

Color the Season Lucky

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The sounds, tastes, scents, and emotions of each season stay constant, as sure as the seasons themselves change. Yesterday's pumpkin spice is today's peppermint. Orange leaves become crispy brown filler for lawn bags, our entertainment passes from Halloween's dark films to Hollywood's white snow, and we begin to look forward to budding April.

However, the symbols we associate with each season sometimes change over time, and the meanings of these symbols can evolve as well.

Black Cats: A Different Purrerspective

Today if you get a greeting card with a black cat, you are likely to think of All Hallows Eve. For us, the color carries a multitude of connotations: Mystery, evil, elegance, dolor, drama and more, depending upon where and how it is used. However, in days past, when holiday cards were far more common than today, greetings with best wishes for the New Year were often accompanied by an illustration of a lucky black cat.

It may seem odd now, but black cats used to be considered lucky in Europe and even in many

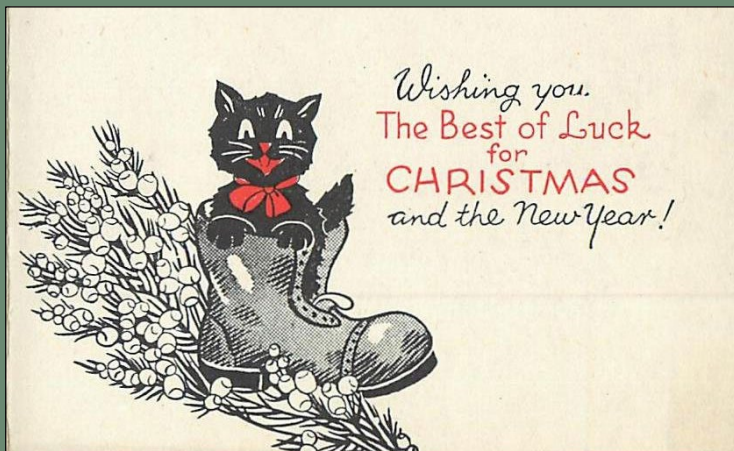
parts of the U.S. The black cat as a crone's familiar was considered a silly myth from ignorant times. Comedian Groucho Marx once quipped, "A black cat crossing your path signifies that the animal is going somewhere."

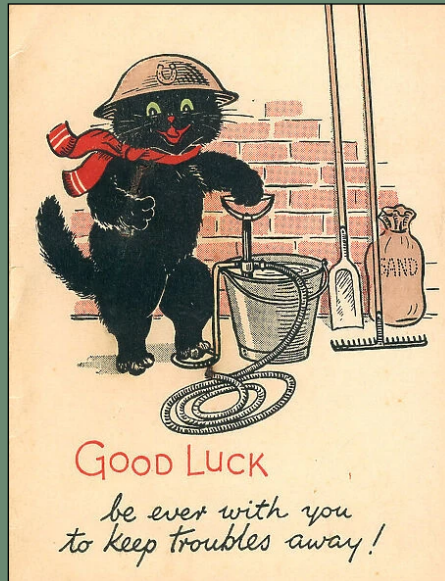
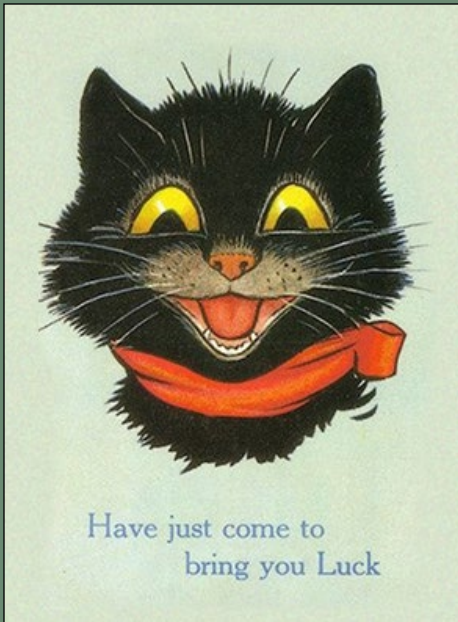
In 1898, a football team in Alameda, California panicked when it lost its mascot, a black feline named Lucky. After losing a game, the boys found Lucky snuggled up in a coal bin. Immediately after his return to the school, the team received a telegram: Their rival for the upcoming championship game had forfeited, and Alameda High won.¹ We may never know if some team member thanked Lucky for the triumph, perhaps with a bowl of cream.

At approximately the same time, department stores would run Lucky Black Cat sales, cigarette brands used the kitty in ads, and even Bingo halls had Lucky Black Cat nights. In this same era, the black cat was occasionally paired with an ancient symbol of prosperity and wealth—the color red.

Seeing Red

Asian cultures have traditionally considered red a symbol of luck. The Chinese Qun Kwa is a red bridal gown symbolizing happiness,





Feng Shui utilizes the color, and in many Asian restaurants, whether or not they serve Japanese food, a Japanese Maneki Neko cat figurine will greet guests at the entrance, one paw beckoning them in, with a red collar around its neck for luck.

Back in America, wealthy Colonials often showed off their status by having a red front door, as red paint was so expensive.² That bottle of Red Door cologne on a vanity? Elizabeth Arden took commercial advantage to equate those doors with a posh, upscale life.

Contemporary lifestyles provide us with electronic greeting cards, and cards of all seasons freely use cats as universal message carriers—fat cats, thin cats, curious cats, sleepy cats, “tuxedo” cats, tabby and calico

cats—in short, Jellicle felines of every stripe. Once, when a greeting card at the end of the year was illustrated with clowning cats and adorable kittens bedecked with red ribbons round their necks, a black kitten in the pride carried special meaning. Today, whether delivered by email or surface post, a message with a black cat combined with red ribbons remains symbolic of a prosperous new beginning.

As we look to a new year, a new season, and the same old resolutions to break, let us consider the words of an unknown writer of 136 years ago, who told his contemporaries, “I’ll bet that the men who have made big fortunes out of nothing had a black cat in the house.”³



Sources

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