

Termed a Mistake-but Canadians Buy Million Christmas Trees Yearly

The Christmas tree is all a mistake. History says so. The custom is of pagan origin. Patrick O'Farrell, a cutter and exporter, says so. And people who have a cockeyed idea of conservation say so.

But, because there are about 32,000,000 Christmas trees sold annually in the United States and 4,000,000 in Canada, and Christmas tree "orchards" are increasing in this country, there is reason to look into the other side of the picture.

From a technical standpoint professional foresters, for the most part, look upon Christmas tree chopping as a legitimate business, important to the country's economy. Ontario's most popular tree, the Scotch pine, grows on relatively poor soils and produces timber of low quality. Removal of this species from plantations gives better timber trees space for development.

"Its best use then is as a Christmas tree," says former zone forester C. R. Groves of Hespeler. "If cutting is not done, all trees suffer and revenue is lost. Reforestation has put thousands of acres of valuable land back into use."

Incidentally, because Scotch pines retain their foliage longer when placed indoors, they are being grown by most as a crop, planted and regulated to give an annual harvest over the years.

Like most other farmers, the growers have organized to improve the industry. R. Jones of Toronto, general manager of the Canadian Christmas Tree Growers Association, said the sale of Scotch pines has been controlled by the association with the aim of ensuring all trees being graded and selected as early as June, then offered to registered dealers at a fair cash price. The CCTGA also encourages investments in tree farms.

Canada now produces nearly 12,000,000 trees a year. It exports about 8,000,000 to United States for a total value of upwards of \$3,000,000 and keeps the rest for sale to its 4,000,000 families.

Each family is presumed to buy a tree yearly, says Stanley Belsey of the federal Resources and Development Department. Although some probably don't buy them, the trees are sold to schools and community groups.

"For the Birds" Mr. Jones predicts the Scotch pine exports should blossom into a \$20,000,000 seasonal industry. Despite his optimistic picture of the industry's aims and fu-

ture, there is one man who thinks it's "for the birds." And after 15 years as a cutter and exporter he quit to go into another vocation.

"Competition among cutters has cut the price back," said Patrick O'Farrell of St. Malachie, Que. "Coupled with that there are too many poor quality trees being cut and put on the market, further depressing the prices."

Last year 167 freight carloads of Christmas trees were shipped out of St. Malachie, Dorchester County, 20 miles south of Quebec City. They were sold to exporters on a loaded-on-car basis by cutters like Mr. O'Farrell. He hired a crew of six men Oct. 15 and took to the woods cutting wasteland Christmas trees that he bought from farmers for 75 cents apiece.

His gang cut ten carloads averaging about 1,500 to the carload. He paid them \$3 to \$10 a day and 10 cents a bundle for trucking. He sold the trees for \$1.75 apiece to a Long Island importer.

Tied With Twine The skilled part of the trade is bundling trees. Depending on size, three to six are tied into a bundle with binder twine. It requires five to six years training to be able to do this job properly. That's where the competition comes in, said Mr. O'Farrell. Too many men learned to do this job and went into business for themselves.

He sees the day coming, too, when a farmer, if he wants to sell trees, must prune them—even the wild ones.

Another bad feature is shipping. The trees must be cut early. Packed in box cars, trampled and often frozen, beautiful trees arrive in the New York market in bedraggled condition. They would be better on flat cars, but the theft rate is too high there.

On the other side of the picture is the enterprise of John and William Armstrong of Orono in Durham County. They have been buying up hundreds of acres in Pine Ridge, a five-mile strip of county badlands, good only for growing trees. They have reforested some, grown a crop of trees and also taken thinnings out of the natural growth.

Other residents of the area are also in the Christmas tree business. And it is thriving to the extent about 1,000,000 trees from Durham County are exported to the United States annually.

Income from Christmas Tree Plot Rivals Other Cash Crop Income

Well established Christmas tree farmers say the annual income from a Christmas tree plot compares favorably with that of a more intensive crop.

