

December 2020

Newsletter

HAPPY  
BIRTHDAY

Resident Birthdays in December

What's Happening in  
December

Universal Human Rights  
Month  
Bingo's Birthday  
Month

Cookie Cutter Week December  
1-7

Hanukkah December 10-18

Gingerbread House Day De-  
cember 12

Christmas Bird Count Decem-  
ber 14-

January 5 Free Shipping Day  
December 17

Christmas December 25

Kwanzaa December 26-  
January 1

New Year's Eve December 31

Wilkins

on Augusta

### A Tough nut to Crack

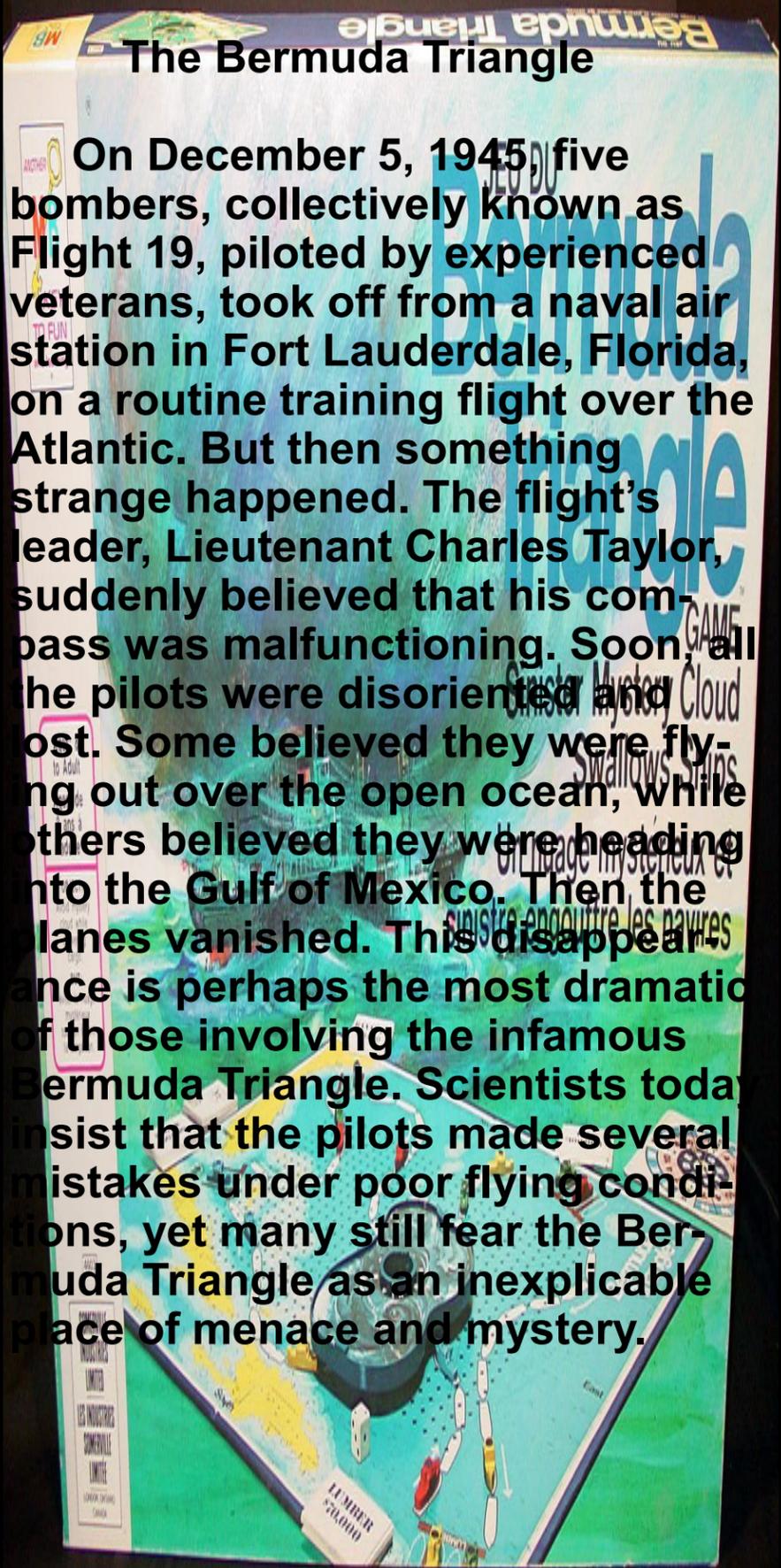
December brings many beloved holiday traditions, but one soars above the rest. No, not flying reindeer, but the dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. Tchaikovsky's classic ballet The Nutcracker has become a holiday staple all around the world, despite not mentioning the nativity story or Santa Claus. It was not Tchaikovsky's idea to write The Nutcracker. After enjoying success with his ballet The Sleeping Beauty in 1890, Tchaikovsky was asked to compose a ballet for the Imperial Theatre. Tchaikovsky turned to his friend and collaborator Marius Pepita, who suggested they write a ballet based on the fairy tale The Story of a Nutcracker, by the French writer Alexandre Dumas. Dumas himself had "borrowed" the story from the German writer E.T.A. Hoffman, who wrote The Nutcracker and the Mouse King in 1816. In the 1800s, nutcrackers were common decorations in German households, revered as symbols of good luck. While composing in France, Tchaikovsky discovered a new instrument, the celesta. He decided to feature its wonderful sound in his new ballet. Before the ballet premiered, a short concert of the musical suite was played in St. Petersburg. Every number was given an encore. Tchaikovsky knew the music was good, but he worried about the performance. Tchaikovsky was right to worry. Critics did not like The Nutcracker when it premiered at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, Russia, on December 18, 1892. One particularly harsh review read, "The Nutcracker cannot in any event be called a ballet." For decades, only the first half of the ballet, featuring the battle between the soldiers and the rat king, was performed. But in 1944, the San Francisco Ballet, led by William Christensen, staged the entire ballet, and it became an instant holiday hit. Nut-



