

## **Pelznickel and Kristkind**

Electronic mail message from Dr. William Wiest, Portland, Oregon, January 2008

Hi Harold, thanks for the note about some of my questions. Your Dad's special memories about the Christmas tradition is very interesting. I noticed that you wrote concerning 'the scary guy,' "He was called the German name for Belzebub" and I wondered at the similarities among Belzebub, Peltzbube, and Beelzebub; the latter I remember vaguely as a Satan-related spirit from Bible courses in high school (private Mennonite school in Reedley called Immanuel Academy) as well as at Tabor College. I got the item below by googling 'belzebub.'

### **Beelzebub**

In the New Testament, the leader of the devils, sometimes identified with Satan and sometimes with his chief assistant (see devil). In the Old Testament Beelzebub was a fertility god worshipped by the Philistines and other Semitic groups (Baal).

I now remember that the term I was searching for when I first wrote 'belzbube' was 'pelznickel' or 'belznickel.' I found a number of relevant websites, now that I remembered the name we use in our local Oregon chapter of AHSGR (Belznickel or Pelznickel). See especially the last website I refer to.

"The figure Nast drew, which was based on Pelznickel, the St. Nicholas of his German ancestors, is the famous Santa Claus, now known to everybody in the country."

The following is a web page of the Germans in Siberia; it is in Russian but has 'Pelznickel' in the index (in Latin Alphabet).

The website that I found most interesting is:

(<http://dallashistory.org/phorum/read.php?2,52779>), from which I copied the following: (There's much more there of interest)

### **Kriskind and Belznikel**

When the German immigrants settled in colonies in the Volga River area of Russia in 1767, they were given a number of privileges. This included freedom of their religion, schools and the use of their mother tongue. It was natural that they retained their German customs.

Christmas was an eventful time of the year. During the celebration was the appearance of two individuals - the Belznikel and the Kriskind.

The name Belznikel is in two parts. Belz (actually spelled Pelz) is a pelt or fur coat and nikel is a nasty person. This unsavory person, using a switch would punish the boys who had misbehaved during the year. Sometimes he would also put them in a large sack and drag them away. Whenever a boy was being bad, he was warned - "Der Belznikel kommt" (the Belznikel is coming).