



# **The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale, with Bonus Cookie Recipe for St. Nicholas Christmas Cookies**

*Aaron Shepard , Wendy Edelson (Illustrator)*

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Van Amsterdam the baker was well known for his honesty as well as for his fine Saint Nicholas cookies. He always gave his customers exactly what they paid for -- not more and not less. So, he was not about to give in when a mysterious old woman comes to him on Saint Nicholas Day and insists that a dozen is thirteen!

The woman's curse puts an end to the baker's business, and he believes it would take Saint Nicholas to help him. But if he receives that help, will it be exactly what he imagined?

Find out in this inspiring legend from Dutch colonial New York about the birth of an honored American custom.

TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS -- A READER'S THEATER SCRIPT OF THIS BOOK IS AVAILABLE IN AARON'S BOOK "FOLKTALES ON STAGE," OR FREE ON AARON'S WEB SITE.

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Aaron Shepard is the award-winning author of "The Baker's Dozen," "The Sea King's Daughter," "The Monkey King," and many more children's books. His stories have appeared often in Cricket magazine, while his Web site is known internationally as a prime resource for folktales, storytelling, and reader's theater. Once a professional storyteller, Aaron specializes in lively retellings of folktales and other traditional literature, which have won him honors from the American Library Association, the New York Public Library, the Bank Street College of Education, the National Council for the Social Studies, and the American Folklore Society.

Wendy Edelson has applied her award-winning skills to a wide range of illustration projects, including picture books, pet portraits, posters, puzzles, and fabric design. Her clients have included Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, the Seattle Aquarium, the Pacific Northwest Ballet, the U.S. Postal Service, and the American Library Association.

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## **HONORS**

American Bookseller Pick of the Lists

Trumpet Book Club selection

Valerie and Walter's Best Books for Children

"The good will of legendary Saint Nick resonates in this tale about the origin of the term 'baker's dozen.' . . . Shepard's easy-to-follow retelling has an appropriate Old World flavor." -- Publishers Weekly, Sept. 18, 1995

"A particularly nice holiday story accented by paintings full of detail. . . . Well-paced and a good length for groups or individuals, this is right on target for audiences. Edelson's artwork is filled with marvelously-alive

characters who almost step from the pages." -- Ilene Cooper, Booklist, Sept. 15, 1995

"A lush new version of a traditional tale. . . . Well-chosen words and a nicely-paced text that begs to be told aloud. A treat for the holiday season." -- School Library Journal, Oct. 1995

"Aaron Shepard retells a favorite colonial legend with the voice of the storyteller." -- Jan Lieberman, TNT, Fall 1995

"A fine tale of generosity for St. Nicholas Day or any day." -- Marilyn McPhie, Storybag, Special Review Issue 1997

"A story with a message to be heard during the holidays and all year long." -- Children's Book Review

## **The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale, with Bonus Cookie Recipe for St. Nicholas Christmas Cookies Details**

Date : Published August 6th 2017 by Skyhook Press (first published 1994)

ISBN :

Author : Aaron Shepard , Wendy Edelson (Illustrator)

Format : Hardcover 40 pages

Genre : Holiday, Christmas, Childrens, Picture Books



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## **From Reader Review The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale, with Bonus Cookie Recipe for St. Nicholas Christmas Cookies for online ebook**

### **Beth says**

The Baker's Dozen- A Saint Nicholas Tale by Aaron Shepard and illustrated by Wendy Edelson is a beautifully done story of the origin of the Baker's Dozen. The story is about Van Amsterdam a baker in Dutch Colonial New York, who on Dec 6 bakes St. Nicholas cookies. He is known for being extremely honest and giving his customers exactly what they have paid for. However, one day, an old woman visits him saying that a dozen cookies is 13 cookies. What happens next shows how giving a little more than expected is rewarded. This is a beautiful told folktale with wonderful pictures that would delight any young reader and make a beautiful holiday present to be enjoyed throughout the holiday season.