This type of farming requires plenty of know-how and alertness for possible hazards from livestock, fire, disease, insects, rodents, adverse weather, thieves and competition from "volunteer" hardwoods.

Two-year-old seedlings may be planted, but the best are those which have spent an additional two years in a transplant bed. Slow growth produces the best tree, but small ones can be harvested at three to five years for table trees. Trees which grow slowly develop a bushy, uniform attractive shape.

Many farmers are now replanting areas which have been harvested. Some grow new trees by stump culture methods, that is, leaving uncut the lowest whorl of branches and staking the most vigorous branch in an upright position to produce a new tree.

An American can claim the largest enterprise is the Christmas tree business. Halvorsen Trees Inc., cuts nearly 2,000,000 dwarf spruce trees a year in ancient lake beds near Duluth, Minnesota. The trees may be as old as 100 years, but because they were unable to receive enough nourishment from the water-soaked lake beds they never grow more than 3½ feet tall.

Halvorsen turns his cutters loose on the beds, in rented government tracts and in his own 15,000-acre tract, as early as Easter. At the peak of the tree cutting season 85 workers are cutting as many as 10,000 trees a day, yet less than 10 percent of the standing growth is cut in any one season.

The trees are preserved in cold storage over-summer. They are given a fire-resistant waxy coating, then painted in green, silver or white colors and a frosty finish sprayed on.

The National Safety Council, however, warns householders to be wary of "fireproof" trees. The normal precautions should be taken to prevent fires. People are warned not to attempt to flameproof trees themselves.

In Ontario, the Department of Lands and Forests has agreements with many counties to operate special reforestation projects. The 10-county Huron forestry district, in charge of W. E. Steele of Hespeler, is one which operates with such an agreement.

Every year about the middle of September trees are offered for sale by tender. The income from these sales goes to the credit of the forest, thereby reducing the amount the county or authority will have to repay when the agreement is ended. Agreements run 30 to 50 years.

About \$12,000 worth of trees were sold this year. Prices ranged from 50 cents to \$1.69 depending on grade of trees.

Among those who put in bids for the trees are American buyers, Canadian private buyers and service clubs and boards of trade. Some service clubs, like the Kitchener-Waterloo Y's Men's Club sell the trees as a fund raising project.

In some counties like Grey, tree cutting is big business. In the past 13 years nearly 150,000 trees have been taken out of the main tract in South Glenelg. The majority went to the American market.

A Windsor company buys the trees on the stump, but Herbert J. Atkinson, caretaker, supervises cutting. Some truckers are

not too popular with farmers as they exercise no judgment in cutting the trees.

There are two kinds of tree cutters whose actions are harmful: (1) Those who cut greatly in excess of demand and waste trees, thereby bringing the wrath of the public on the industry in general; and (2) those who destroy older trees in order to sell the tops.

He is glad to note that these two kinds of operators are disappearing with the advent of plantations and orderly marketing systems.

Mr. Steele estimates there is about a 10% wastage of trees every year. These are trees of particularly poor quality because the public is becoming more discriminating in its buying habits.

In Ottawa and some other centres old Christmas trees are gathered annually and burned in a huge civic bonfire. This is not the case in all cities where some are left to clutter alleys for months.

Used trees can be used in back yards as suet feeding stations for the birds. They make good forts for the youngsters and are used as road markers for snow plow crews.

Thousands of people owe their lives to parachutes when they have been forced to abandon an aircraft. The correct packing of parachutes is so important that "riggers" are licensed by the Civil Aeronautics Authority. Parachutes must be inspected every ten days and repacked every 60. Civil aircraft don't have to carry them, except when acrobatic flying is to be done. Occupants of military and naval aircraft must wear them. A man falling freely will reach a terminal velocity of about 118 miles per hour.

