

# A Living Tribute To Our Heritage And History

The animals snort and stamp, vapour ascends from their steady breathing. Riders gather their mounts together, two ranks deep. Lights are dimmed and the audience hushed in anticipation. The blast of a trumpet signifies the alert; a drum roll snaps and echoes throughout the arena. All at once the jet-black horses and scarlet-clad riders explode into furious motion. The Charge of the RCMP Musical Ride thunders the length of the building, halting as quickly as it began.

As the national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police enjoys a special relationship with Canada and all Canadians. Along with the RCMP's policing responsibilities, the force's scarlet tunic has become a recognizable national symbol and is featured in tourism advertisements on television and in magazines. Often the mountie in red serge is sitting astride a black horse with distinctive RCMP tack and shabrack.

Horses have always been a part of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. By combining both the horse and the traditional scarlet uniform, the RCMP has created a distinctively Canadian spectacle known to millions around the world as the Musical Ride. The Musical Ride came about as a result of organizational culture and environmental factors. Early recruits of the Northwest Mounted Police usually had military backgrounds where cavalry drill exercises were a fundamental part of armed forces training. Isolated in Canada's frontier west, these NWMP officers were faced with little to do in their off-duty hours. Cavalry movements and mounted drill became a form of

leisure activity. It is believed that the first public performance of the Musical Ride under the direction of Inspector W.G. Matthews took place at Regina, Saskatchewan January 15, 1887.

By the 1940s the Musical Ride had become a successful and popular Canadian attraction. The RCMP decided to establish its own breeding program, as suitable horses were becoming difficult to obtain. Black horses were sought to complement both uniform and equipment.

Dress and equipment are deeply rooted in cavalry and force tradition. The original NWMP uniform has undergone some modifications over the years but the scarlet tunic has remained with the force since its beginning. Blue-black breeches with a jaunty yellow cavalry strip have replaced the steel-gray or flesh coloured riding breeches once worn. In 1901, the Stetson and the long brown Strathcona riding boots were adopted. Today ride members wear modern Review Order-Stetson, Red Serge, Sam Browne, breeches, Strathcona riding boots and spurs.

