

Cherished Christmas Customs Were Pagan Rites

(By Mary Ann Fitzgerald)

Christmas is here and everyone is busy putting up the Christmas tree, hanging the holly and mistletoe and generally preparing for the festivities which time has made inseparable from Christmas. Curiously enough, many customs we observe on the anniversary of the birth of the Christ child are not of Christian origin. Most are relics of pagan rites and ceremonies which in the early days of Christianity church fathers submitted to as inevitable and so allowed many of the festive practices of earlier belief to filter into the celebration of Christmas.

In our land the Christmas tree, decked with colored lights and ornaments and dripping with statuettes, is the centre of decoration in the home.

In Latin lands, centuries ago, the evergreen was the central figure

in the pagan celebration of the Roman Saturnalia, which was held during the winter solstice, the week before our Christmas. Actually the Christmas tree came to England and this country from Germany where the "weihnachtsbaum" was held as a symbol of the tree of deathless life. The custom passed to England after 1340, when Queen Victoria had a tree, and came to America at the time of the German immigration.

Tree Decorations

According to the old German tradition late on the first Christmas Eve when the wise men were hurrying to Bethlehem they saw the lights of the village in the distance in observance of the Jewish feast, Chanukah (Feast of Lights), every house had a flame burning in honor of the day. To the wise men lights appeared as a symbol of the birth of Christ as did the star, and thus they came to be used on the tree.

Other tree decorations seem to date back to the 10th century when an Arabian geographer declared that all trees in the forest blossomed and bore fruit on the night of nativity, and so today we hang fruit and ornaments on the branches as a symbol.

The custom of decking the halls with holly also had its origin in the pagan festival of Saturnalia. At that time, branches of holly believed to be an antidote for poison and a protection against lightning, were exchanged as good-will offerings between barbarous European tribes who had little in common except their allegiance to the Roman Empire.

The word holly derived from the ancient custom of using sprigs to decorate churches at Christmas, thus giving it the name holy trees which later changed to holly tree.

Under The Mistletoe
The most popular spot in any fun-loving home during the season is beneath the mistletoe bough. In the days of the Druids, mistletoe was held sacred and at the festival of the winter solstice it was cut with a golden knife, gathered with great ceremony and distributed so that everyone could hang it over the door to seek favor with the wood nymphs who might take shelter from the cold.

The custom of kissing under the mistletoe is said to have originated from a Scandinavian myth which said that the lad must remove the berries one by one and give them to the maid, each time giving her a kiss. When all the berries were gone, the bough lost its spell. In line with the belief, it was said that the maid who received no kisses would not marry that year.

The idea of giving gifts at Christmas seems once again to turn to the Romans for its origin. During their festivals they hung earthen boxes to receive contributions. Later, priests placed alms boxes aboard ships to be opened at Christmas Mass said for contributors, and so it became known as the "Christmas Box". Gifts were also exchanged in remembrance of the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh which the wise men bore infant Jesus.

Old St. Nick

Actually a mistake was responsible for the custom of hanging the stockings at the fire place on Christmas Eve. The story is told that good old Bishop Nicholas, who lived in Asia Minor, wished to assist a poor nobleman, who was too proud to ask for help.

While the nobleman was asleep, St. Nicholas dropped a purse of money down the chimney intending it to land on the hearth floor, but it landed in a stocking which was hung by the fire to dry. Upon discovering it the next day, the nobleman used it as a marriage portion for his daughter. Afterwards, when the nobleman's daughters were of marriageable age, he hung a stocking by the chimney and the girl was provided for. The same St. Nicholas later became known as St. Nikolaus which years corrupted into Santa Claus.

While the yule log is not so much a part of our Christmas tradition, it was the centre of celebration in Medieval England and is still a well-worn custom of Ireland, Southern France, northern Italy and Yugoslavia.

