

Custom first began in Great Britain

"The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
"In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there."

So wrote Clement E. Moore in 1822. And so it will be in most homes this Christmas Eve, at least where there are small children, at least in North America, and even though St. Nicholas has become Santa Claus. The custom seems to come from Great Britain. There, too, children hang their stockings by the fireplace, hoping that Father Christmas will fill them with Christmas treats. In other lands the customs vary.

Early Christmas

In Belgium and The Netherlands, people exchange gifts on Dec. 6, St. Nicholas' Day. A man dressed in the rich robes of a bishop represents the saint, World Book Encyclopedia says. He questions the children about their behavior during the year and promises to return during the night with gifts for the good children.

In Holland the children fill wooden shoes with cookies and candies for the saint and leave them on the doorstep. He takes the goodies and leaves toys and other gifts. In France, children put their shoes on the doorstep on Christmas Eve so the Christ Child (or Father Christmas) can fill them with gifts. In Italy, on the eve of Epiphany, or Twelfth Night, a sort of aged fairy queen named La Befana comes down the chimney with gifts for the children.

Different versions

Most children in South America believe that the Wise Men bring them Christmas gifts. Children in Brazil find gifts in their shoes on Christmas morning. On the eve of Epiphany some people leave water and hay on the doorstep for the Wise Men's camels.

Christians in China and Japan observe Christmas customs that are familiar to us. The Chinese version of Santa Claus has a Chinese name which varies according to the dialect.

And in Japan? Santa Claus is called Santa Claus.

Mistletoe magic

Ancient followers of the Druid religion were the first to regard mistletoe as a sacred plant, say the editors of The New Book of Knowledge. They supposed it to have Panacean virtues in warding off everything from witches to disease.

Each year, about the time Christmas is celebrated today,

there was a ceremonial rite in which Druid priests, using a golden sickle, cut the mistletoe leaves from the "sacred oak" and distributed them among the people.

The Saxons also valued this plant; they were the first to call it mistletoe. To them, mistletoe symbolized everlasting peace.



SANTA CLAUS had a huge fluffy bear in his bag of goodies for the holder of the lucky ticket at Tyler Transport's annual Christmas party at the Acton Music Centre. Ted Tyler Jr. and wife Dolores helped Santa make the draw. —(Staff Photo.)

mas party at the Acton Music Centre. Ted Tyler Jr. and wife Dolores helped Santa make the draw. —(Staff Photo.)

"A tragedy we cannot face"

Fire Bureau urges safe yule

Christmas is the easiest time of year to have a fire in your home, according to Acton Fire Chief M. Holmes, 1970 chairman of Halton County Fire Prevention Bureau. "It's just unfortunate that such a happy time of year can be quickly marred by a fire tragedy," says Chief Holmes. But the happy sounds of jingle bells, children's laughter and seasonal hymns are easily drowned out by the wail of a fire siren.

Work year round

"Our Christmas fire safety campaign is probably the most important battle we wage in the course of a year's work," says the chairman of the county-wide Bureau. "Our year-round campaigns cover spring grass fires, Halloween hazards, fire prevention week and a hundred and one other things related to fire, but Christmas has to rank as number one. Fire is grim at any time of the year, yet at Christmas time fire is a tragedy we just cannot face."

The Bureau's annual Christmas campaign is launched early each December when fire departments around Halton distribute free Christmas tree tags to tree dealers and service club outlets in the county. These tags are stapled to a branch of the tree and carry a six-point message of safety into practically every home in Halton:

Do's and don'ts

"Don't put the tree up until a week before Christmas; Don't place it near any exit or heating appliance; Don't place the tree in a dry container; Don't use other than approved decorations; Don't leave tree lights on when retiring or going out; Don't use other than 15 amp. fuses in lighting circuits."

Why stress fire safety with Christmas trees?

Chief Holmes says evergreen trees are dangerous if owners don't take precautions to keep them dry, as a dry tree can be reduced to ashes in 18 seconds. The newer metal or plastic synthetic trees can also be a

hazard if they are not properly wired for lighting. And any tree is a hazard if combined with careless smokers, frayed electrical wiring or a pile of discarded gift wrappings.

Safety wish

The Bureau also distributes a large, colorful Christmas poster to churches, offices and public buildings each Christmas. It features a large holly wreath and the message, "Wishing you a

FIRE-SAFE Christmas.

Member fire departments in Acton, Georgetown, Milton, Oakville and Burlington also back the Bureau's Christmas fire safety campaign with local programs designed to ensure a fire-free yule season. Their programs include advertising on radio and in newspapers and often floats or fire pumpers bearing safety messages in the local Santa Claus parades.

Esquesing council okays payment

Authorization of payment of accounts took up a good portion of the business at the last meeting of



A WALKING doll was just what young Deborah Main wanted for Christmas. Deborah was one of many youngsters who received gifts at Building Products employees' Christmas party. —(Staff Photo.)

Esquesing council for 1970. Accounts approved for payment included:

—\$1,585 legal fees to the firm of Holson, Balnes and Langdon, township solicitors.

—\$110 to reeve George Currie for attending meetings of the Halton County Industrial Committee, during 1970.

—\$30 each to deputy-reeve Tom

Reminders of old days

E. E. Perryman, whose 50th wedding anniversary was celebrated recently, enjoys keeping reminders of the old days. He brought to the Free Press this week his father's old cash book, recording his salary with W. H. Storey and Son, dated 1895. On week's salary was indicated as \$10.50, or five days' salary at \$2.10.

He also has his parents' wedding certificate for Thomas Perryman and Fanny Christie, dated June, 1879 in the village of Acton, with witnesses W. H. Storey and Agnes Perryman.

Esquesing council for 1970. Accounts approved for payment included:

—\$50 each to councillors Wilfrid Leslie and Russell Miller for service on Georgetown fire area committee.

—\$438 to George Herrington for dog catching services during the months of October and November.

—\$95.04 to clerk-treasurer Delmar French for mileage during 1970.

—The township's municipal levy from the Halton County Board of Education in the amount of \$133,206.

—\$5,340.75 to Georgetown Fire Area for fire protection.

—\$1,811.70 to Milton Fire Area for fire protection.

—Reeve George Currie's 1970 salary in the amount of \$1,700. Council also authorized Mr. French to pay road accounts as submitted by roads superintendent C. E. "Bud" Snow on December 31, 1970.

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TWO MILES WEST OF ACTON—SOUTH SIDE OF HWY

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