

# Rudolph Ramblings

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## Local artist draws legend

A little bit of Burnaby has been brightening up Christmas across North America for the past 51 years.

The original drawings of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, penned as a promotion for the American-based Montgomery Ward department store in 1939, were created by former Burnaby resident Denver Gillen.

Rudolph, immortalized in song by Gene Autrey, had his start in a comic-book style promotion for the department store chain.

By DAN HILBORN

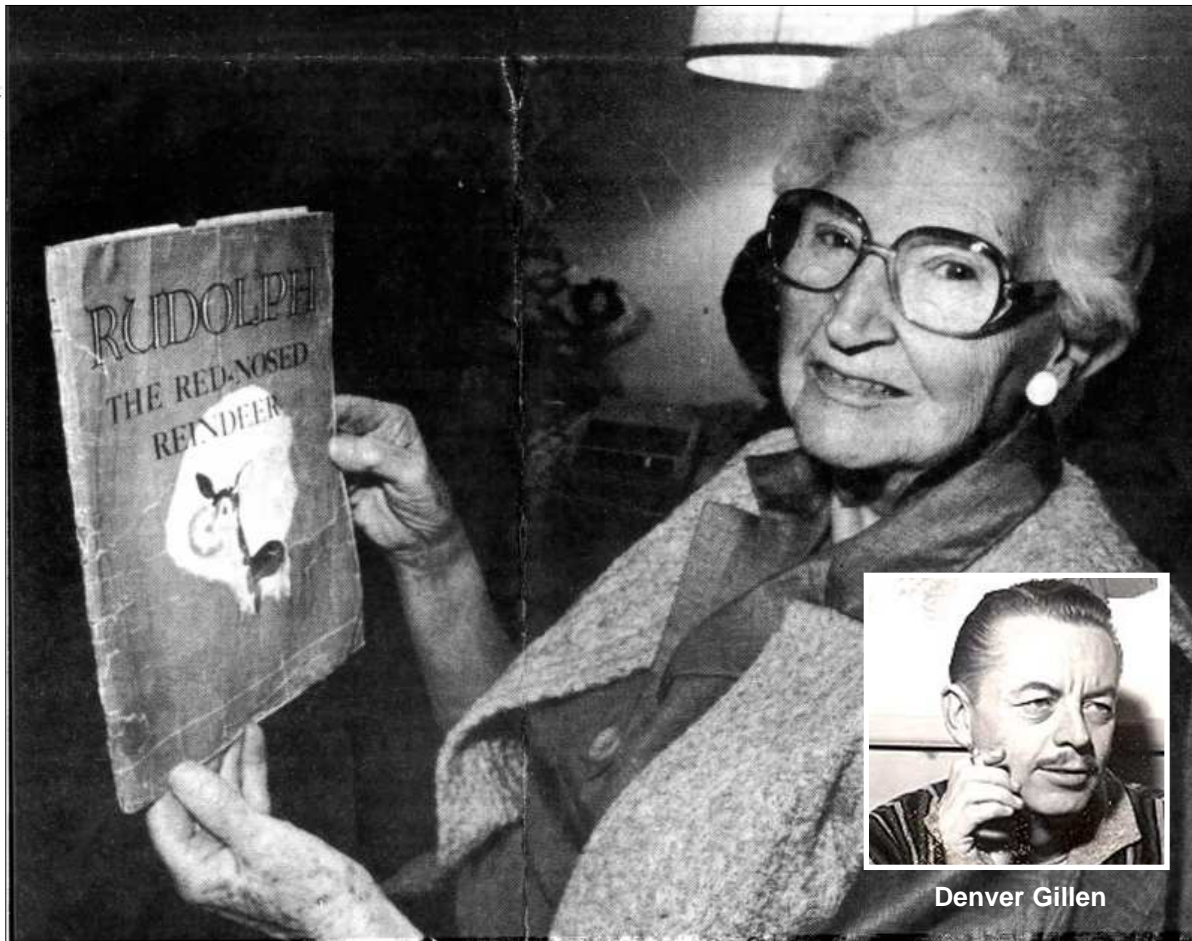
"Everyone knows Rudolph, but what isn't well known is that a Burnaby boy was his illustrator," said Metrotown area resident Bessie McLaren-Taylor, a long-time neighbor of the Gillen family.

Gillen had his start in the art field as a student at the old Kingsway West School. His teachers prompted him to attend the Vancouver School of Art and in his early twenties, just as the Great Depression was ending, he had his start in advertising for the Hudson Bay Co.

Before long, Gillen realized the best opportunity for fame in the drawing field led to the United States, and he packed up his sweetheart, Delores Myles, and moved to Connecticut. His first job was with Montgomery Ward where Gillen met writer Robert L. May and the idea of a red-nosed reindeer.

After becoming more well-known Gillen turned to other fields and was commissioned to paint a mural for a US president's private railcar, the designing of an American commemorative stamp, plus art work for major travel magazines.

"He was younger than I was by about eight years, but as I remember he was a real cut-up, loads of



Denver Gillen

fun and had a terrific sense of humor," said McLaren-Taylor.

The creator of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer died in 1975 from a massive heart attack while swimming in his private pool.

"Rudolph has become a classic," said McLaren-Taylor. "It just seems

to me to be nice to remember that his first illustrations were made by a Burnaby boy."

Everyone knows Rudolph but Bessie McLaren Taylor, above, knew his creator as well.

Larry Wright/NOW

Source: Burnaby, (BC) Now newspaper, 1990s. (Your Editor lives in Burnaby.)



The "American Commemorative" designed by Denver Gillen was the Gardening—Horticulture stamp honoring Bro. Liberty Hyde Bailey, Hobasco Lodge No. 716, Ithaca, New York.



US stamp showing Rudolph issued in 2014. (USA #2792, 1100, and New)