

a taste of the holidays

From turkey to ham, traditional dinners are always appealing

By Lorna Martens-Lanza

Each year from Thanksgiving to New Year's day, Canadians feast on an array of tempting holiday foods. Plump turkey with crisp bronze skin, salty-sweet ham, nutmeg-flecked eggnog, sticky dark mincemeat and fruitcakes dense with mosaic of glacé fruit — these dishes are as much a part of the season as gift giving, caroling and trimming the tree. They satisfy the yearning for familiar flavours we always seem to desire as Christmas approaches.

Today's traditional meals are a pale reflection of what was popular during Victorian times in Canada. These tables groaned beneath their heavy burdens

and, afterward, many stomachs groaned, too.

The table was set with the finest linens and table decorations were added according to the whim, pocketbook and talent of the hostess. Fresh greenery formed a major part of the decorations — it was always available in the yards and fields of country folk and at the markets for the city dwellers. Bright red cranberries, satin and velvet ribbon as well as popcorn added festive colour to the fresh garlands and centrepieces. A bunch of mistletoe was hung from the chandelier and a basket of holly with its berries adorned the centre of the table. Sprays of holly and mistletoe tied with a scarlet ribbon were placed about the room.

Christmas morning began with an early hearty breakfast so the children would see the tree and open their presents before going off to church. In 1890, Louise Knapp urged readers in her column The Practical Housekeeper to serve a modest breakfast of "Malaga grapes, Florida oranges, oatflakes and cream, hot rolls, fired oysters, waffles, cream toast, beef steak, potato chips, big hominy, fried sausage and coffee". All of this would be followed six hours later by

