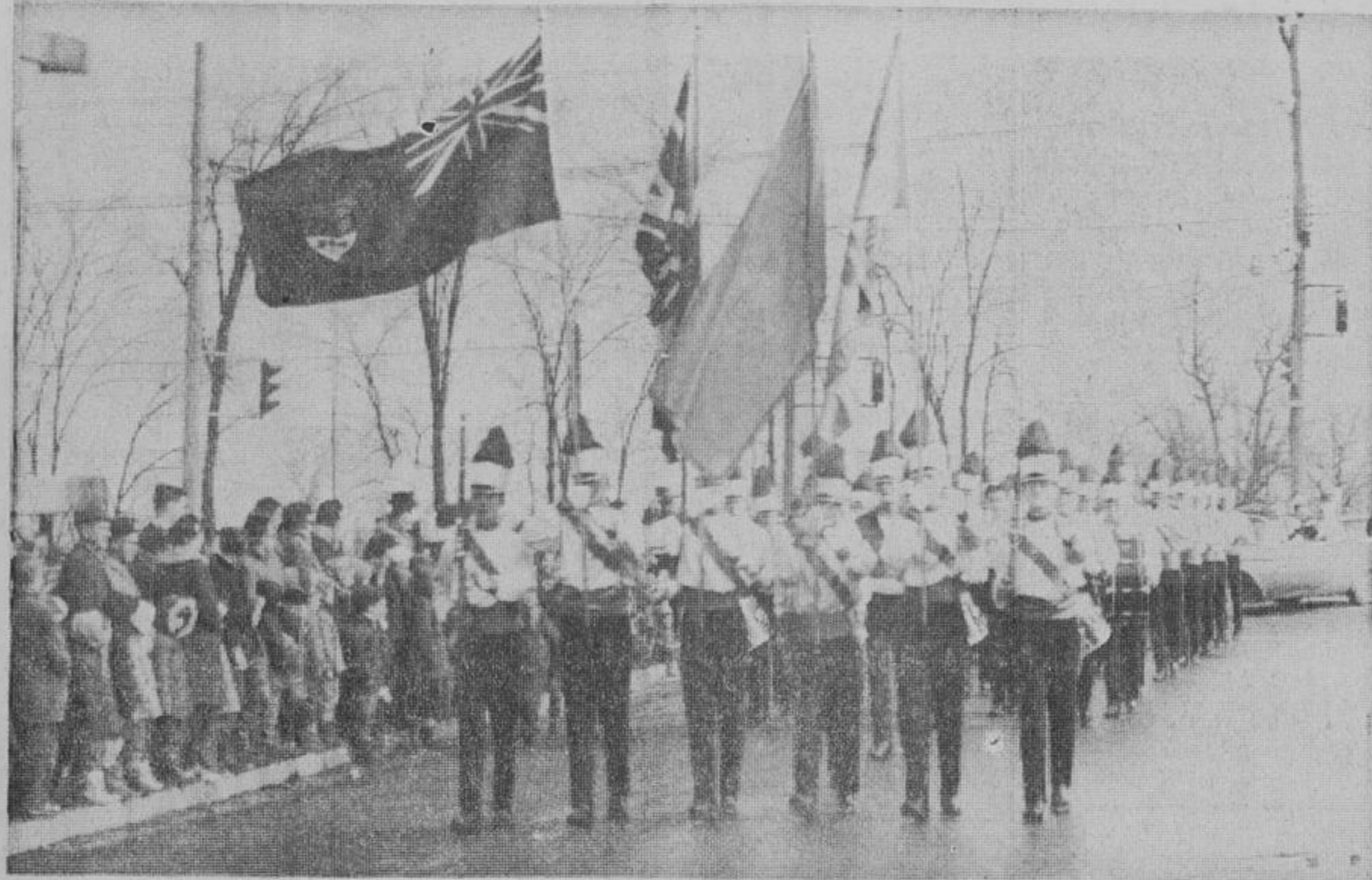


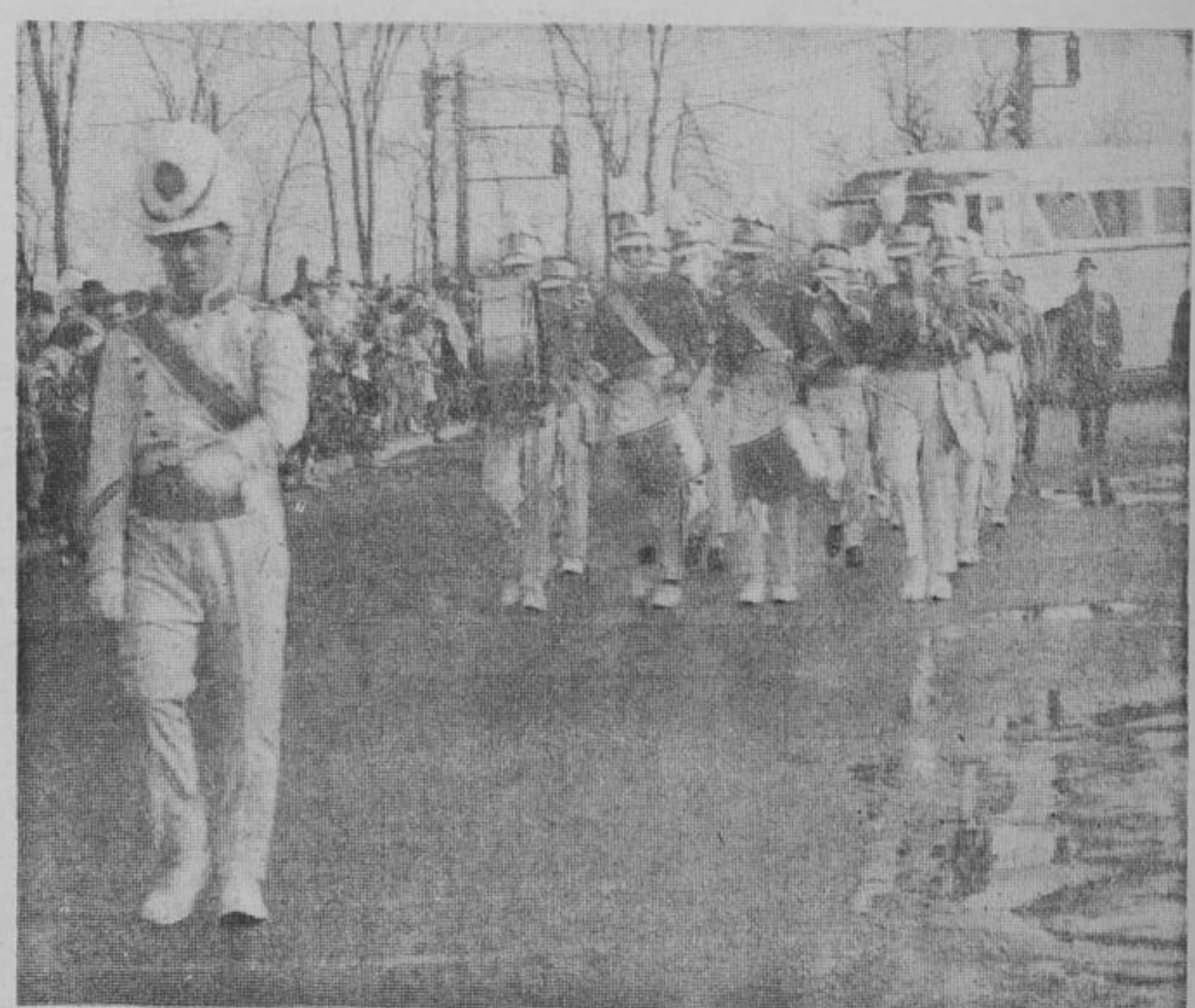
SANTA COMES TO RICHMOND HILL



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Christmas Count - Down Begins

BY FRED SIMPSON

The Christmas count-down has begun.

Ten days, nine days, eight days and so on into the night. Panic grips the hearts of pedestrians as they walk dazedly along Yonge Street.

They shudder convulsively whenever the "limp Santa's jolly whiskers smiling out from the card" appears with that "Ho Ho" look in his eye. They love Santa but they no longer can afford him.

"What on earth will I get them for Christmas? How in heaven will I be able to pay for it? There's no answer. There never is. You just do it."

Even your distant relative has weakened under the countdown-madness. Only a few days ago she was saying a "no" to bother providing a Christmas present for her family this year. You could have sworn she said it would be something like "too costly."

Now she's firing hints left, right and centre. Pretty broad hints, too. She's telling you what she wants, what size, how much it costs and how to wrap it. You smile bravely through your tears.

Even the children have

been bitten. In the old days they expected Dad Santa to buy them an electric train set. Now they'll settle for nothing less than a car with power steering.

But things haven't changed too much for Dad. It's just a question of whether he's going to get socks this year or ties. For 20 years he has been getting socks and ties for Christmas.

And for 20 years he has been expected to look at his wrapped Christmas present and wonder out loud for the benefit of his family something like: "Now I wonder what this is?" Then he opens it and exclaims with gusto, "Why, its socks!"

But it's the Christmas card ordeal that saps the strength of the family.

About three days before Christmas father decides he has put off sending the cards long enough. It's something that has to be faced.

So one evening he sits down and starts signing "Merry Christmas" on a host of cards. "How many friends have we got?" he exclaims desperately to his spouse.

"Just keep signing," she says.

And signing he keeps on doing. But every once in a while he pauses to say hopefully,

"I don't think they sent us one last year. We'll just skip them this year." Fine.

About one day before Christmas the card arrives from the person who didn't send you one last year. You're out of cards.

"We'll send him a New Year's card," he says hopefully again.

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