

# Experience a Country Christmas

## Christmas tree is bedecked with customs and history

(MS) Of all Christmas customs, perhaps the most universally-treasured is the Christmas tree.

Brightly decorated with shimmering lights and glittering ornaments, the tree is as likely to reflect the traditions of each individual family as it is those of the world at large.

From the exciting moment when the tree is erected, usually some days in advance of Christmas Eve, it commands a position of central importance during all holiday festivities.

So much so that it is difficult to believe that, a scant 200 years ago, the custom of trimming a tree at Christmastime was not widely observed outside its native Germany.

One legend credits Martin Luther, the 16th century theologian, with having set up the very first Christmas tree. According to this legend, Luther conceived of a tree alight with countless candles as a way of representing to his children the glory of the starlit heaven.

However, historical sources indicate that the first Christmas tree can be traced to the early 17th century, when fir trees - decorated with coloured paper, gold fir, apples, toys and candies - were reported in the German city of Stasburg.

What are the antique origins of the Christmas

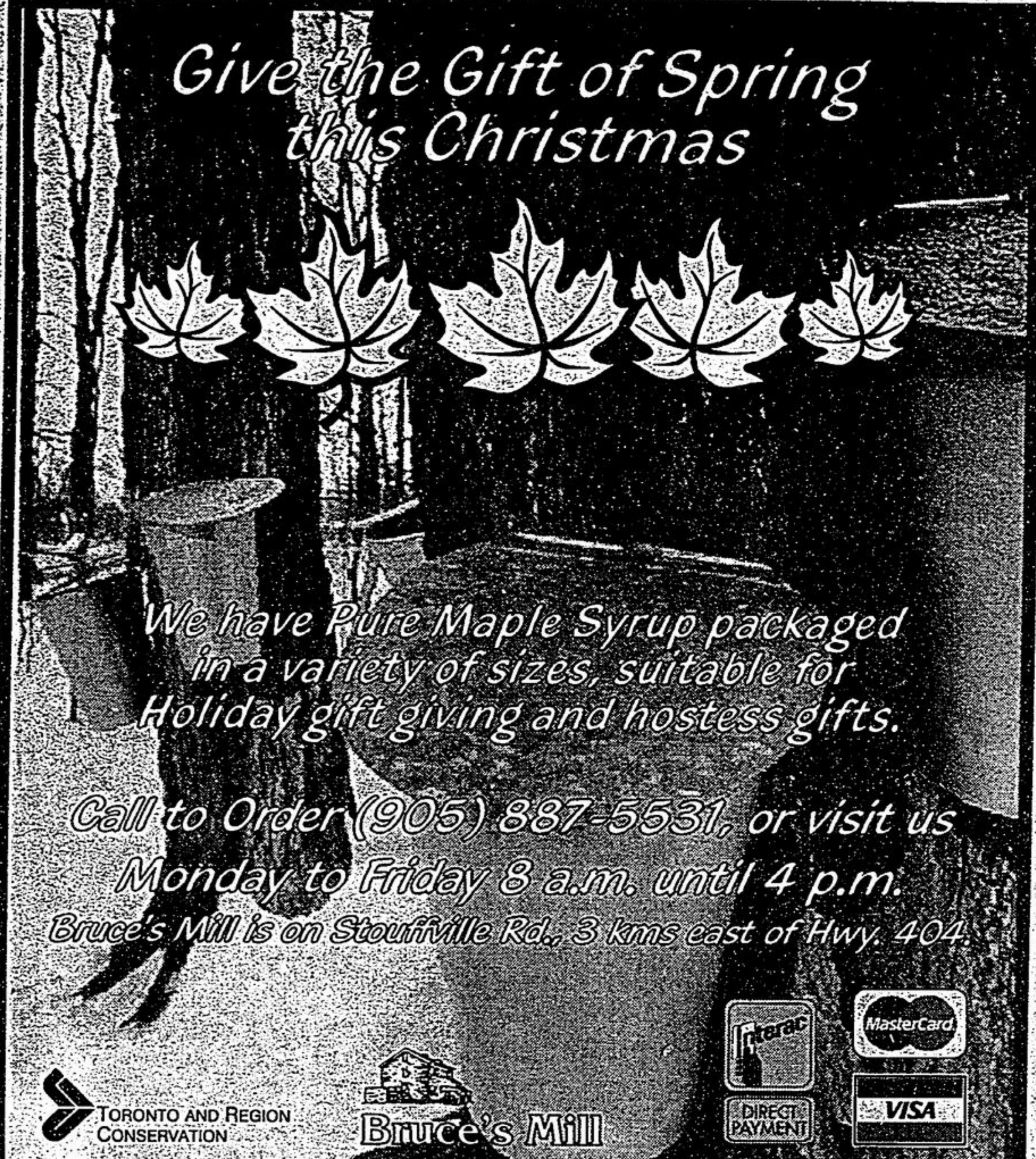
tree? Historians point to a multitude of sources, among them the Roman custom of decking residences with evergreens during the festival of Kalends, which occurred in the early part of January.

Parallels between the Roman observation of Kalends and the festivities traditional at Christmas are many and include those of decorating the home with lights and extending lavish hospitality to friends and family as well as extravagant gift giving. Many early Christian beliefs stand behind the tradition of trimming a tree at Christmas. For instance, it was customary for people to bring flowering trees, like hawthorn or cherry, indoors during the autumn so they might bloom and bring forth fruit on Christmas Eve.

This tradition may derive from the belief that St. Joseph of Arimathea, settling at Glastonbury in western England, planted his staff in the earth, whereupon it became a thorn tree and sprouted leaves. Furthermore, it miraculously blossomed.

December 24th, according to the old church calendar, was the Feast of Adam and Eve, on which day it was traditional to hang a fir tree with red apples.


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