



O CHRISTMAS TREE: Canada's evergreens are known the world over for their fitness as Christmas trees. This rural lane shows their beauty in the new fallen snow.

Christmas tree roots are traced to medieval times

The first Christmas tree, as we know it, appeared in that part of France known as Alsace in 1521. It was introduced to France by the Princess Helene de Mecklenbourg, who brought one to Paris, after her marriage to the Duke of Orleans.

Now the Christmas tree, an integral part of the Christmas season for most Canadian families, has a history that dates back to medieval times. Of course, decorated trees have been part of pagan festivities for centuries but it wasn't until the 11th century they had a Christmas basis, history tells us.

During Advent in the 11th century, scenes called mysteries, including one about Paradise, were very popular. A tree decorated with red apples symbolized the tree of Paradise.

During the 15th century, Christians began to put up trees in their own houses on December 24, the feast day of Adam and Eve.

In the 18th century, the custom of decorating a Christmas tree was well established in Germany, France and Austria.

In 1841, Prince Albert

(originally from Germany) husband of Queen Victoria, set up a Christmas tree at Windsor Castle in England. From the royal court, the custom of Christmas trees spread quickly to the middle class and then to working people.

For Victorians, a good Christmas tree had to be six branches tall and be placed on a table covered with a white damask tablecloth. It was decorated with garlands, candles and paper flowers.

The Christmas tree was introduced to Canada around the end of the 18th century before it became a common practice in England. The various ornaments in which it was decorated were first made at home before being commercially produced. In the middle of the 17th century Christmas trees were illuminated with little candles. These were replaced at the beginning of the 20th century by electric bulbs, much safer than lighted candles.

Other variations like outdoor and artificial Christmas trees started to appear around the begin-

ning of the 20th century and the custom is gaining acceptance in other parts of the world.

The growing and selling of evergreen trees has also become a prosperous industry in Canada.

Merry Christmas



Candles symbols of Christ

Candles or tapers have been a symbol of Christ from the very beginning of Christianity.

At Christmas time a large candle was lit in homes on Christmas Eve symbolizing Christ, the Light of the World. It was left to burn the whole night to mark the Nativity.

The custom still per-

sists in some countries such as France, Ireland, Denmark and England. Canadian families light candles decorated with pine, or fir branches dur-

ing Christmas dinner but the meaning has been obscured by the passage of time.

Candles are enjoying a comeback again. Fire departments which must quench flames started by careless people are imploring residents to never leave lighted candles unattended.

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