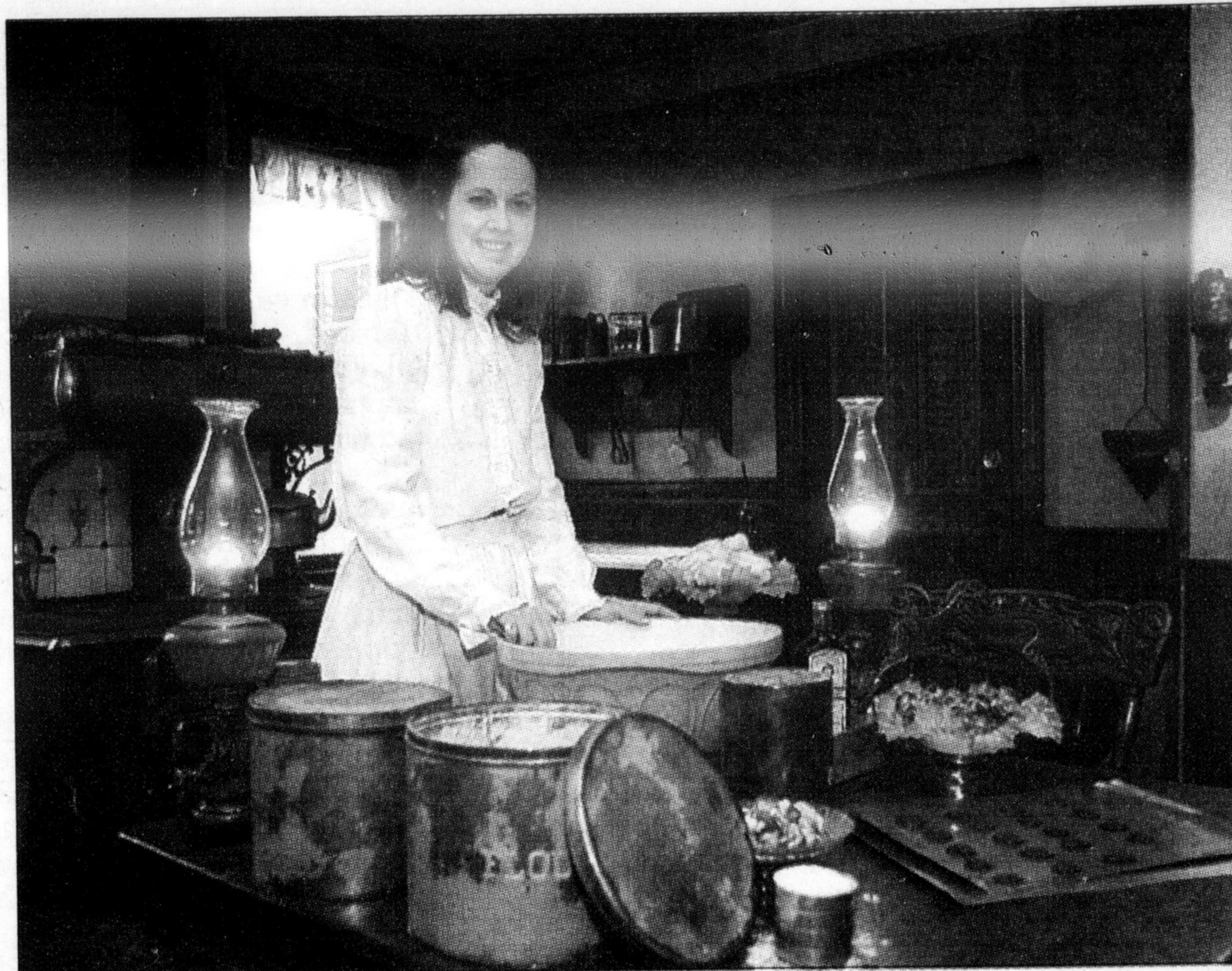


Photo by Ron Kuzyk

Sandy Woodhouse from Spruce Lane Farmhouse at Bronte Creek Provincial Park prepares to cook the old-fashioned way. The historic farmhouse celebrates a Victorian-style Christmas.

Christmas dinner. Are you full yet?

Three to four weeks of hard work were devoted to preparing for Christmas dinner, beginning with plum pudding, fruitcakes and cookies.

On Christmas Day in a typical Victorian household, dinner would begin about 3 p.m. and it was not unusual for it to continue 3-4 hours.

The meal started with turkeys roasted to polished golden brown and stuffed

with oysters, chestnuts and corn bread. This was accompanied with dark gravy, brandied peaches, pickles and delicate jellies. At the other end of the table were one or two hams, a large roast and a heaping plate of stewed oysters.

Potatoes of two or three different varieties, vegetables such as pumpkin, corn, sweet potatoes, squash and cranberries