## Hogmanay in Scotland

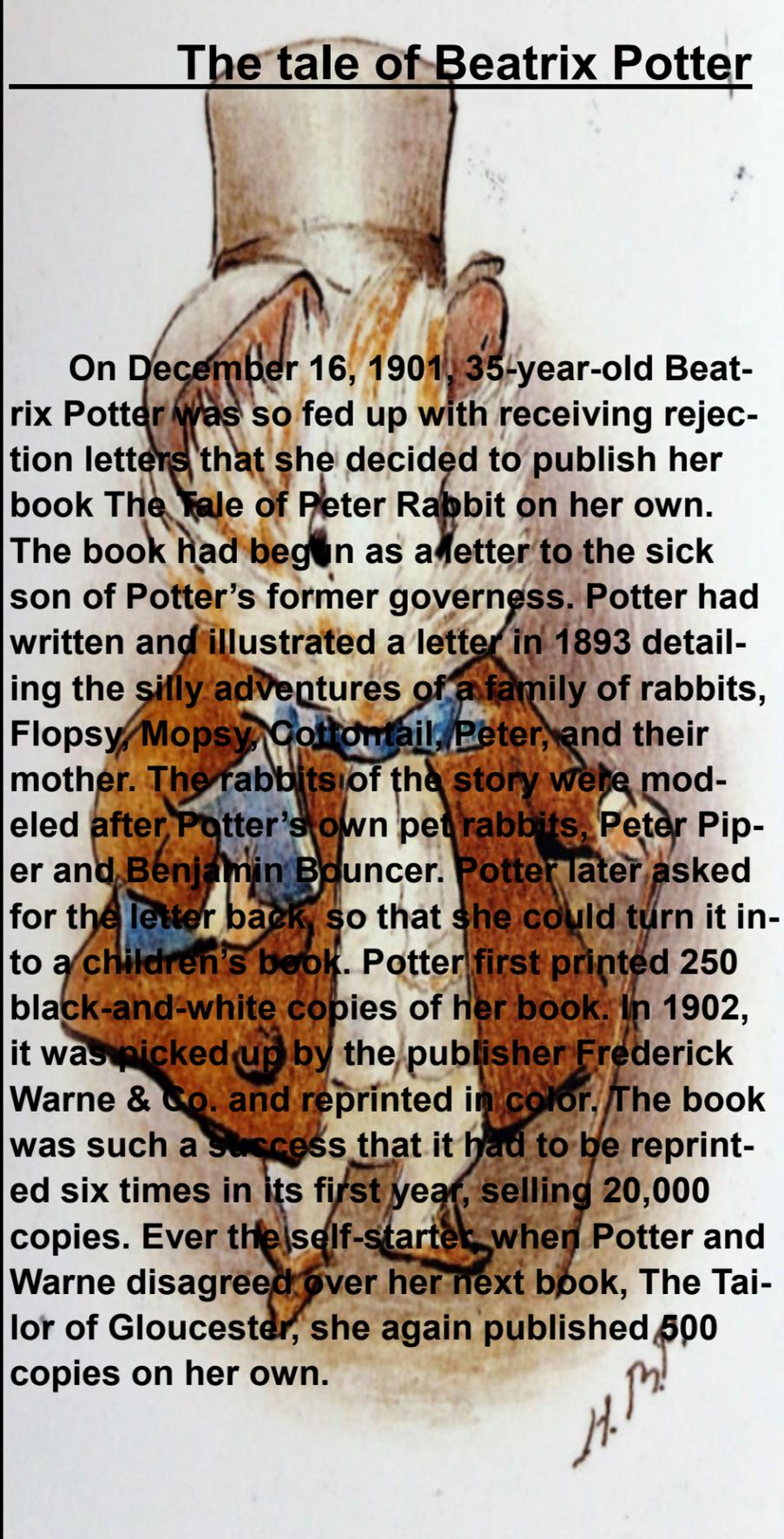
Consider yourself lucky if you find yourself ringing in the New Year in Scotland. Their Hogmanay holiday is one of the world's greatest New Year's celebrations. No one is exactly sure what the term Hogmanay means. It first appeared in writing back in 1604, and historians believe the festival was celebrated decades earlier. Some speculate that Hogmanay derives from the French word hoganine, meaning "gala day." Others believe it comes from the Norman French word hoguinan, meaning "New Year's gift." Historians agree that both the term and the celebration likely appeared after Mary, Queen of Scots, returned to Scotland from France in 1561. One of the foremost Hogmanay traditions is redding the house. This involves a deep cleaning of the home for the new year. It was traditional to clean the ashes from the hearth. Some community members were called upon to read the ashes, the way some soothsayers read tea leaves. The cleaning wasn't complete until a smoking juniper branch was carried from room to room, dispelling evil spirits. One last way of keeping house was to clear up all family debts before midnight. The stroke of midnight brings the first footing. The first foot refers to the first person to set foot in your house on New Year's Day, and this first footing is symbolic of the year to come. This is why many new year's visitors come bearing gifts of shortbread and black buns, both considered luxurious foods. Hosts are obliged to offer their first footers a small drink, or wee dram, of whiskey. First footers often visit many homes, and the wee drams certainly add up. Bonfires are also traditional. Since ancient times, fire has symbolized purification in Scotland. This is yet another means of cleaning for the new year. Of course, Hogmanay wouldn't be complete without the singing of Auld Lang Syne, written by Scotland's national poet Robert Burns.