I received this book from NetGalley and Skyhook Press in exchange for a fair and honest review

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### **Kathryn says**

This story tells how the term "a baker's dozen" (13, not 12) may have come to be. Here, a very honest baker always makes sure he gives each customer exactly what he pays for, no more and no less. One day, an old woman comes and demands a dozen cookies. The baker gives her twelve cookies. No, she emphasizes, a dozen is THIRTEEN. He refuses to give in, and she leaves disgruntled--and leaves him with bad luck. Later, the baker has a nightmare about being so "miserly" and in reality the townsfolk stop coming to his shop. Eventually the spirit of St. Nicholas helps him learn the joys of giving more than is expected.

I think this is the only story about St. Nicholas Day that I've come across (at least, in picture book form) and since we celebrated that as kids, I was delighted to discover it (thanks, Abigail!) The story is well-told and the illustrations are just marvelous. I especially love the first pages that show the sweet Dutch colonial village.

I appreciated many aspects of this story, and the overall message of generosity and giving more than is expected is a good one. However, I was a bit troubled by how it played out. I personally did not see anything wrong with the baker wanting to be fair regarding giving all customers exactly what they pay for. It did not seem to me that the old lady was particularly needy or destitute, just pushy, so why she should receive special treatment when other customers did not (or that the baker, simply because he had other cookies, had to give them away vs. reserving them for other paying customers or his own family) didn't really come across. The baker didn't really seem to commit any wrongdoing, in my opinion, and I felt the punishment was a bit harsh. Of course, the ultimate message is a good one but I felt it could have been delivered a bit better. Still, that is just my personal take and I am not docking any stars because I do think it was a well told story and beautifully illustrated.

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## **Annet says**

Gorgeous book, beautiful pictures, festive Xmas spirit.

In Holland we know Sinterklaas, a saint of ancient history and a festive day for kids on 5th December. This story relates to Sinterklaas (Saint Nicolas). Including a recipe for cookies ;-)

Recommended in these days of festive spirit!

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## **Luisa Knight says**

This is an altruistic story. And businesses can't be run on altruism. What I also didn't appreciate is that the old woman made it seem as if the poor baker was a bad guy - it says he did all that he could to be honest - he was a fair guy. He shouldn't be discredited and slighted like that.

\*\*Like my reviews? I also have hundreds of detailed reports that I offer too. These reports give a complete break-down of everything in the book, so you'll know just how clean it is or isn't. I also have Clean Guides (downloadable PDFs) which enable you to clean up your book before reading it! Visit my website: The Book Radar.

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## **Jeremy says**

Nice blend of American folk tale (Dutch), Christmas lore, and virtue. Origin story for baker's dozen.

Great artwork. Includes a recipe in the back; I would love a cookie like this.

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## **Tracie says**

The Baker's Dozen Review

**Book:** The Baker's Dozen

**Author:** Aaron Shepard

**Publisher:** Skyhook Press

**Genre:** Children's/ Folk Tales and Legends

**Publication Date:** December 6, 2010

**Rating:**

\*Thank you NetGalley and Random House for a copy of this book in exchange for a review!\*

## **The Low Down:**

A tale straight from colonial New York. Van Amsterdam always gives his customers what they paid for, no more, no less. However, when an old lady comes in insisting that a dozen is 13, Van Amsterdam learns what it means to have a generous and giving spirit. This edition also came with a St. Nicholas pattern and recipe.

### **My thoughts:**

First, let's appreciate the illustrations in this book.

I thought this was a wonderful tale about how the baker's dozen came to be. I also appreciate how the story introduces children to a new tradition and culture (St. Nicholas Day and the Dutch culture), and I thought the lesson of having a generous spirit was well thought out and presented so that it was easy for children to see. The illustrations in this book were wonderful, very detailed and elaborate. I also liked the pattern and the recipe. I feel like they were explained in a way which would make them easy for a child to do with a parent's help. I also enjoy the inclusion of a recipe into the tale (which is about a baker). I feel like it gives the story a more "real" feel, and I like the hands-on approach as well. I feel like a parent or guardian could talk to their child about the story while having fun making their own St. Nicholas cookies.