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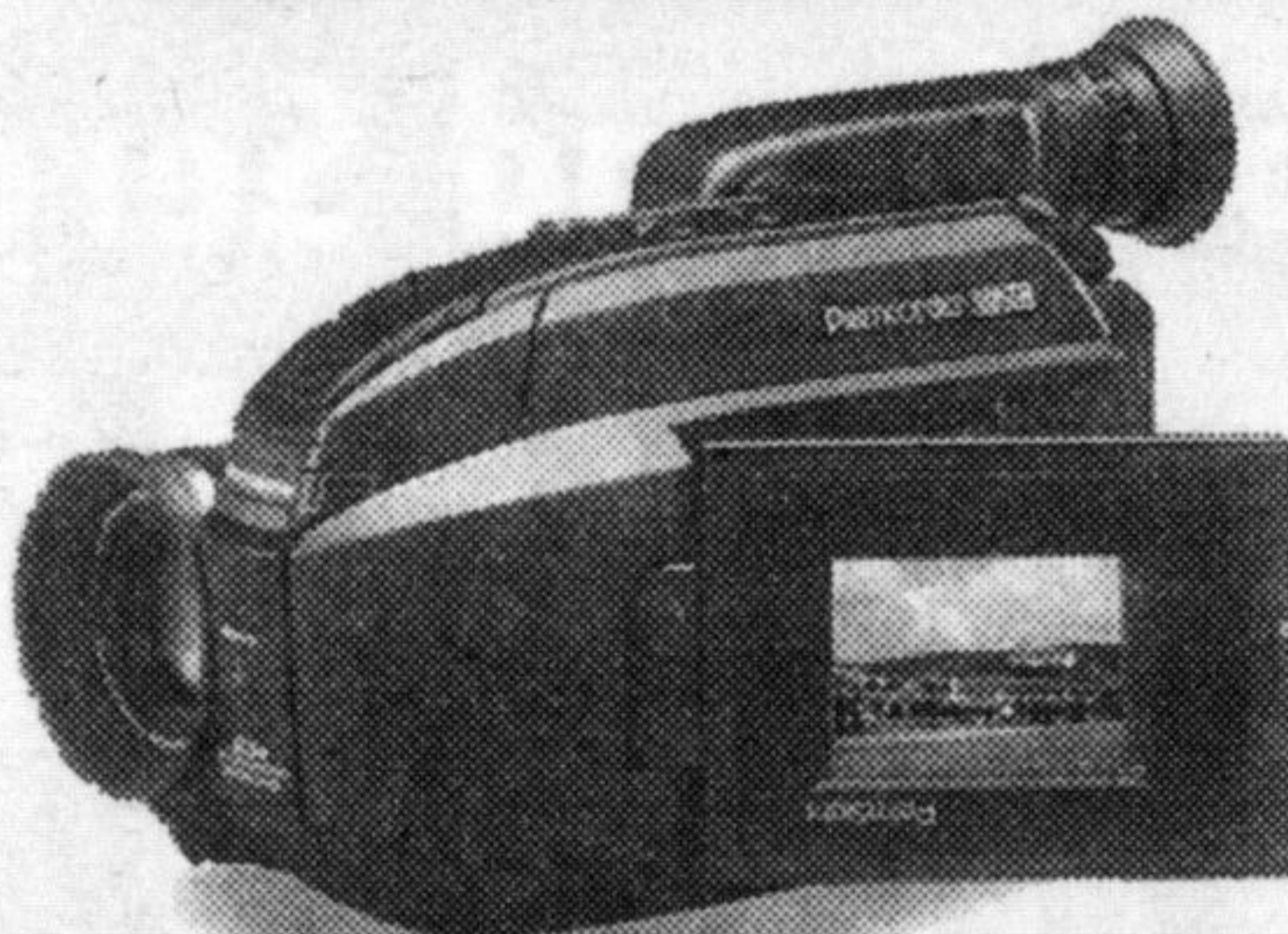
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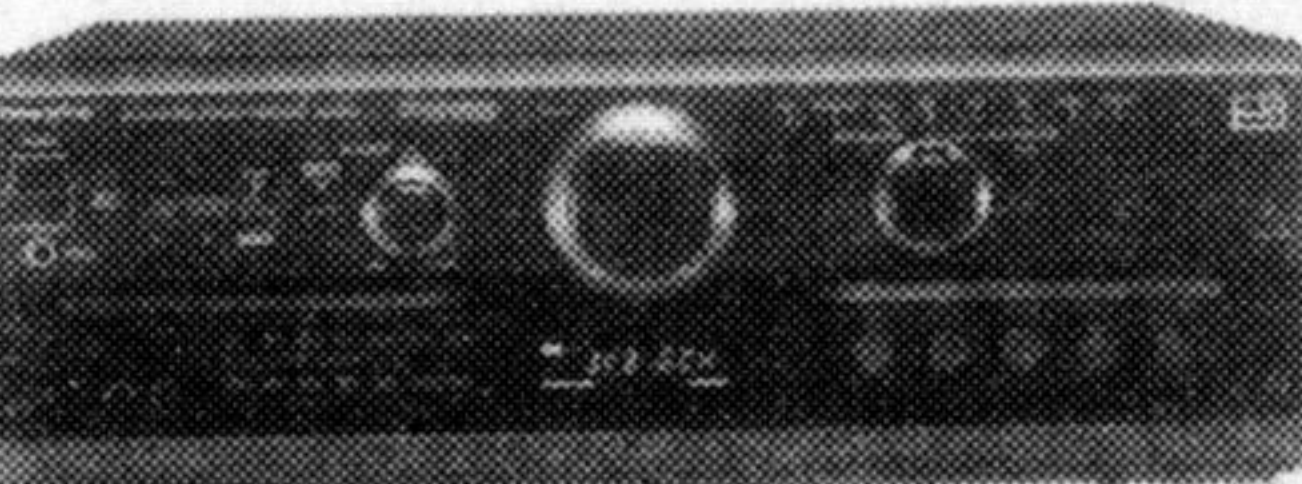