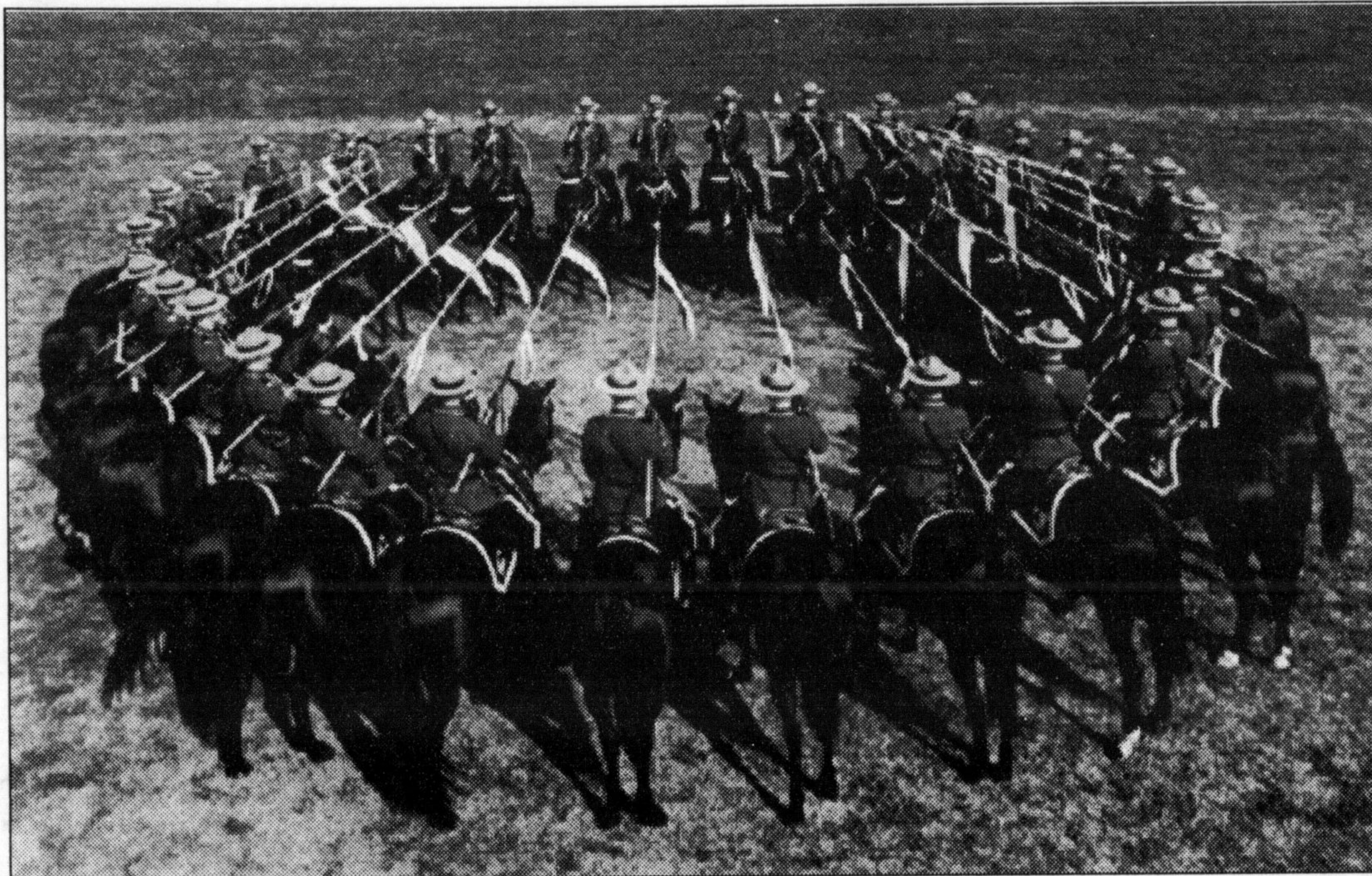
The horse's have their own ceremonial tack that includes royal blue and yellow saddle blankets or shabracks, Stubben Siegfried saddles, white head ropes and bridles with white brow-bands secured on each side with rosettes bearing the RCMP badge. The badge also appears on the breastplate of each martingale. The fused MP letters that appear on the shabracks are a registered brand of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. An additional touch is the maple leaf pattern applied to the horses' rumps. This

pattern is created by applying a metal stencil and brushing across the lie of the hair with a damp brush.

The final distinctive accoutrement is the lance topped with a red and white pennon. Historically, the lance is a cavalry weapon. Lances were issued to the Northwest Mounted Police "Originals" for their 1874 march west across the Canadian Prairies. The modern lance carried by members of the Musical Ride is made out of male bamboo and is one to one-and-a-half inches in

diameter, nine feet in length, topped with a red and white pennon below a 12 and one-half inch chrome-plated steel point.

The Musical Ride is a favourite attraction at Grey Cup Parades and the Calgary Stampede. The ride has also taken part in Pasadena's Rose Bowl Parade, the Lord Mayor's Parade in London, England, and the Canada Day Parade in Osaka, Japan. The RCMP is proud of both its horses and its riders, and their image as a living tribute to Canadian heritage and history.



