

Christmas cards for special folk

Variety itself is the trademark of today's greeting card business, especially when it's Christmas season. Special cards for special folks and nothing too trendy seems to be the keynote all around.

"Counter cards, the kind you pick individually," says Howard McGirr, Chairman of Public Relations for the Gift Packaging and Greeting Card Association, "have become enormously important, while once boxed cards were almost the total business."

All members of the Association agree that this represents a major shift in the industry of the last few years. "The individualized approach to choosing greeting cards is most important now" says William McKay, an Association

director. According to Rich Cairns, President of the Association, about 30 per cent of the cards each year are new, adding to the variety and catering to individual tastes. "We never try to lead tastes," says Howard McGirr, "but rather reflect tastes of a broad cross section of consumers." Special cards designated for members of the family and loved ones, rank particularly high this year as they tend towards more elaborate, large-size varieties. Cards to Mother, Wife and Sweetheart are especially popular in their plastic coverings or "acetate ramables" which are individually boxed.

In religious themes, "The Praying Hands" are still a deeply loved symbol of Christmas, as are the Bible,

candles and Nativity scenes. Little creatures, such as squirrels, birds, mice and kittens are abundant, expressing the soft and caring sentiments that go with the season. And it isn't Christmas for Canadians without snow scenes, glowing hearths, poinsettias, bells, holly wreaths and snowmen. Santa is frequently pictured in muted reds and greens with an antique touch of days gone by.

With all that silver and gold foil, coloured paper stock, special die-cutting and embossing, many cards require hand finishing, lending the industry a home-spun flavour. "It's still a very personal business," says Howard McGirr. There is still time left to go out and choose cards.



Santa was a big attraction at the Acton blood donor clinic Thursday. Children who were waiting while

their parents gave blood found the jolly old man entertaining.

Soup stock

A piping hot bowl of homemade soup is a delicious and satisfying way to beat the chill of cold, blustery fall and winter days. Food specialists at the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food suggest preparing the stocks or finished soups now and freezing them for use later.

Now is the time to make them when there is a great variety of Ontario winter vegetables. Choose from carrots, onions, rutabaga, potatoes, mushrooms, cabbage and squash.

Begin with a basic stock, for example, vegetable cooking water. It is nutritious and full of flavor. For a meaty flavor, add or start with beef, pork, ham, chicken or turkey plus the bones. Cover the meat and bones with water, bring to the boil and simmer for several hours.

Add the seasonings to suit your taste. Common favorites include onions, carrots, celery stalks and leaves, bay leaves, parsley, salt and pepper. When the stock is ready, strain, cool, and remove any fat. At this point, the stock may be frozen to be used for soup later.

Label the container with the contents, quantity and the date. Plan to use the stock within six months.

To complete the soup, follow your particular recipe to make a cream, vegetable or chowder soup. Select your favorite Ontario vegetables, remembering that leftover vegetables can be pureed and added to the stock.

Christmas trees

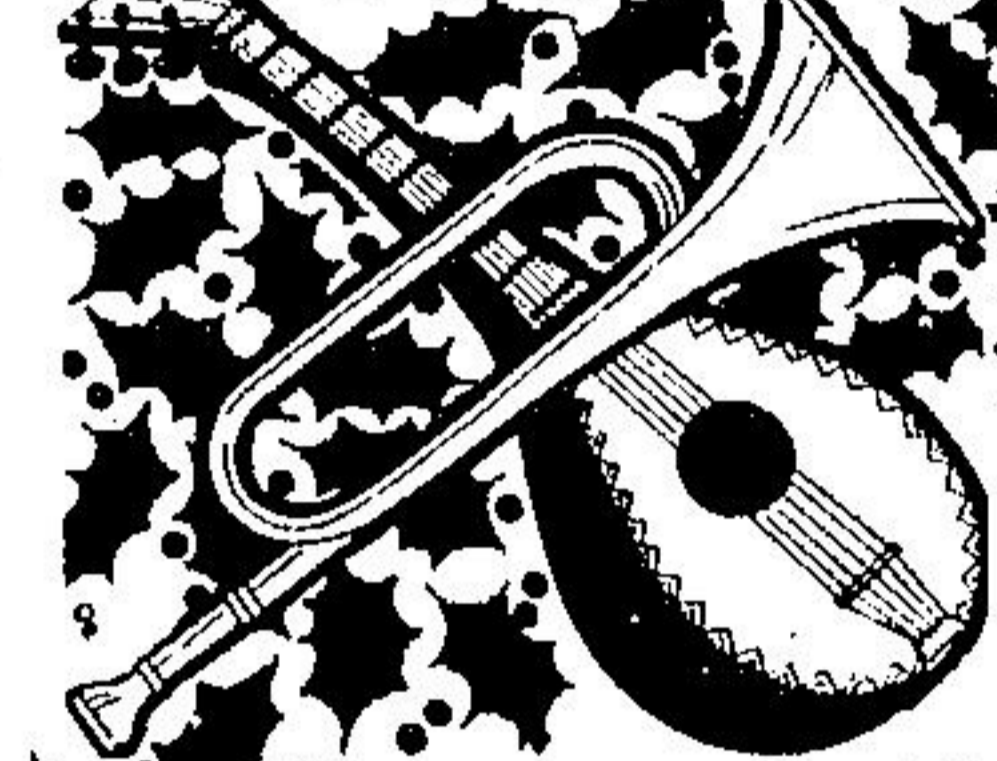
There are many legends, indeed, concerning the origin of the Christmas tree. The first Christmas tree mentioned in literature was in Strasbourg in 1604, but the one associated with Martin Luther is the most familiar. It is related that he wandered through the woods one starry Christmas Eve and became enamored of the wonders of the night for the sky was filled with stars. He cut a small snow-laden fir tree and, when he returned home, set it up for his children and illuminated it with numerous candles to represent the stars.

