

VNY *La Voce di New York*

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New York

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Merry Christmas at NY's Morgan Library and Museum with Scrooge and St. Nick

The financier bought the manuscript of A Christmas Carol in the 1890's. Every Christmas the staff advance the story by one page



Italian Hours

Lucy Gordan



J. P. Morgan's study. All photos are thanks to the Morgan Library and Museum.

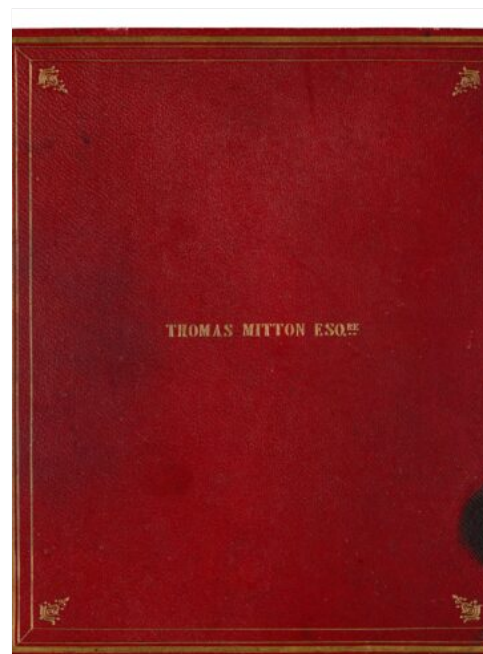
Traditionally every holiday season the Morgan Library displays Charles Dickens's only original manuscript of his novella *A Christmas Carol*. In drastic financial straits Dickens wrote the five “staves” or chapters of this iconic tale over six weeks at the end of 1843.

That he was in a hurry to finish is clear from the 66-page manuscript's many revisions: detailed emendations, deletions, and insertions, and his scrawling handwriting. The book was published on December 19th and sold out by Christmas Eve. By the end of 1844 thirteen editions had been released and since then the novella has never been out of print.

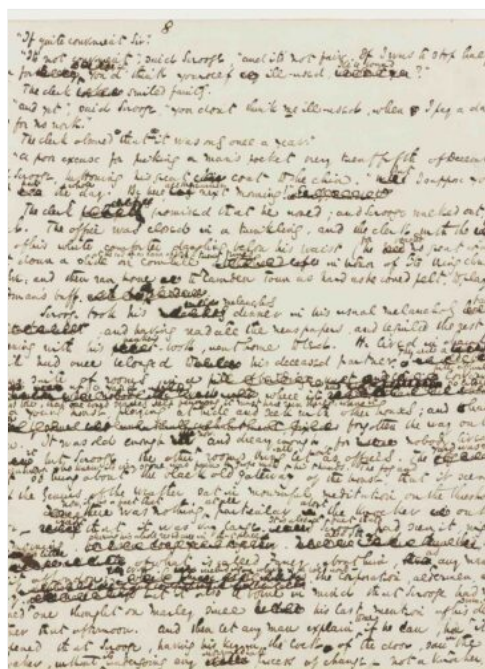
A Christmas Carol recounts the story of the money-lender Ebenezer Scrooge, an elderly miser who, on Christmas Eve, is visited first by the ghost of his former equally miserly business partner and then by the spirits of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come. Thanks to them, Scrooge, who'd always hated Christmas until then, wakes up on Christmas morning a changed man. He makes a large donation to charity, sends a turkey to his clerk's family, and even attends a family party. From then on, he treats everyone with goodwill generosity, and sensitivity, embodying the Christmas spirit.

When the manuscript was returned by the printer, Dickens sent it to a bookbinder (probably Thomas Robert Eccles on London's Cursitor Street, just off Chancery Lane and near Fleet Street), who bound it in crimson Morocco, a durable goatskin leather. The binding was then elegantly decorated in gilt with the name “Thomas Mitton Esq.re” stamped on the front cover. Mitton (1812-78), a solicitor, was a close friend of Dickens and his creditor so Dickens gave him this bound manuscript as a Christmas present to thank him for a loan of 270 pounds.

The manuscript then passed on to several different owners until the banker, businessman, art and book collector J.P. Morgan bought it in the 1890s.



The front cover of Thomas Mitton's copy of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*



Manuscript page from *A Christmas Carol*

Beginning a few years ago, Morgan started advancing the *Christmas Carol* manuscript by one page each season. This year's passage is from the beginning chapter. Scrooge is alone. He has sent away two charity workers seeking donations for the poor, reluctantly given his overworked, underpaid clerk Bob Cratchit Christmas Day off and turned down a dinner invitation from his ebullient nephew Fred. Marley' ghost still has to arrive.

This year's Christmas exhibition, on until January 5, includes a special gift: the donation of the earliest manuscript of the poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas” (better known as “The Night Before Christmas”) by Clement Clarke Moore and illustrated by his daughter Mary Clarke Moore Ogden.

Clement Clarke Moore (1779-1863), a professor of Greek and Hebrew at Columbia University and devotee of Italian lyric opera, wrote “A Visit from St. Nicholas” in 1822. Supposedly a family friend sent a copy to the *Troy Sentinel*, newspaper in Troy, New York, which published it anonymously on December 23, 1823. Moore's authorship wasn't authenticated until 1837.

Moore's daughter, Mary Clarke Moore Ogden (1819-1893) illustrated the manuscript and gave it to her husband John Doughty Ogden as a Christmas present in 1855. On the page opposite her dedication to her husband she drew her family house in Manhattan's westside Chelsea neighborhood where she'd grown up and with her eight brothers and sisters heard their father recite his poem every Christmas.

David Ogden, Mary’s great grandson, recently donated this family treasure illustrated with beautiful color miniature vignettes and decorative floral borders similar to those in medieval manuscripts. He’d just turned 100 years old as had the Morgan Library and Museum. For in 1924 J.P. Morgan’s son, also named J.P. Morgan, in accordance with his father’s will, opened the family home as a public research library and museum.

The Morgan Library and Museum is located at 225 Madison Avenue at 36th Street in Manhattan, a five-minute walk from the no. 6 subway stop at 33rd Street and with several Madison Avenue buses stopping right in front of its main entrance. Renzo Piano, the *genovese* architect, in 2006 designed its glassed-in courtyard with a café.

J.P. Morgan’s personal library and study as well as the exhibition rooms are open to visitors on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday from 10:30 AM to 5 PM, and on Friday from 10:30 AM to 8 PM. Admission is \$25 for adults, \$17 for seniors (65 and over), \$13 for students (with current ID), and free for children 12 and under (who must be accompanied by an adult).



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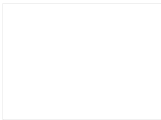
 



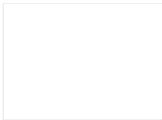
Lucy Gordan
Italian Hours

Former editor at the American Academy in Rome and at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, with journalistic accreditation in Italy and the Vatican, I'm culture editor of the US monthly Inside t...

DELLO STESSO AUTORE



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Ravenna's New Museum: Lord Byron, Il Risorgimento, and Dolls
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