

Prince Albert of Germany introduces evergreen custom

Quebec is the plantation-grown Scotch pine. White and black spruce are valued for their foliage and density and shape, but have poorer needle-holding qualities. Other frequently used Christmas trees are lodgepole pine, Norway spruce and red spruce.

The average Canadian will have little trouble distinguishing Scotch pine from the fir and spruces; in any case, this plantation species is usually marketed separately. The difference between spruce and fir can be more difficult to detect. Here is a sure and simple way: Remove one or two needles and examine the twig closely. Spruce needles leave raised bumps on the twig; fir needles leave a smooth twig with small, white scars.

The practice of bringing an evergreen tree into the home as part of the Christmas celebration originated in Germany, as early, it is believed, as the eighth century. Prince Albert introduced the custom to England shortly after his marriage to Queen Victoria, and German immigrants are credited with bringing it to North America.

The Christmas tree is a firmly established Canadian tradition. The most popular evergreens used are balsam fir, Douglas fir, white and black spruce, and Scotch pine, with the order of popularity varying from region to region. Douglas fir is the favored tree in Western Canada, while balsam fir is preferred in the East. Fast rising in popularity in Ontario and

Yuletide beauty reflects in legends of flowers, greens



Flowers burst into bloom and trees and shrubs were green with new leaves on the night of the Saviour's birth, so legend says. Down through the ages, certain flowers and greens have held an honored place in the lore of Christmas: the holly and the myrtle, the rosemary, the mistletoe, the Christmas rose, the thorn tree.

Ancient peoples believed that mistletoe has powers to ward off evil or cure a variety of illnesses. Druid priests of Britain, long ago, believed that mistletoe should be cut with a golden knife, then hung over doorways as a protection from the evil. The Greeks, too, used it to ward off evil.

One of many legends surrounding the poinsettia tells of a poor Mexican girl who, having no gift of value, humbly placed some roadside weeds at the foot of a statue representing the Virgin and Child. Instantly, the weeds became scarlet blossoms and thus, so the legend says, the poinsettia was created.

Rosemary, the symbol of constancy, was at one time widely used in England as a Christmas decoration. During the Victorian era, it lost popularity and is now seldom, if ever, seen as part of the Yuletide greenery.

THE POINSETTIA
From America's traditional Christmas decoration, the poinsettia, is also popular in Canada. The shrub, which has flaming red bracts, is named for Joel R. Poinsett, an American statesman and former ambassador to Mexico.

Use of holly once verboten

Love, the poets say, is like the wild rose briar and friendship like the holly tree.

The similarity of love and wild rose briar may need proving but history records the use of holly as a symbol of goodwill and friendship even before the Christian era.

Holly wreaths, sprays and twigs were used too, in various rites throughout much of Europe in those early days. And large quantities of the shiny green foliage and red berries were brought indoors to brighten the scene during drab winter days. But even before the Romans set foot on English shores, the druids were using holly in their own pagan rites.

Due to this pagan association, early Christian leaders opposed use of holly during the Christmas season. In fact, the Christians were forbidden to decorate their homes with Christmas greenery during the mid-December Saturnalian revelries of the Roman Empire. Eventually, however, holly decorations became so well established and so popular they were given Christian acceptance.

Midnight feast French tradition

In French-Canadian homes, one of the highlights of Christmas is the "Reveillon," a middle-of-the-night family feast, for adults. The meal is served after the return from midnight mass but the preparations start many weeks ahead.

Much of the food for the feast, nowadays, centres around turkey and trimmings. But the traditional dishes, including goose with nut stuffing, and such specialties as "tourtiere," or spicy pork pies, are still prepared for the Reveillon.

Saint Nick pirates' pal

Practically everyone knows that jolly old St. Nick was a real-life bishop in ancient Turkey, the original Santa Claus who liked to distribute anonymous gifts. Yet it is not so well recorded that he was also the patron saint of pickpockets, robbers and pirates.

The oddity came about when St. Nicholas intervened to persuade a robber band to return stolen treasure. Pirates looked to St. Nick for accurate tips on the weather, even flew his supposed likeness on flags of their ships. In later years, swindlers in France were popularly referred to as the "Knights of St. Nicholas."

St. Nicholas was apparently very wealthy and exceedingly generous. The best-known gift-giving tale concerning this first Santa Claus was of gold secretly thrown into a house to provide three luckless daughters with dowries as today symbolized by the signs of the pawnbroker—three gold balls.

The good bishop supposedly possessed miraculous powers. While on a voyage to the Holy Land, he calmed the waters of the sea to save a drowning sailor.

Sailors and pirates adopted him as their patron saint. Pirates even stole some of his relics from a Turkish church and took them to Bari, Italy, where a church was built for him in 1087.

Born in southern Turkey, of wealthy Greek parents, Nicholas joined the church and became bishop of Myra. It is said that he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was there imprisoned by Emperor Diocletian for his faith. Later released by the Christian Emperor Constantine, he returned to Myra, where he died on December 6th, 342.

Flowers to fore at Christmastime

Christmas is the time of storybook enchantment—a holiday rich in fables and fancies for the young-at-heart.

The familiar Christmas tree, gleaming with festive tinsel and trim, is a centuries-old holiday delight. According to legend, a kindly woman once decorated a tree on Christmas Eve, and during the night spiders spun webs on the tree's branches. Before morning an angel changed the webs to sparkling silver.

