzaa focuses on rejoicing in community, creating an atmosphere of love, peace and unity.

Rooted in cultural and political expression, it reaffirms African heritage while organizing Black people for total liberation. Each day centers on one of the seven principles of Nguzo Saba: Umoja, Unity; Kujichagulia, Self-Determination; Ujima, Collective Work and Responsibility; Ujamaa, Cooperative Economics; Nia, Purpose; Kuumba, Creativity; and Imani, Faith. It begins with the question "Habari Gani?" "What's the news?"

For 20 years, the Alexandria Black History Museum has celebrated this tradition. Join us on Saturday, from 11 a.m. to noon, for just \$3, to enjoy crafts, storytelling and light refreshments honoring this meaningful holiday.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.