## The Bermuda Triangle



On December 5, 1945, five bombers, collectively known as Flight 19, piloted by experienced veterans, took off from a naval air station in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on a routine training flight over the Atlantic. But then something strange happened. The flight's leader, Lieutenant Charles Taylor, suddenly believed that his compass was malfunctioning. Soon, all the pilots were disoriented and lost. Some believed they were flying out over the open ocean, while others believed they were heading into the Gulf of Mexico. Then the planes vanished. This disappearance is perhaps the most dramatic of those involving the infamous Bermuda Triangle. Scientists today insist that the pilots made several mistakes under poor flying conditions, yet many still fear the Bermuda Triangle as an inexplicable place of menace and mystery.

## The tale of Beatrix Potter



On December 16, 1901, 35-year-old Beatrix Potter was so fed up with receiving rejection letters that she decided to publish her book *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* on her own. The book had begun as a letter to the sick son of Potter's former governess. Potter had written and illustrated a letter in 1893 detailing the silly adventures of a family of rabbits, Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail, Peter, and their mother. The rabbits of the story were modeled after Potter's own pet rabbits, Peter Piper and Benjamin Bouncer. Potter later asked for the letter back, so that she could turn it into a children's book. Potter first printed 250 black-and-white copies of her book. In 1902, it was picked up by the publisher Frederick Warne & Co. and reprinted in color. The book was such a success that it had to be reprinted six times in its first year, selling 20,000 copies. Ever the self-starter, when Potter and Warne disagreed over her next book, *The Tailor of Gloucester*, she again published 500 copies on her own.

December 11 is International Mountain Day, a day to show appreciation and respect for

the high places in the world.

It is also a day to honor those with the courage to explore

the mountains. On December 3, 1910, Australian mountaineer Freda du Faur became the first woman to reach the summit of Mount Cook in New Zealand. As a young girl growing up in Sydney, Australia,

Du Faur taught herself rock climbing at a nearby national park. Summer vacations to New Zealand inspired her to summit the island's snow-capped peaks. Du Faur's dedication to physical fitness and rock-climbing would become standards for mountaineers of any gender. Du Faur made many first ascents in New Zealand's rugged ranges, for which she would become famous in the mountaineering world.

### Sitting Down for Equal Rights

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was commuting home after working a long day at a Montgomery, Alabama, department store. Segregation was written into law and Blacks were required to sit in the back of the bus, with seats in the front reserved for white riders. When a white man entered the bus and found no open seats, the bus driver asked four Black riders seated in the first row of the "colored" section to stand. Three complied, but Parks did not. This was not because she was tired from working all day. In her own words, she "was tired of giving in." Parks was arrested and later released on bail, but not before word of her arrest reached civil rights activist E.D. Nixon. Nixon quickly organized a boycott of the Montgomery buses and enlisted the support of Martin Luther King Jr. Despite threats and bombings of both Nixon and King's homes, the boycott continued. Nearly a year later, the Supreme Court ruled Montgomery's bus segregation unconstitutional. Parks' story has remained an inspiration for generations of civil rights activists seeking equality, justice, and equal protection under the law.



### December Birthdays

In astrology, those born between December 1–21 are the Archers of Sagittarius. The Archer's open mind, optimism, curiosity, and enthusiasm make them the travelers of the zodiac. They treasure freedom: freedom to roam, freedom of thought, and freedom to express themselves. Those born between December 22–31 are Capricorn's Goats. Goats are responsible masters of self-control. They are practical planners and leaders