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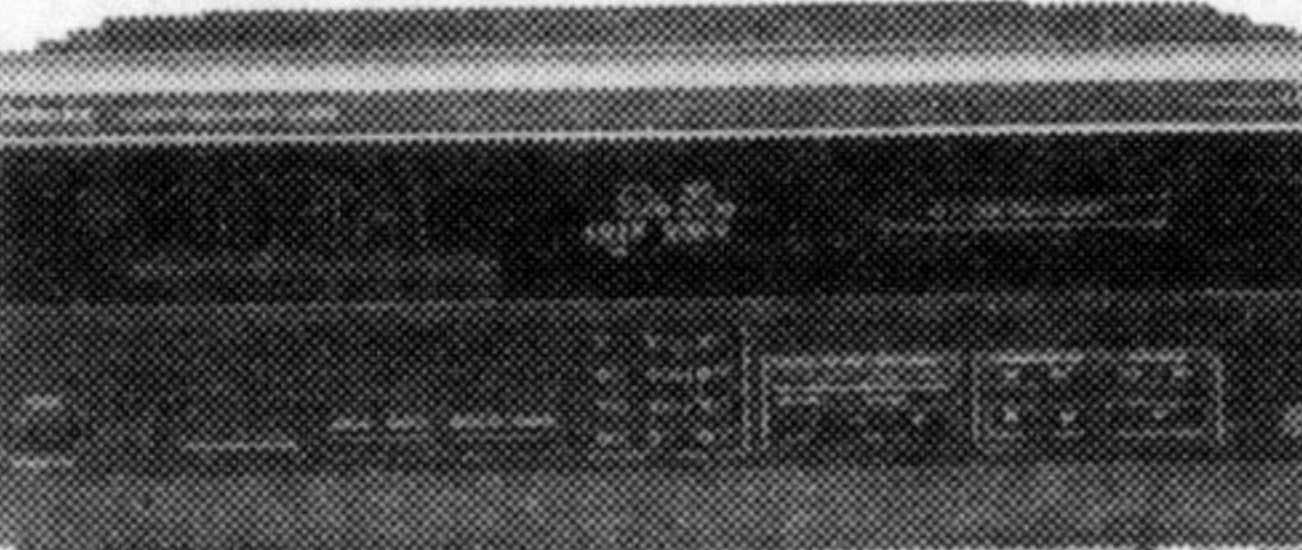
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