Evergreen trees, plants and flowers are a Yuletide tradition. This year, trim a gala tree with bright Christmas ornaments and your favorite flower. Ask your florist to place roses, carnations or pansies in tiny water-tight tubes. Wrap the tubes in ribbon

and tie them with bows on the branches of your tree.

The Season's greenery, a symbol of everlasting life, and red blossoms for joy and laughter make holiday-bright bouquets. For Yuletide decorating or festive greetings for family and friends, an ancient tale says that the red Christmas rose sprang from the ground at an angel's bidding and centuries ago the flowers were placed at the entrances of homes to keep the occupants from harm.

Today, floral experts suggest red roses to help set a cheery holiday table. Make a merry mixture of roses and dark green holly in a straw basket. Dot the arrangement with miniature-gilded pine cones and sprinkle with sparkling "snow."

One of the oldest Yuletide tales says that on the first Christmas all the flowers and trees burst into bloom in spite of winter weather. This Christmas, fresh flowers in festive holiday arrays will make your home blossom with the warmth and magic of the season of joy.

Christmas seals Emperors demanded Christmas gifts began in Denmark

Slightly newer than the Christmas card is the Christmas seal.

The Christmas seal was originated by a postal clerk, Einar Holboell, who ordered the first Christmas seals printed and sold at regular post offices in Denmark. While stamping letters and Christmas cards in 1903 in Copenhagen, the idea occurred to him. Why not have a special stamp printed for the many tuberculosis sufferers who need hospital treatment? The first year more than four million stamps were sold, yielding some \$18,000.

The movement for adopting the stamp in the United States was greatly strengthened through the efforts of Miss Emily Bissell of Wilmington, Delaware. She designed the first Christmas seal herself. It had a half wreath of holly and a cross, with "Merry Christmas" in the centre and "Happy New Year" at the bottom.

Giving gifts during the Christmas season is a custom that most of us enjoy. Some of us even become reckless and spend more than we should for a particular gift merely because it seems the "perfect" item for a special individual.

In ancient times and places, gift giving was sometimes compulsory. Roman emperors demanded Yuletide gifts of clothing, gold and silver from their subjects. So, it is said, did the kings and queens of medieval England.

Long before the birth of Christ, Romans exchanged gifts

of laurel, olive and myrtle branches, in conjunction with the Saturnalia, a pagan festival which occurred about the same time as the present date of Christmas.

The Druids of England and Northern Europe tied gifts on trees during the festival observing the winter solstice.

Gift giving today does not take the form of appeasement—it reflects the spirit of kindhearted generosity.

Always clear away discarded holiday gift wrappings promptly.

a Joyous Christmas
To all our friends, we send sincere wishes for Yuletide joy!

MR. AND MRS. **C. K. BROWNE**

MERRY CHRISTMAS
As the season of good will comes to us once again, we take the opportunity to bid our friends a Merry Christmas!

FRANK TOTH MOTORS
12 GUELPH ST. ACTON, ONT.

Joyous Greetings
May His Star, that guided the Wise Men on their way to the Manger, lead us toward greater love, peace and fulfillment.

EARL VAN NORMAN
ELECTRICIAN
125 MAIN ST. N. ACTON, ONT.

GREETINGS
We bring good tidings and glad greetings to you and your kin, with wishes for happy holidays and a Merry Christmas.

B-P SERVICE STATION AND ACTON-AUTOMAT CAR WASH

MERRY CHRISTMAS
Santa's pack holds a special message from us to you—good wishes for a wonderful holiday! Merry Christmas!

JOHN'S TEXACO SERVICE

Merry sounds at Christmas

Among the merry sights and sounds of Christmas, none is merrier than the ringing of bells.

Since the earliest times, the pealing of bells has announced important events, both happy and sad. The first use of bells to call Christians to worship took place, it is believed, at Christmas in Italy, about 400 A.D.

Tradition once held that Christ was born exactly at midnight on Christmas Eve. On the stroke of 12, a joyous pealing announced the Miracle of Christmas.

Buy within budget evergreen rope

A rope of evergreens is easy enough to make, say the experts, and might go well over your door frame, mantle or along a stair rail.

Materials: rope long enough for your needs, short lengths of wire (15 to 18 inches), short sprays of evergreen (cedar is especially good), balls, bows, red berries or bells.

Place a bunch of evergreen against the rope and fasten in place with wire. Repeat length of rope. Drape as desired.

Locate places where additional decoration—berries, balls, bells would be effective and wire on.

Fasten decorated rope in place with tape, tacks, corsage pins or small nails.

Wire lengths of evergreen together as a spray and decorate with bells, balls or ribbon.

Remember to replenish your Christmas tree water regularly throughout the Christmas season. You may need to add more than a pint a day.

Greetings
We hope that Santa is bringing good things your way.

ACTON FABRIC CENTRE
GWEN AND RUTH

Merry Christmas

We're joining Santa and his reindeer in sending warmest wishes for a joyous holiday, rich in many blessings. Do have a wonderful Christmas!

EILEEN BEAUTY SALON

JOY & PEACE

Once more the message of Peace and Joy resounds across the land, heralding that first Holy Night when the beautiful Christmas story was begun. Our sincere wishes to all for a Merry Christmas.

JERRY SKIRROW
YOUR IMPERIAL ESSO AND HOME HEAT SERVICE DEALER 853-2340

"Ho Ho" says San Tan

In Hong Kong, Santa Claus goes by the name of "San Tan You Lin."

The Hong Kong department stores employ elderly men who are specially costumed for the season. Just like Santa Claus, San Tan You Lin is present for the purpose of holding the youngsters on his knee and listening to their requests for gifts.