There seems to be some discrepancy of opinion about the origin of the custom. Some say that it passed down from the Scandinavian pagan festival Jul, celebrated in the winter solstice in honor of Thor, while others agree that it may have had origin with the Druids when the ancient priest chose a log, blessed it with great ceremony and proclaimed that it should be kept burning. Each year a brand was saved to rekindle a new fire. In medieval England the yule

BIRTHS

MacLAREN—At the P. E. I. Hospital on Saturday, Dec. 17, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. Melvin C. MacLaren, St. Peter's, a son (still-born).
KELLY—At the Prince County Hospital on Saturday, Dec. 17th to Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Kelly, Summerside, a daughter.
HOWARD—At the P. E. I. Hospital on Sunday, Dec. 18, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. Reg Howard, a daughter, Shelley Anne. Weight 7 lbs., 10 ozs.
ROSS—At the P. E. I. Hospital on Dec. 17, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. Albert L. Ross, a son, Sheldon Garfield. Weight 9 lbs., 2 ozs.
TWEEL—At the P. E. I. Hospital on Sunday, Dec. 18, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Tweel, a son, Douglas Karl Heinz.
COURT—At the Prince County Hospital on December 15th, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Court,

log symbolized the centre of the family, while the Irish superstition held it bad luck for someone to leave the house without taking refreshments while the log was burning.

Traditional Feast
No Christmas Day is complete without turkeys and mince pies. Centuries before Christianity, roast duck and goose were considered a special delicacy to be served at festivals. Actually in the ancient days of Christianity the peacock, a symbol of immortality and a rarity, was served at Christmas feasts.

Originally a native of American continent, the turkey was so scarce in Europe even in the 16th century that Archbishop Cranmer prohibited the appearance of more than one dish of turkey cocks at state festivals. It wasn't until a quarter of a century later that it became a Christmas dish for the farmer.

Mince pie was supposed to commemorate in its ingredients of oriental mixture offerings made by the wise men. Perhaps one of the most recent of our Christmas customs is the exchange of Christmas card greetings. The predecessor of the first cards were Christmas pieces written by school children on gaily decorated paper to show parents that school fees were not being spent in vain. Another ancestor was the Valentine. In 1840 designs were made and verses written in a revival of Christmas festivities once forbidden by Puritan laws, but it wasn't until 1871 that the habit was firmly adopted in England.

Summerside, a daughter, 8 lbs., 4 1/2 ozs.

KELLY—At the Charlottetown Hospital on Wednesday, Dec. 21, to Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Kelly, Dromore (nee Mary McGuirk) a daughter, Mary Patricia, weight 7 lbs. 8 ozs.

McQUAID—At the Charlottetown Hospital Dec. 22, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. Linus McQuaid (nee Geneva Morrison) a son.

ENSERINK—At the P. E. I. Hospital on Dec. 20 to Mr. and Mrs. L. Enserink a daughter, Hilma Johanna.

SMITH—At the Prince Edward Island Hospital on December 21, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. Clark Smith, Hunter River, a son (Donald George).

STEWART—At the Charlottetown Hospital on Dec. 19, 1955 to Mr. and Mrs. Roy D. Stewart (nee Kathleen McCarville) a son, David Leonard. 6 lbs. 10 oz.

MURPHY—At Moncton City Hospital on Wednesday, Dec. 21, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. James F. Murphy (nee Reta MacDonald) a daughter.

HOF—At the Prince Edward Island Hospital on December 19, 1955 to Mr. and Mrs. Kornelis Hof, Charlottetown, a daughter.

MACDONALD—At the Charlottetown Hospital on Dec. 16, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. Gordon MacDonald,

Souris (nee Margaret Arsenault) a daughter, 7 lbs. 11 ozs.

CARTER—At the Charlottetown Hospital on Dec. 13, 1955 to Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Carter, Souris, twin boys, 6 lbs. 8 ozs and 6 lbs. 10 oz.

MACDONALD—At the Charlottetown Hospital on Thursday, Dec. 15, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. James L. MacDonald, 28 Spring St., Charlottetown, a son, 6 lbs.

RAMSAY—At the Prince County Hospital Dec. 18th, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. Keith Ramsay, Kensington, a son.

MACDONALD—At the Prince Edward Island Hospital on Friday, Dec. 16, 1955, to Mr. and Mrs. Irving MacDonald, York, twin girls.

MACMILLAN—At the Charlottetown Hospital on Dec. 18, 1955, to Dr. and Mrs. Allan MacMillan, a daughter (Mary Ellen).