Vivian Forest Big Producer



The Vivian Forest near Balintree is a big producer of pulp wood, hard wood and Christmas trees. Since Nov. 1, more than 1,500 Christmas trees have been cut and sold by tender. An employee of the Dept. of Lands and Forests cuts a sample tree out of the forest (top) while another employee, Mr. Elliott Graham of Vivian loads it on the truck. More than 400 cords of pulp wood were cut from the Vivian forests. From reforestation areas in York and Ontario Counties, more than 30,000 feet of hardwood lumber was cut and sold locally this year. The project was started in 1924. There are 3,500 acres of reforestation in York County. —Jim Thomas

TREES SYMBOLIZE LIFE EVERLASTING

The custom of bringing green boughs into dwelling places is a pagan one. It was symbolic of the triumph of life over death or of eternal life.

The Egyptians used green date palms; the Romans an evergreen bough as did the Druids, and the Scandinavians held the fir tree in reverence. So, historically, the Christmas tree has nothing to do with the Christian religion observance of the day of the Christ mass (or Christmas).

To Pope Gregory I can be attributed the credit for weaving the Christmas tree into the fabric of Christian ceremony. He instructed his missionaries not to destroy the innocent pagan customs which were not inconsistent with church doctrine.

There are two theories on how the Christmas tree came to be widely used in Britain. When the missionary, Boniface, went to England to preach Christianity to the Teutons, he found them worshipping the sacred oak of the god Odin: Instead of trying to destroy that practice, Boniface persuaded the Christian converts to substitute an evergreen for an oak and to decorate it in honor of the Christ Child. The practice stuck, particularly in the English-speaking world.

The other story is that Queen Victoria's marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe-Cobourg and Gotha in 1840 was largely responsible for the introduction of the Christmas tree into England. Hessian soldiers are credited

Fruit Trees to Be Counted

Designed for the purpose of estimating with some degree of accuracy the fruit resources of the province and provide a guide for marketing purposes, the Ontario Dept. of Agriculture is initiating a tree fruit census throughout the province.

Under the direction of the Extension Branch, Ontario fruit growers are being asked to make a return of the number of apple, peach, pear, plum and cherry trees on all of the fruit-growing farms of the province. In addition to the fruit trees, grape growers will be asked to report on the number of vines in their vineyards.

In addition to reporting the number of trees, growers will be asked to report on the varieties under cultivation.

A similar count of trees and vines is taking place in all fruit growing sections of Canada. W. B. Fox, Director of the Fruit and Vegetable Extension Service, said that the census would provide a guide as to the fruit resources of the province and assist in the marketing of the produce. Forms for the return are being distributed.

