

Spectacles of Customs of the United States



# 美国 风俗 大观

徐开元 编译

汉 对 照 美 国 风 情 丛 书



東方出版中心

英汉对照美国风情丛书

俞耀生 郁明亮 主编

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徐开元 编译

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## 内 容 提 要

本书是《美国风情系列丛书》中的一种,以英汉对照的形式,对美国社会的各种风俗习惯进行了比较详尽的描绘和介绍。全书计有礼仪、社交、婚丧、聚会、餐宴等方面的短文 31 篇,内容充实,笔调生动。本书既可供学习英语之用,又是一部了解当代美国社会各种风俗习惯的理想读物。

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英 语 原 文





## **1. The Birth of a Baby**

The birth of a baby is good news for a family and their relatives and friends. what do the Americans usually do before and after the baby is born?

### **Baby Shower**

When the news of the expected baby is known, someone may offer to give a baby shower. Although this type of shower is held less often than it used to be, it is a delightful custom. There should be only one baby shower, not several, and it should not be scheduled until one month before the expected delivery date. Traditionally, the baby shower was held for close female friends and relatives at lunch or during the afternoon on a weekday. Since so many women work today, more and more showers are held on weekends. Usually they are held only for the first baby, since subsequent children are the "beneficiaries" of the hand-me-downs.

When a baby shower is held, guests always bring gifts with them. It is a good idea to organize

what the guests should bring, so that the parents are not left with fourteen baby bibs, sixteen rattles, and nothing else. Gifts do not need to be elaborate, but should be truly useful. If people give a friend a nice baby shower present, they do not have to send another gift at the time of the baby's birth or christening.

If the tragedy of a stillborn baby or an early infant death occurs, the parents' natural reaction will be to return the shower gifts to their friends. The latter will vehemently resist such an action. The friend always says, "Don't send it back. That sweater will do for the next baby, who'll be along soon... Put it away — it's not going to go out of style."

### **Choosing Baby's Name**

What's in an American's name? Everything. Usually, long before the baby is born, its name has been chosen, argued over, changed, argued over again, and finally agreed upon through compromise. For Americans, naming a boy after his father or a girl after her mother is an honorable tradition. Of course, the boy or the girl also has a nickname that differs from the parents's, so that there will be less confusion about the house. Giving the child a different middle name can help to avoid this

problem, too.

Catholic children often receive multiple names, one of which is that of a saint. These names are not always utilized when the child grows up but they are officially his, even though he may use a shorter form of his name for legal and social purposes. Greek Orthodox children have just one given name. A Jewish child of traditional background is rarely given a "Jr.," or "Second," or "Third" because it is not customary for Jews to be named for living people. If any meaningful name is used, it is usually that of someone recently dead, although biblical names are popular, too.

### **Christening**

In America, babies are baptized in the Protestant faith usually between two and six months of age, although in some faiths children are not baptized until they are eight or nine years old and can read the service with the member of clergy and be active participants in their own baptismal ceremony.

Catholic infants are baptized as soon as possible, usually from two to six weeks after birth, when someone who is unbaptized converts to Catholicism, he goes through a baptism ceremony, too, under the supervision of two godparents he

chooses himself.

Catholic godparents must be of the Catholic religion. It is preferred but not mandatory in most Protestant denominations that the godparents be of the same faith in which the baby will be raised. Godparents are chosen from among close friends and relatives of the baby's parents. Traditionally, there are two godparents, one male and one female, although parents may ask another close friend, perhaps even of another religion, to serve as a kind of "honorary" one. It is a great honor to be asked to be a godparent. The real responsibility of the godparent is to oversee the spiritual education of the child and to see that he is confirmed at the proper time. If one or both of the godparents cannot be present at the baptismal ceremony, the parents will choose proxy godparents to stand in for the missing ones at the ceremony.

It is very often for the godparents to make a separate or a joint gift to the baby—perhaps a sterling silver mug that will always remind the child as he grows toward adulthood of his godparents. The godparents should remember this child every Christmas (and at birthdays, too, if it is possible, until he is an adult). They should make him feel he always has a very special place in their heart.

It used to be a tradition that, if both parents

died, the godparents had the responsibility of taking care of their godchild. This is not the case today, however, for there is always a legally appointed guardian if such a tragedy occurs. When the child grows up, the godparent's duties cease to exist. The friendship between them will not, however.

Invitations to a christening party are handled informally, usually by brief note, by telephone, by mailgram, or in person. Only those really interested in the event through a very close friendship with the parents would be invited to the ceremony itself. If they plan to have a large cocktail reception after an afternoon christening, they may send printed invitations.

The long white lace-trimmed christening dress, puffing out over layers of long white organdy petticoats, exquisitely pleated, embroidered, is another of those lovely traditions that has all but disappeared. Now a lovely short all - white dress will do perfectly well. The baby can wear white booties to the church, or white silk shoes, or even white socks. If it's chilly, he should be brought to the church in his bonnet and coat; both of these will be removed before the ceremony.

A Catholic child would wear his saint's medal pinned to his dress or on a chain around his neck, if

he has already be given such a gold or silver medal. An older girl being christened would wear an all-white dress, and little boys would wear a dark blue jacket, white shirt, and dark blue or gray shorts. The mother of the baby dresses as she would for church, in a nice dress (not black, however), and the father would wear a business suit.

If the christening is to take place during a regular church service, arrangements must be made well in advance. As babies are not always happy about this event, it is best to bring them to church just before the christening is to take place. The baby's outer wraps are removed; if the church is chilly, the baby should be wrapped in a white blanket and handed to its godmother. The godparents arrive with the family party or just in advance of it and take their places near the font. The other friends and relatives stand nearby. As the clergyman takes his place, the congregation stands. At a certain moment in the protestant ceremony, the godmother hands the baby to the clergyman and, when asked the baby's name, pronounces it very carefully. In the Catholic ceremony, the godmother holds the baby over the font to receive the holy water. If the baby's name is at all complicated, it should be written down for the minister and given

to him just before the ceremony, for the baby's baptismal name pronounced during this ceremony legally becomes his name.

After the ceremony the clergyman signs the baptismal certificate. The child will need it later in order to receive Holy Communion, for confirmation, and in order to be married.

Certain Protestant denominations permit home christening; Catholics do not. If the baby is christened at home, host and hostess should place flowers in a room large enough for assembled guests, and a small, waist-high table on which is set a silver bowl to be used as the font. The clergyman is not necessarily in vestments in a home ceremony.

A late morning christening is usually followed by a luncheon, often buffet. A late afternoon ceremony may be followed either by a formal tea or by a cocktail party. The food is more or less the kind served at wedding receptions, but an important ingredient of the party is a festive beverage with which to toast the baby's health: champagne, or a champagne punch, or even white wine. Either the godfather or the godmother should propose the first toast, and this is followed by toasts from the parents, guests, or even siblings, if they are present. It is nice to have a christening cake, white, with white icing, perhaps bearing the baby's initials



and the christening date. Both parents cut the first piece together, reminiscent of their cutting the wedding cake.

The nicest thing about christening parties for some people is that they are healers of family rifts. Time and time again an estranged member of a family will accept a christening invitation when he or she would accept no other. There is something about a small baby that brings families together and heals all wounds.