DEATHS

CARTER—At her residence, 18 Fraser St., Halifax, Dec. 20th, Lois MacKinlay Carter, beloved wife of A. S. Carter.

DOWLING—At the Charlottetown Hospital on Tuesday, Dec. 20th, 1955, Dennis Dowling of 29 Victoria Avenue in his 91st year.

GILLIS—At the P. E. I. Hospital on Friday, Dec. 16th, 1955, Mrs. Catherine Gillis, formerly of

Grand View in her 85th year.

GORVEATT—At the Prince Edward Island Hospital on Tuesday, Dec. 20, 1955, Mrs. Everett Gorveatt of 24 Gower Street, Park-

dale, in her 58th year.

MacLaren—At the P. E. I. Hospital on Dec. 18, 1955, Mrs. Ronald MacPhee of Heatherdale in

CUDMORE—At the Prince Edward Island Hospital on Monday, Dec. 19th, 1955, William James Cudmore in his 73rd year.

Province of Prince Edward Island DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS

TO ALL CITIZENS OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

I feel, at this time, that I should request the attention and co-operation of all concerned in so far as the practice of good driving habits on our highways are concerned during the holiday period immediately ahead.

All our roads now have a covering of snow and ice. This condition itself requires a driver's utmost care and caution to continue without mishap.

For the many who do partake of alcoholic beverages, as well as the many who do not, I suggest that in so far as possible, always, one who has not been drinking should drive.

Christmas is a joyful occasion and is the anniversary of a Birth. Let us, in the days ahead, not mar this Glorious Event, through careless driving on our highways, with a Death.

I extend my best wishes to everybody.

J. GEORGE MacKAY, Minister of Highways.

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SINGLE \$2.50 - \$3.00 - \$3.50. DOUBLE \$4.00 - \$4.50 - \$5.00
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CLASSES BEGIN JANUARY 4, 1956
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W.C.T.U. NOTES

What a waste of foodstuffs, happiness, money, time, and talent is caused by beverage alcohol, the greatest of evils. This cursed habit, of strong drink is steadily ruining our young people who through it lose public respect and their taste for the better things of life because their minds are dulled by the use of liquor.

Let us never weary of our high endeavour to set forth the value of total abstinence by teaching and by gracious example.

"The struggle of the school, the library, and the church, all united, against the beer room is but one development of the war between heaven and hell." You can never drink a second Until you drink the first So try the juice of fruit It's sure to quench your thirst.

It gives you vim and vigor Keeps young minds clear to think If offered poison alcohol Say NO to that first drink. —The Young Crusader.



is the constant aim of the Cutcliffe Funeral Home

PHONE 4432



A. B. Cutcliffe

Intelligent study of funeral directing problems and 27 years of experience have enabled A. B. Cutcliffe and Son to relieve the bereaved of the trying responsibilities of funeral arrangements and to perform them in a manner that has won the appreciation and approval of a large number of people throughout the Province.

A. B. Cutcliffe after doing business in the country for 10 years, came to Charlottetown 17 years ago during which time he has always endeavoured to give a courteous and dignified service to those who call on him in times of bereavement.



Funeral Chapel

Recently he has taken into the business, his son Sinclair who has worked with his father for the past ten years.

In an effort to give the best in service to the public, Mr. Cutcliffe and Son have completely remodelled the interior of their Funeral Home on Fitzroy Street.

The Chapel has been divided into four slumber rooms, each divided by beautiful coloured drapes of a quiet red. Matching carpet has been laid on the floor from wall

to wall. Each slumber room can, by drawing the curtains be completely separated from the others so that a family may remain in complete privacy with their loved one.

Situated to one side of the main chapel is the Family Room. This room is so arranged that the mourners can have an unobstructed view of the funeral service but out of sight of those attending the funeral. The total seating capacity of the funeral

home is now 144, including space for 12 choir members. The family room has new upholstered chairs and new chairs in the chapel replace the full length pews which were there originally.

A set of melodic chimes has been installed and will render soft music previous to the service.