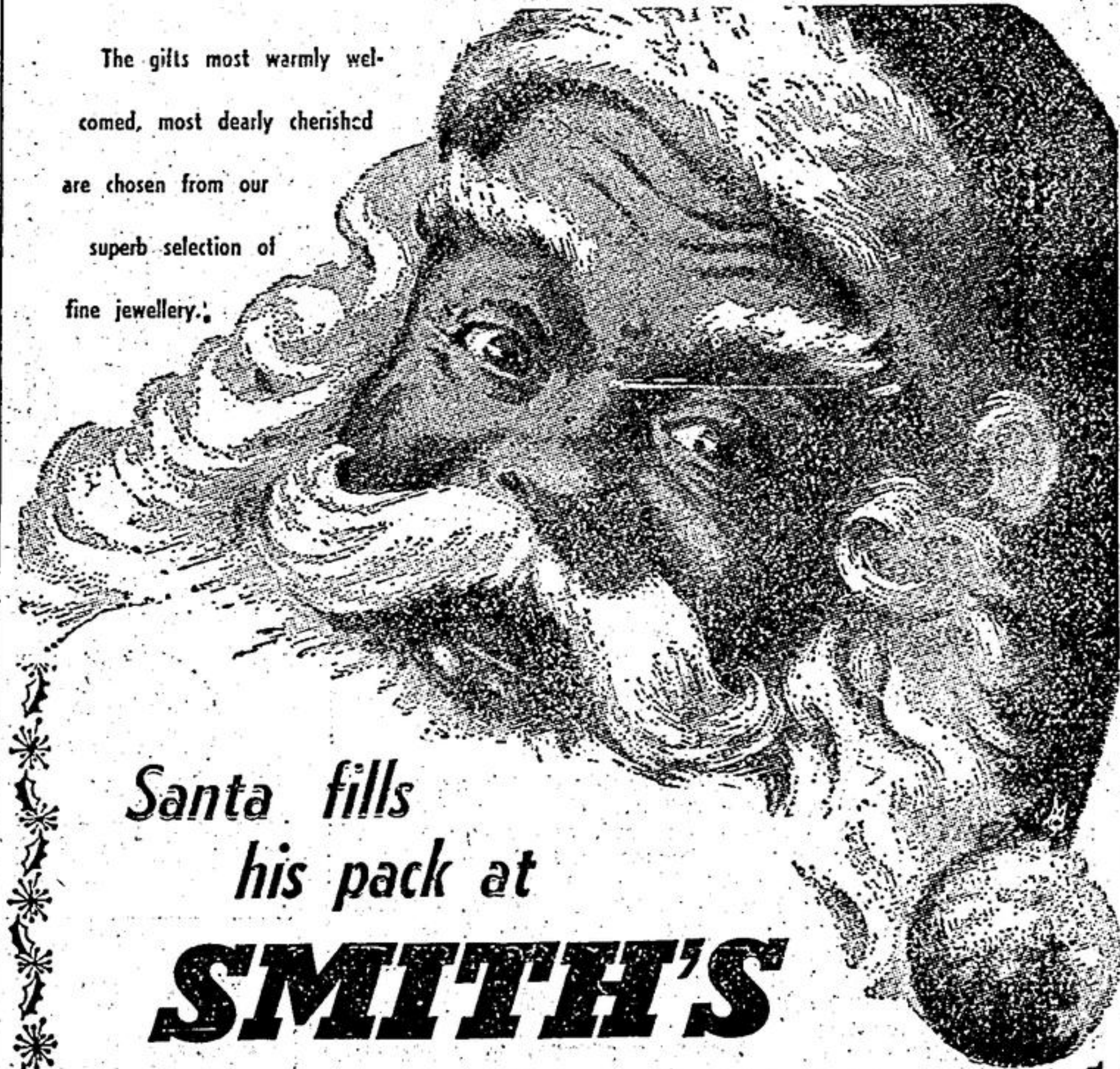
It is anticipated that the census will be completed by April.

with introducing the decorated Christmas tree into the new world at the time of the American Revolution.

The custom grew until everybody who can afford a spruce, fir or pine tree now buys one for the annual Christmas season.

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HOW TO BUY A CHRISTMAS TREE

- Scotch pine is becoming a favorite Christmas tree. It is usually fairly straight, has dense foliage with few gaps and ungainly spaces and the needles don't fall out readily.
- A species such as spruce from which the needles fall easily may leave you with a skeleton for Christmas. But tree sellers must cater to many tastes, from those who want a tree stuck in a flower pot to those who want a 15-footer. One man with good taste always demands a tree as wide as it is tall.
- Here are some tips when buying a Yule tree:
1. Seize the tree and slam it down on its stump. If the needles drop then, they'll drop faster when you get it in the house.
 2. Rub your finger across the end of the stump. If it is made sticky by resin, the tree should be fairly fresh.
 3. It should have six or seven inches of stump but don't worry about it. You can trim the lower branches to make the stump longer.
 4. Although many people do not put their trees in water, they will hold their needles and fragrance longer if the bark is peeled back an inch or so and the stump inserted in a water pan. They will also be less of a fire hazard.

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