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### **January Gray says**

I have heard and used the term "baker's dozen", but I had never given the origin of it any thought. I did not know it was a Dutch story!

This book is short and cute and interesting, and also includes a recipe.

The illustrations are AMAZING AMAZING!

You and your child both will LOVE this book!

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### **PattyMacDotComma says**

*Edited to add a couple of colourful illustrations*

4★

This 2010 edition was for the 15th anniversary of its 1995 original publication. It should be just as welcome a gift for children today, 21 years later, as it was then.

This lovely folktale is about why bakers add a thirteenth item to make a baker's dozen. I've read a couple of possible explanations (one is to ensure the dozen isn't underweight), but I prefer this one.

It takes place in Ye Olde colonial somewhere which later becomes Albany, NY. Heavy Dutch influence, Dutch St Nicholas, Dutch cookies, Dutch designs. Gorgeous!

### **Illustration of town and St Nicholas**

Van Amsterdam is a popular, prosperous baker who prides himself on his honesty.

***“Each morning, he checked and balanced his scales, and he took great care to give his customers exactly what they paid for—not more and not less.”***

### **Van Amsterdam, prosperous baker**

The Dutch celebrate St Nicholas Day on Dec 6, and his shop is always buzzing with shoppers before this busy holiday. People wait for his St Nicholas cookies.

That is, he's popular until he refuses an extra St Nicholas gingerbread cookie to an old lady who insists that a dozen is 13, not 12. The old lady responds by declaring:

***“Van Amsterdam! However honest you may be, your heart is small and your fist is tight. ‘Fall again, mount again, learn how to count again!’ Then she was gone.”***

From then on, his baking went wrong and his business dwindled. A year later, he's ready to shut up shop when he has a dream where he learns about giving a little more than is asked for.

And that's where I'll leave you, gentle reader, although I will reveal (without a Spoiler Alert) that OF COURSE IT HAS A HAPPY ENDING! Plus a recipe to bake your own gingerbread St Nicks in the traditional Dutch style.

It also has gorgeous illustrations, the kind of rich, complex pictures that make you want to spot things. Ask children to find all the cats and the ones watching the mouse; find all the people with their tongues stuck out; find all the yummy breads and describe their shapes; count the St Nicholas cookies.

Thanks to NetGalley and Skyhook Press for allowing me a preview copy of the wonderful anniversary edition of such a delightful book.

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### **Lisa Vegan says**

The illustrations are period perfect and full of detail. I especially love the cat sleeping on the same bed as the baker.

I've been familiar since childhood with 13 equaling a baker's dozen, and this was a fun tale of how a dozen might have come to mean 13 vs. 12 where bakery goods are concerned.

I think this is the only Saint Nicholas Day story I've ever read and I can heartily recommend it. It reads like an original fairy tale. I cared about the baker. The message re Saint Nicholas's generosity and of being generous is a good one. And the cookies look delicious and festive. It's a fun story with wonderful pictures.

I would have loved an author's note about the actual history of a baker's dozen.

a bit more than 4 stars

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### **Cheri says**

Aaron Shepard's Saint Nicholas tale of the origin of the "Baker's Dozen," and how it came to be is nothing less than charming with a nice "lesson" for all. A storyteller by (former) profession, he brings this story to life with a fairy-tale essence, and a lesson that is always relevant. To give credit where credit is certainly due, the illustrations by Wendy Edelson in this tale bring the story even further to life, they are beautifully done, bright and colourful intricately drawn and with an old-world charm. Gorgeous to look at, a nice life lesson for little ones, gently shared, just in time to muster as much generosity of spirit as you can.

In addition to the story, this edition (15th Anniversary Edition) comes with Bonus Cookie Recipe and Pattern for St. Nicholas Christmas Cookies that was adapted from baking with a cookie mold recipe to use with just a cookie sheet.

For those of you who have little ones, those who love beautifully illustrated children's books, those who like to bake holiday cookies, or those who love to gift thoughtful "welcome" gifts to new neighbors, I highly recommend this.