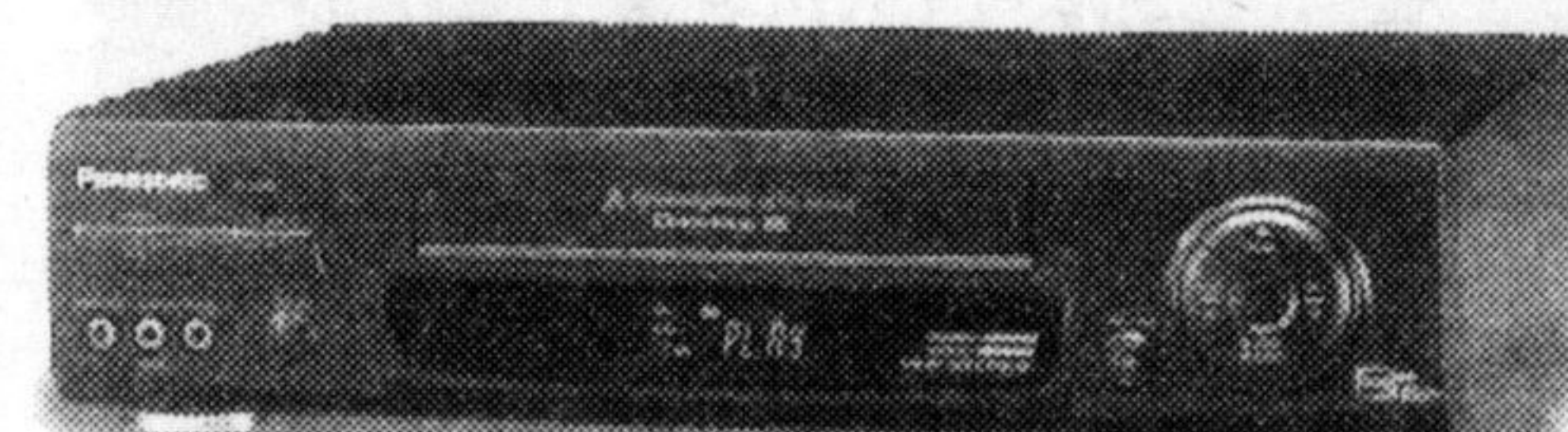
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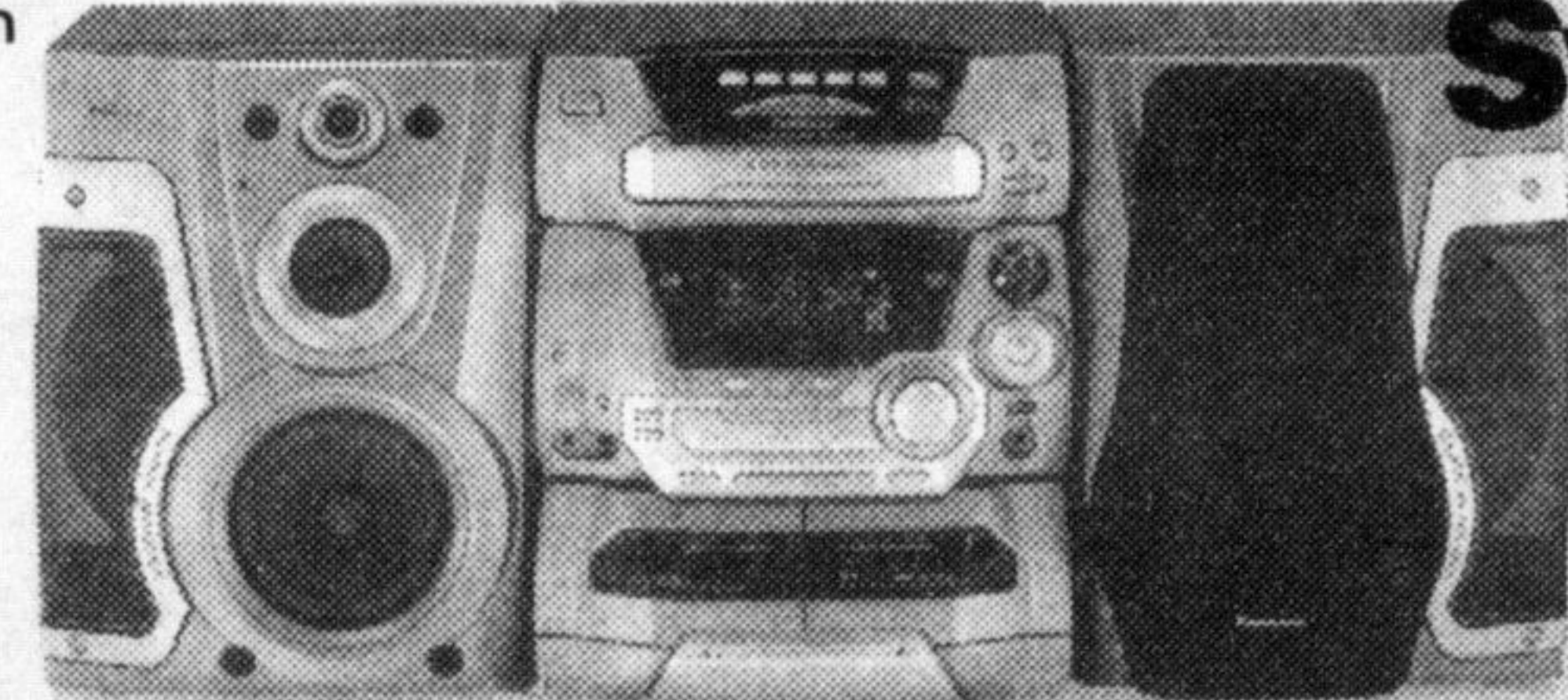
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