

Cab Gab  
by Abe Mittleman

Happy New Year!

Well we made it to another year. Did you work on New Years Eve? I did. I did well. Afterwards I wondered when did the Times Square New Years tradition start? Having grown up in New York City I can't remember a time that the celebration didn't take place. I obtained the following information from a web site [timessquarenyc.org](http://timessquarenyc.org)

### History of the Times Square New Year's Eve Ball

Revelers began celebrating New Year's Eve in Times Square as early as 1904, but it was in 1907 that the New Year's Eve Ball made its maiden descent from the flagpole atop One Times Square.

The first New Year's Eve Ball, made of iron and wood and adorned with one hundred 25-watt light bulbs, was 5 feet in diameter and weighed 700 pounds. It was built by a young immigrant metalworker named Jacob Starr, and for most of the twentieth century the company he founded, sign maker Artkraft Strauss, was responsible for lowering the ball.

As part of the 1907-1908 festivities, waiters in the fabled "lobster palaces" and other deluxe eateries in hotels surrounding Times Square were supplied with battery-powered top hats emblazoned with the numbers "1908" fashioned of tiny light bulbs. At the stroke of midnight, they all "flipped their lids" and the year on their foreheads lit up in conjunction with the numbers "1908" on the parapet of the Times Tower lighting up to signal the arrival of the new year.

The Ball has been lowered every year since 1907, with the exceptions of 1942 and 1943, when the ceremony was suspended due to the wartime "dimout" of lights in New York City. Nevertheless, the crowds still gathered in Times Square in those years and greeted the New Year with a minute of silence followed by the ringing of chimes from sound trucks parked at the base of the tower - a harkening-back to the earlier celebrations at Trinity Church, where crowds would gather to "ring out the old, ring in the new."

In 1920, a 400 pound ball made entirely of wrought iron replaced the original. In

1955, the iron ball was replaced with an aluminum ball weighing a mere 200 pounds. This aluminum Ball remained unchanged until the 1980s, when red light bulbs and the addition of a green stem converted the Ball into an apple for the "I Love New York" marketing campaign from 1981 until 1988. After seven years, the traditional glowing white Ball with white light bulbs and without the green stem returned to brightly light the sky above Times Square. In 1995, the Ball was upgraded with aluminum skin, rhinestones, strobes, and computer controls, but the aluminum ball was lowered for the last time in 1998.

For Times Square 2000, the millennium celebration at the Crossroads of the World, the New Year's Eve Ball was completely redesigned by Waterford Crystal. The new crystal Ball combined the latest in technology with the most traditional of materials, reminding us of our past as we gazed into the future and the beginning of a new millenium.

#### About "Time-Balls"

The actual notion of a ball "dropping" to signal the passage of time dates back long before New Year's Eve was ever celebrated in Times Square. The first "time-ball" was installed atop England's Royal Observatory at Greenwich in 1833. This ball would drop at one o'clock every afternoon, allowing the captains of nearby ships to precisely set their chronometers (a vital navigational instrument).

Around 150 public time-balls are believed to have been installed around the world after the success at Greenwich, though few survive and still work. The tradition is carried on today in places like the United States Naval Observatory in Washington, DC, where a time-ball descends from a flagpole at noon each day - and of course, once a year in Times Square, where it marks the stroke of midnight not for a few ships' captains, but for over one billion people watching worldwide.

#### The Times Square New Year's Eve Ball 2000-2007

The 2000-2007 version of the Times Square New Year's Eve Ball, designed by Waterford Crystal, made its first descent during the last minute of the 20th century, at the Times Square 2000 Celebration.

The Ball was a geodesic sphere, six feet in diameter, and weighed approximately 1,070 pounds. It was covered with a total of 504 Waterford crystal triangles that varied in size and ranged in length from 4.75 inches to 5.75 inches per side.