Especially for teachers working with young students, or for anyone wanting to know more about the author, his website: [www.aaronshep.com](http://www.aaronshep.com)

Original Pub Date: 6 Dec 2010

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Many thanks for the ARC provided by Skyhook Press, NetGalley and author Aaron Shepard and illustrator Wendy Edelson

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### **Ursula says**

Delightful story told with amazing illustrations! Perfect for the CHRISTmas season! :)

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### **Abigail says**

Known for his scrupulous honesty, Van Amsterdam the baker, who lived in the colonial Dutch settlement that would one day become the city of Albany, gave his customers exactly what they ordered: no more and no less. When an old woman comes into his shop on Saint Nicholas Day (December 6th), and demands a dozen of his special cookies, in the shape of the saint himself, he carefully counts out twelve of his best, only to be brought up short by the woman's insistence that he had counted incorrectly, and that a dozen should be numbered thirteen. Refusing to give in, and add a cookie to the package, Van Amsterdam finds, after the woman storms out, declaring: "*Fall again, mount again, learn how to count again!*," that his fortunes suddenly take a turn for the worse. After a year in which his business slowly goes to ruin, Van Amsterdam

once again confronts the old woman in his shop, but *this* time, having had a revelatory dream involving Saint Nicholas himself, he behaves very differently...

I love the New York-based fairy tales of Washington Irving, from *Rip Van Winkle* to *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, so I was interested to see (on Aaron Shepard's website) that this traditional tale, long part of the folklore of my home state, was first collected by a contemporary of Irving's, and a fellow member of the Knickerbocker Group, James Kirke Paulding, in his 1836 [The Book of Saint Nicholas](#). According to the author's note, however, this retelling is taken from Charles M. Skinner's 1896 [Myths and Legends of Our Own Land](#) (volume unspecified). An interesting story, one that explains the evolution of the idea of the "baker's dozen," while also seeking to inculcate generosity, it makes for a lovely holiday selection. The artwork, done in watercolor by Wendy Edelson, is simply gorgeous! Colorful, lushly detailed, and very expressive, it has a rich quality that is very appealing. Recommended to anyone looking for children's stories set in Dutch colonial days, or during the celebration of Saint Nicholas Day.

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### **Whispering Stories says**

The Baker's Dozen, is a modern take on a traditional tale of why a baker's dozen is thirteen and not twelve.

Van Amsterdam, runs his little bakery in Albany, New York, a Dutch Colonial. Every day he prepares his goods, and makes sure that he weighs out his ingredients perfectly, as he likes to be a very honest man and give nothing less, nor nothing more than what his customers are paying for.

In the lead up to Saint Nicholas day, which is celebrated on the 6th December, by the Dutch, Van Amsterdam was very busy. His famous Saint Nicholas cookies were selling very well. That is until an old lady comes in and asks for a dozen of them. He counts them out, twelve cookies, but she insists that a dozen is thirteen. When Van Amsterdam won't let her have thirteen for the price of twelve, she leaves, but not before telling him, 'Fall again, mount again, learnt to count again'.

Over the next year, his bread and cakes turn out badly and his customers start to go elsewhere. Has the old woman put a curse on him?, and how can he make his shop successful again?

I've never really given much thought as to why a bakers dozen is thirteen, but I love this folk tale about why it came to be.

The illustrations have an old feel to them, just like you will find in a traditional book. The story is attention grabbing, and has you thinking that sometimes doing just enough isn't good enough, and going that extra mile can make someones day.

A perfect book for the holiday season, that I'm sure young children will love.

Reviewed by Stacey at [www.whisperingstories.com](http://www.whisperingstories.com)

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### **Chris says**

Nice story about the origin of a baker's dozen. If you have a child, Shepard is worth checking out. Nice

illustrations.

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### **Relyn says**

I needed more Christmas books for my library and I stumbled on this treasure. What a wonderful story of generosity. This book is sure to prompt many character conversations.

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