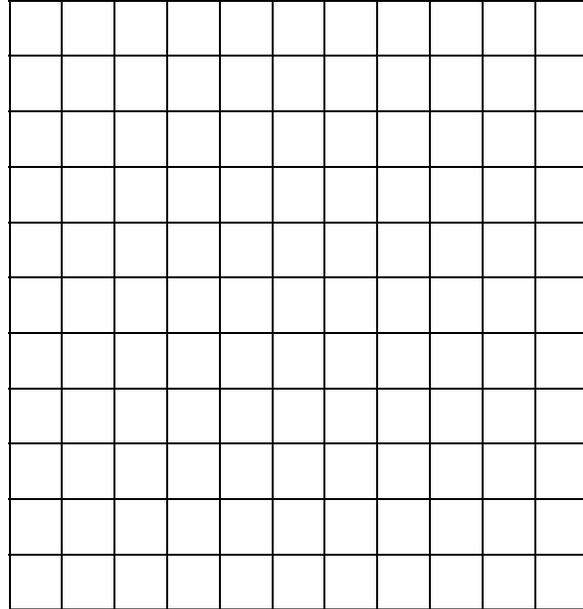


Puzzle #55 — "Christmas Card"

Instructions: Guess the words defined by the cryptic clues (words vary in length from three to eight letters and include three proper names), then enter them in the grid one after another in the same order as their clues, starting in the upper left corner. Across words that don't end at the right margin continue on the next line, and down words that don't end at the bottom margin continue in the next column. Eight across words and eight down words won't fit in the grid unless one of their letters is removed. Those sixteen letters, taken in order, spell a timely two-word phrase. As ever, I am indebted to Kevin Wald for help with the clues.



Across

1. *Mystery word*
2. Runner, retired, started learning to play on the bagpipe
3. Long-handled tool to remove skin
4. Premier distressed after losing royal dominion
5. Greeting the return of mom with an expression of regret
6. Smooth and fresh, with momentum to compensate for lost lead
7. Boy endlessly playing the odds
8. Erase a mark around a juncture line
9. Control and rule by proclamation
10. Encourage a wager
11. Follow course around source of river
12. Boat kept in shed or yard
13. Southern town harbors English set
14. *Mystery word*
15. My uncle in France loses new lens
16. Lady's out of sole and char
17. Deviant asks about a northern state
18. Stool pigeon is at home earlier
19. One man that keeps quiet is run through with a stake
20. Straight man goes to bedlam
21. Bare bodies beaten with rod
22. Material included in comic repertory
23. Denying indigen eats a lot of egg
24. *Mystery word*

Down

1. The crime resolved and sealed off
2. Seedy pinniped eats half of minnow
3. Hear couple shave
4. Turns east in decline
5. In Paris papa eats meat spread
6. Governor occupied a chair to talk
7. Legendary messenger sending out city's blessing
8. Lois runs a shelter
9. Character expression begun in Melville novel
10. Informer going back east for weapon
11. Large, not-all-there family with one bathing suit
12. Mark not seen in river
13. Unrefined, erratic, leaderless driving
14. Immediately taken back
15. Food vendor is coarser in speech
16. River streaming as a rill at the start
17. City coming back in my recollection
18. Food from clambake
19. Bumpkin doesn't finish harness
20. Golly! A thousand bucks
21. Bending of the knees in initially prone position
22. Wire trap
23. Boy and animal take part in dramatic presentation
24. Study English, then start to reckon and deliberate