

# Holiday season superstitions

By MADELINE SANDERSON

Now that the holidays are upon us, I thought the residents of the town might be interested to know there are a few superstitions concerning Christmas and New Years.

For instance, in Devonshire, England, many years ago, it was a custom on Christmas morning for a young girl to look for a rose which she had put away on a summer's day. Should the rose be fresh (as it superstitiously was) it was worn to church that holy day, whereupon the girl's intended husband would take it from her in the church.

Not all superstitions were this pleasant.

In Wales a few centuries ago, it was believed that while the Yule log was burning you were to watch the shadows of people on the wall. Those shadows which appeared without heads belonged to persons doomed to die within the year. What a cheerful game to play at a Christmas party!

Many of these old superstitions had something to do with the weather forecast.

In parts of Rutland, England, it was believed that a green Christmas meant a heavy harvest. Also, if the sun shone through an apple tree on Christmas morning there would be a heavy crop the following summer. I wonder how many farmers were disappointed when this didn't happen?

The authors E. and M.A. Rathford, who wrote the "Encyclopedia of Superstitions," once lived in Lincolnshire, England, and while there were told that all cows knelt to the Lord every Christmas Eve. They

were assured this was true by the old cattleman, who had witnessed this happen for many years.

The origin of this superstition would seem to be fairly simple. Cows, upon rising, get up on their knees first, and any person arriving in the barn at midnight would disturb the occupants. The first and automatic action of a cow is to rise to its knees in preparation to move away from the intruder.

In Yorkshire, it was believed if a girl or woman walked into your home first on Christmas morning, ill fortune would surely follow.

It seems a little insulting to that particular person, doesn't it? Another strange and in-

teresting custom was making certain that all remnants of Christmas decorations were removed by January 2nd from all churches. If any were left behind, there would be death in the family occupying the pew in which a berry or holly was left. New Years had many customs which I find quite amusing.

In the 17th Century, it was strongly believed, and always practiced, that nothing was to be carried out from your house on New Years Day as it meant ill luck. This meant that everyone was to keep the ashes from their fires, garbage, etc., and empty it all out on January 2nd. It had to be kept indoors until then.

## Who's coming down the chimney?



ONE OF THE EARLIEST ILLUSTRATIONS of Santa Claus is this one from *The Great Pictorial Annual Brother Jonathan*, dated January 1, 1845. The reindeer and sleigh were already part of his image, though the great white beard and face full of wrinkles were still to come.



## An early visit

It appears Santa Claus decided to visit Georgetown, or least this Maple Avenue house, a little early this year. Maybe, however, Santa is having a little navigation trouble. The truth will be known come Christmas morning that's for certain. (Herald photo)

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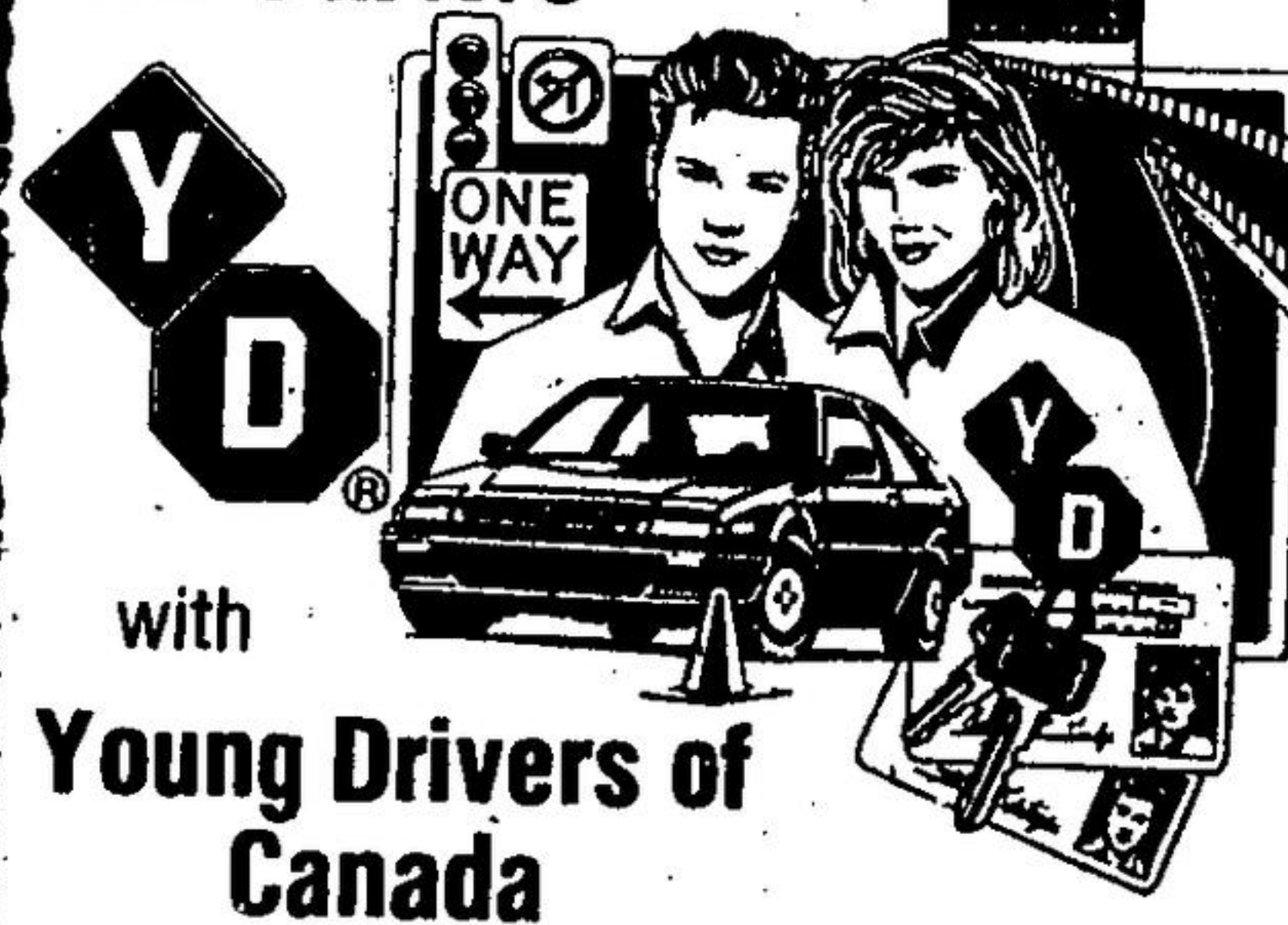
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