This image depicts Clement Clark Moore, author of "The Night Before Christmas," as engraved by J.W. Evans from "the portrait of life painted for his children."

What do we know about Clement Moore and his famous poem? For starters:

- How did this fanciful tale come about?
- Where did Moore write it?
- Was he inspired by anything?

Let's investigate the poem's background via the Library of Congress and its "America's Story" website:

Clement Moore Is Believed to Have Written “A Visit from St. Nicholas”
December 24, 1822

Perhaps you have read these famous words: “‘Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.”

‘Twas the day before Christmas, December 24, the day in 1822 that Clement Moore is thought to have composed the classic poem that was then called “A Visit from St. Nicholas.” You probably know it as “The Night Before Christmas.”

While traveling home from Greenwich Village, in Manhattan, where he had bought a turkey to donate to the poor during the holiday season, Moore penned the story for the amusement of his six children, with whom he shared the poem that evening.

He was inspired by the plump, bearded Dutchman who took him by sleigh on his errand through the snow-covered streets of New York City. Moore’s vision of St. Nicholas draws upon Dutch-American and Norwegian traditions of a magical, gift-giving figure that appears at Christmas time. It also is based on the German legend of a visitor who enters homes through chimneys.

Clement Moore knew of such folklore as a learned man of literature. He was born into a well-respected New York family in 1779. His father, Benjamin Moore, had served as president of Columbia University and Episcopal bishop of New York, participating in the inauguration of George Washington as the nation’s first president.

Clement Moore graduated from Columbia. As a scholar, he is said to have been embarrassed by the light-hearted holiday poem, which somehow made its way into the public without his knowledge in December 1823.

Moore did not publish it under his name until 1844. Many editions of “The Night Before Christmas” have been published over the years.

American parents still read the tale to their children at bedtime on December 24, as their parents did to them.

Thomas Edison, the great inventor, also started a company which recorded film and sound. In 1922, that company recorded a message from "Santa." It was called “Santa Claus Hides in Your Phonograph.”
Although it didn’t become the classic that Clement Moore’s poem became, the recording—by Harry E. Humphrey and Arthur A. Penn—was something very special for little children who thought they were hearing Santa’s voice.

In those days, nearly a century ago, small children didn’t just think that they were hearing Santa’s voice, they actually believed that Santa Claus was hiding *inside the machine*. Why ever did they believe such an unlikely tale? Because Santa *told* them so!

Credits:


Online, courtesy *Making of America* at Cornell University.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Clement-Clark-Moore-The-Night-before-Christmas

See Learning Tasks for this story online at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Clement-Clark-Moore-The-Night-before-Christmas