Another legend, a much

more ancient one, tells how in the eighth century, St. Boniface persuaded the Teutons to give up their cruel practice of sacrificing a child before a great oak tree during their midwinter festival. Instead, he said, "Cut down a big fir tree, take it home, and celebrate around it with your innocent children."

He also told them that the fir was the wood of peace, from which their houses were built, that it was a sign of immortality, because its leaves were ever green and its top branches pointed straight to heaven.

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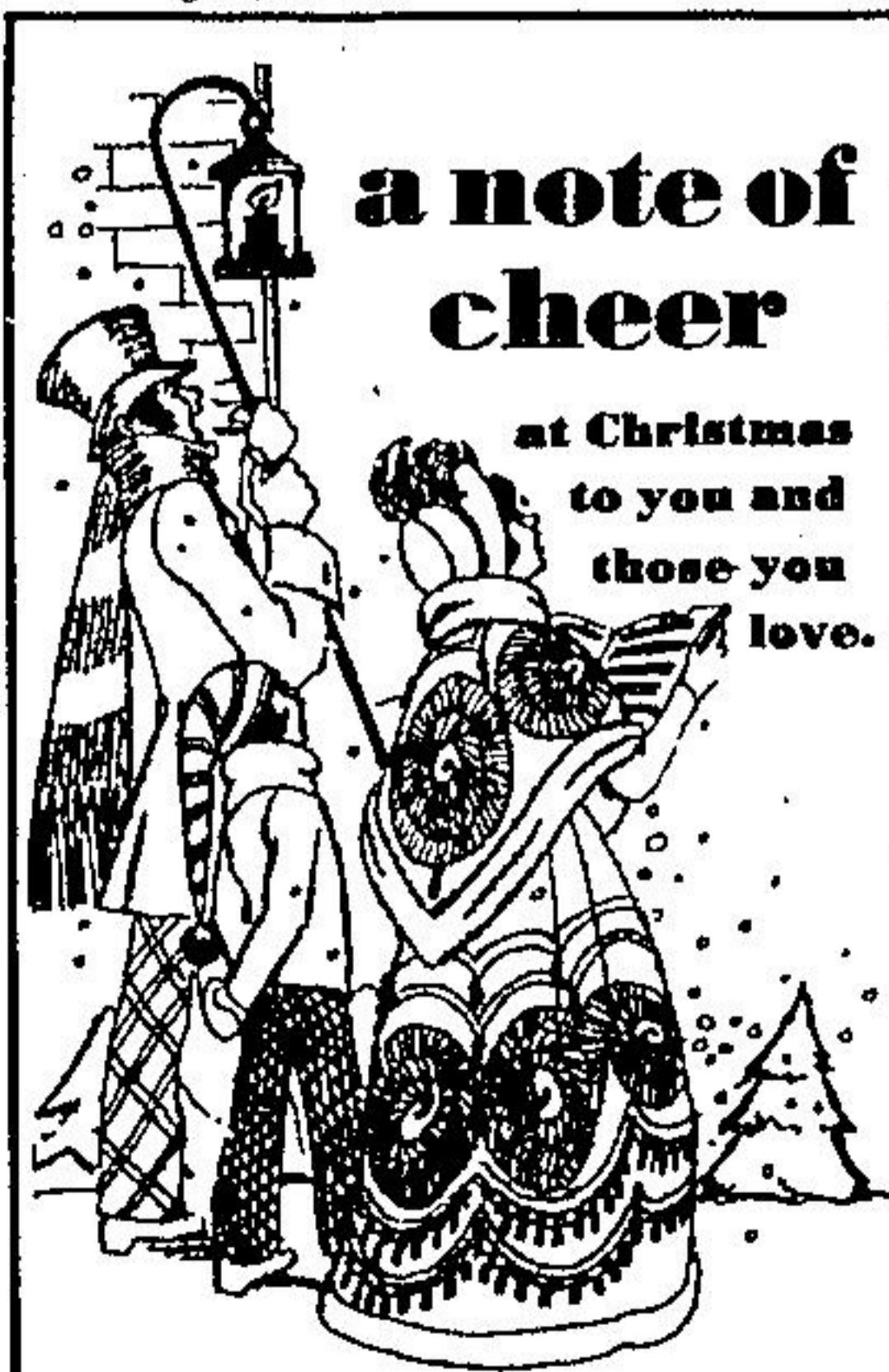
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Bob Heatley and Staff