## SABRE

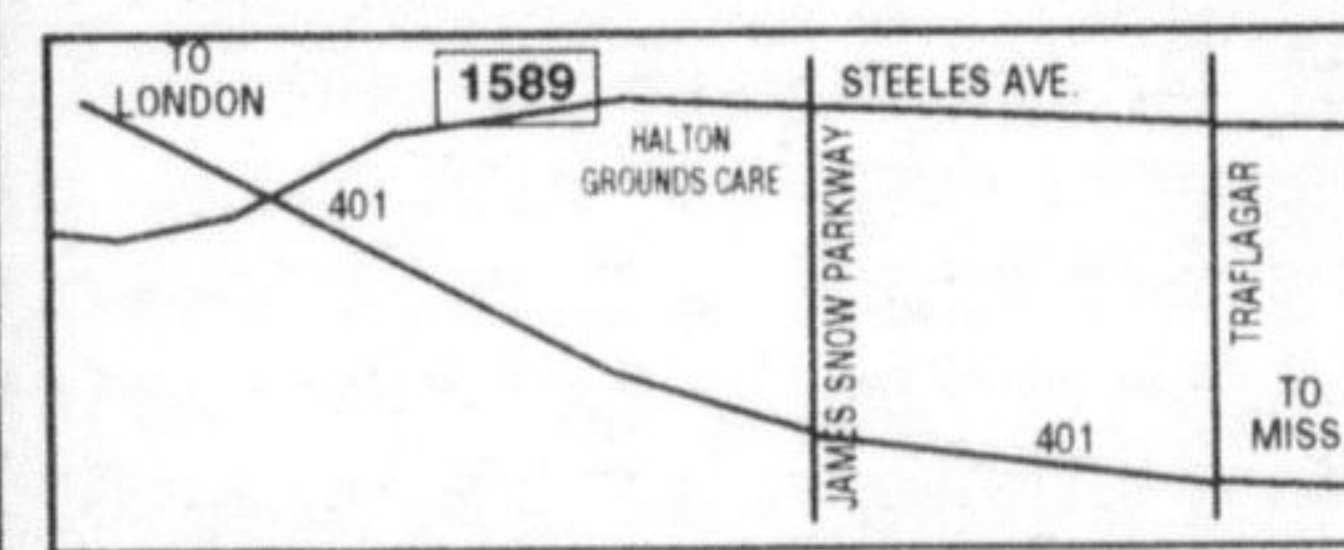
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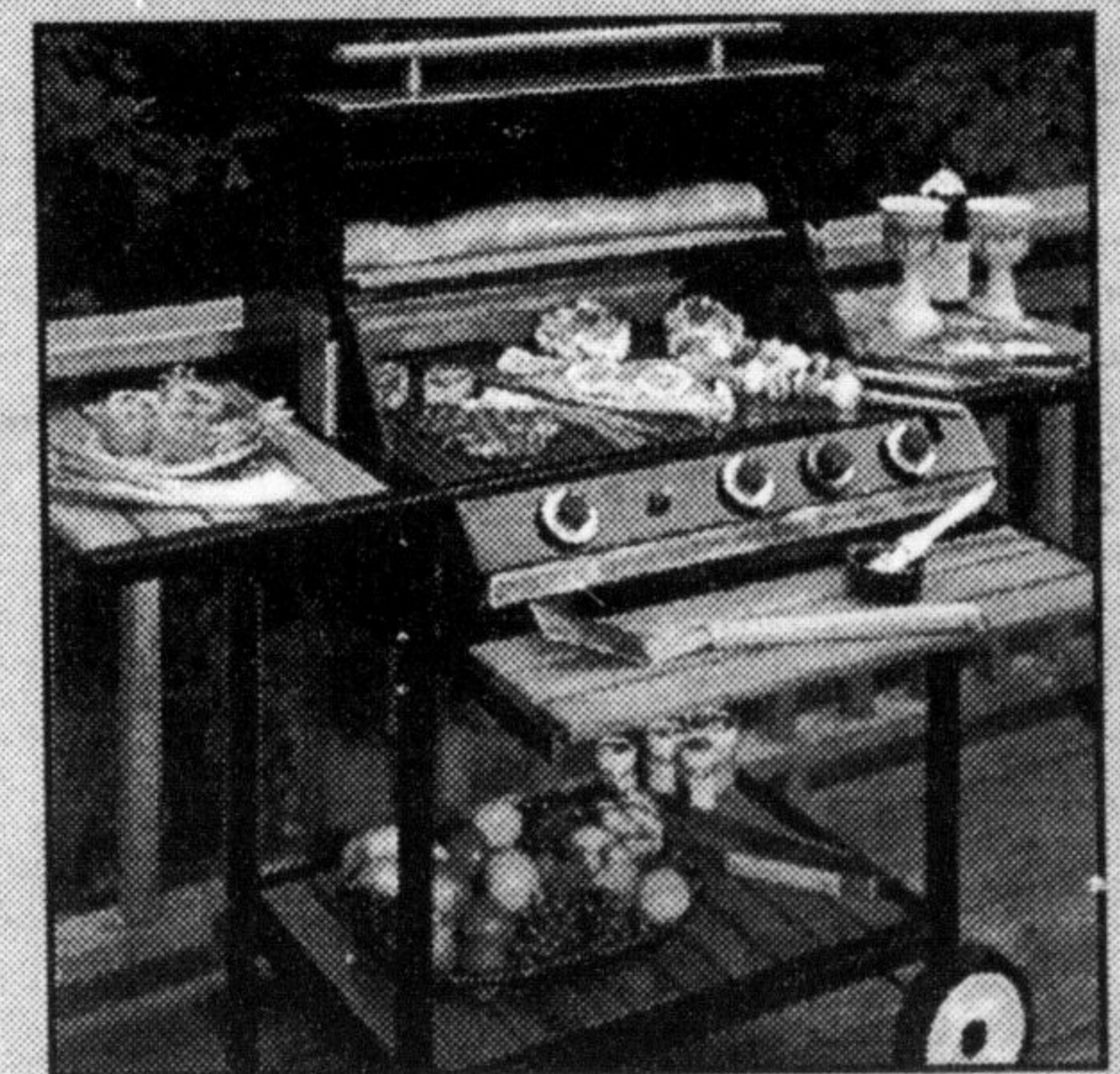