Cutcliffe's Funeral Home has always specialized in prompt and efficient ambulance service and two cars properly heated

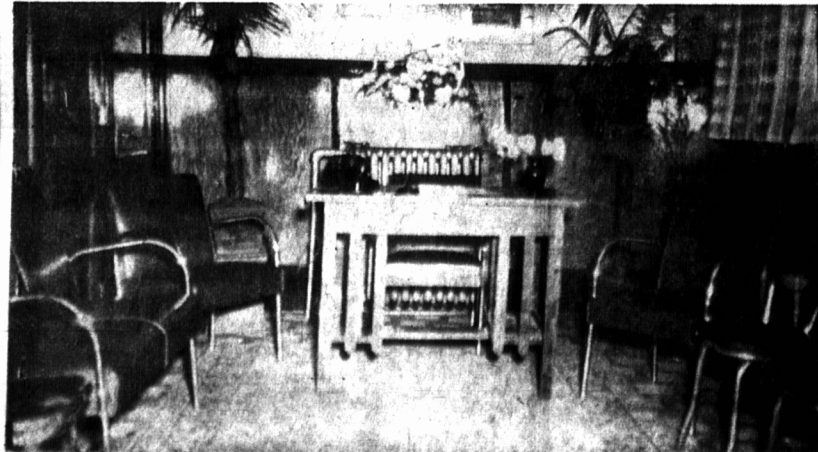


J. S. Cutcliffe

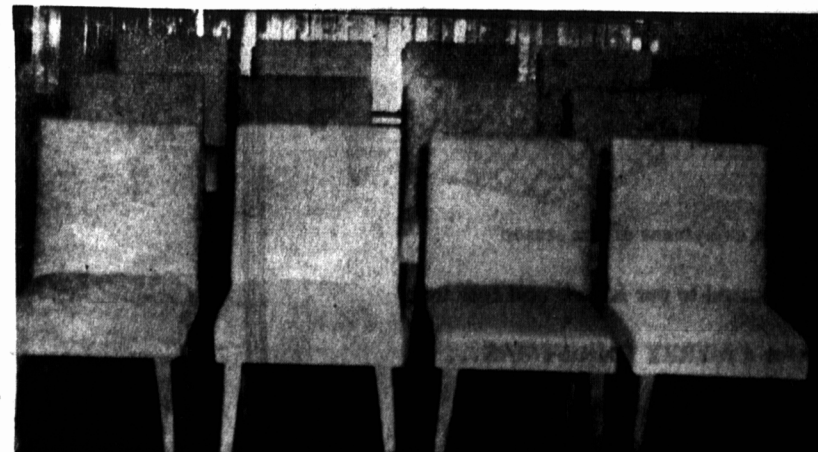
and equipped with clean linen covered stretcher are ready for call 24 hours of the day. Both Mr. Cutcliffe and his son are fully qualified under the Red Cross in First Aid work.

The Funeral Home uses the famous E. & J. Resuscitator which is recognized by and is part of the equipment of most of the best hospitals in North America. Its use in cases of heart failure, electric shock, carbon monoxide poisoning, asthma and asphyxia of the newborn has been favourably demonstrated on many occasions.

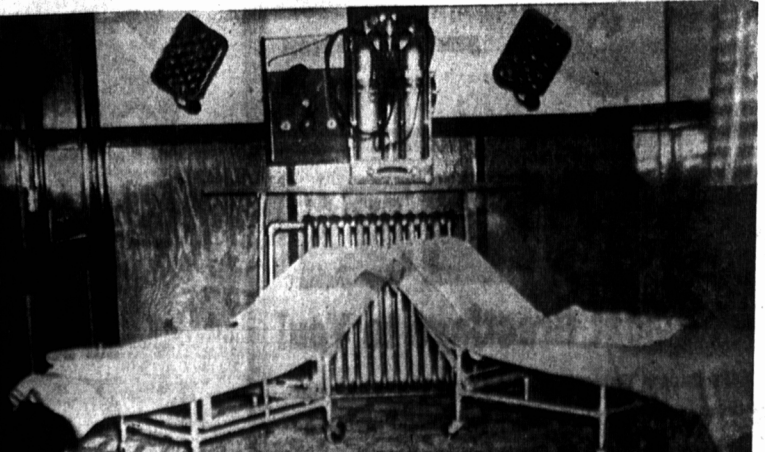
Day and night service in any emergency will be quickly rendered by phoning 4432.



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Family Room



Ambulance Room