For the 2007 New Year's Eve celebration, 72 of the crystal triangles featured the new "Hope for Peace" design, consisting of three dove-like patterns symbolizing messengers of peace. The remaining 432 triangles featured Waterford designs from previous years, including the Hope for Fellowship, Hope for Wisdom, Hope for Unity, Hope for Courage, Hope for Healing, Hope for Abundance, and Star of Hope triangles. These crystal triangles were bolted to 168 translucent triangular lexan panels which were attached to the aluminum frame of the Ball. The exterior of the Ball was illuminated by 168 Philips Halogená Brilliant Crystal light bulbs, exclusively engineered for the New Year's Eve Ball to enhance the Waterford crystal. The interior of the Ball was illuminated by 432 Philips Light Bulbs (208 clear, 56 red, 56 blue, 56 green, and 56 yellow), and 96 high-intensity strobe lights, which together create bright bubbling bursts of color. The exterior of the Ball featured 90 rotating pyramid mirrors that reflect light back into the audience at Times Square.

All 696 lights and 90 rotating pyramid mirrors were computer controlled, enabling the Ball to produce a state-of-the-art light show of eye-dazzling color patterns and a spectacular kaleidoscope effect atop One Times Square. The now-retired 2000-2007 New Year's Eve Ball is the property of the building owners of One Times Square.

### Lost and Found

Recently, during the holiday season, I was driving on a Saturday night. I picked up a fare at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel just across from Battery Park. Two men and a woman wanted to go to the Twenty one Club. They did not know where it was. I did. The Twenty One Club is located at 21 W 52<sup>nd</sup> Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues. This would later be a clue to help return a lost item to them.

The logistics of this fare were difficult. Because of the very heavy holiday traffic in the area the only way to enter this street was to start at 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and ride east across the avenues until entrance was allowed into this street. This is because traffic east of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue was not allowed by police enforcement to make a turn into W 52<sup>nd</sup> Street.

A short time after dropping off my passengers it was discovered that a small shopping bag with a package that was apparently a gift for someone was left behind by these passengers. I've written in the past that usually any time someone loses something in your taxi there is always a way to return it. This is a

story that demonstrates this. It is also a story of how having a cell phone made it a whole lot easier and gave this story a happy ending.

Fortunately for these passengers a conversation between them and myself had revealed to me that they were from Massachusetts and that they were in the veterinary field. This would also help me to return the item.

I wanted to return this item as soon as possible. I knew where I had left them. I also knew that this would be easier said than done. Here was the dilemma: There was no way I could park and leave my taxi in this location at this time because of the holiday traffic. It would be almost impossible to even enter this street because of the traffic enforcement. Even if I could get to the front of this establishment, I could not trust to leave it with a doorman because there were many patrons there and there was no way to determine exactly who left it. I thought as a last resort I could go back to the hotel where I picked them up and try to get some help in determining their identity. But, I would consider that as a last resort. So, I grabbed my cell phone and phoned the Twenty One Club!

I described to a woman who answered what I knew about the people. She told me there were close to three hundred people there and some were in the public area and some were in a private party. Since they were from out of town, and since they did not know the location of the Twenty One Club when they entered my taxi and since the lost item appeared to be a gift that they were bringing to the Twenty One Club, I thought that it was more probable they were at the private party. I left my cell phone number and waited to hear back from her.

After an hour passed and I hadn't heard back I phoned again. I spoke to the same woman. She told me that she hadn't been successful in finding the people who lost this item. I insisted that they had to be there and she should try harder. After a little while I called again and reiterated that she try harder. I told her to ask the doorman if anyone had approached him. I figured these people would maybe alert him to look for the taxi they were in. She said that she had already done that and was not successful.

Well, a short time later my cell phone rang and one of the people who lost the item was on the other end. Through my persistence the person who lost the item was found. And yes, the item was a birthday gift that was intended to be given at the private birthday party they were attending. I had a passenger in my taxi when I received the call. So, I took the return cell phone number and phoned him back

after I dropped my passenger on the upper west side. Afterwards I would go off duty and drive to the Twenty One Club to return the item.

By the time I got there they were ready to go back to the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. I returned the item, they gave it to the intended recipient and I drove them back to the Ritz-Carlton. They gave me a generous tip.