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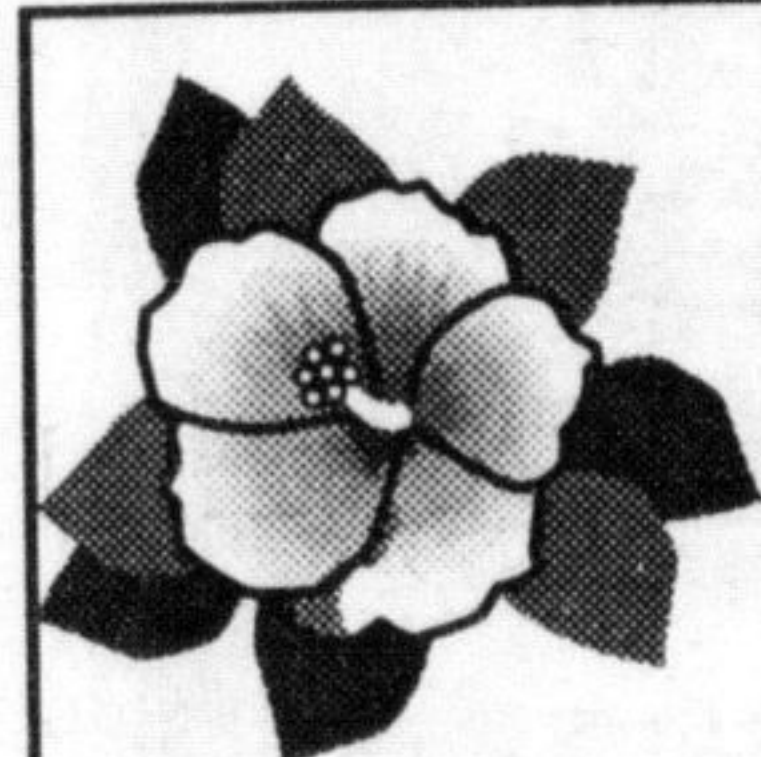
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