Christmas Traditions Should Grow Every Year

Gay Activities Within Your Home Should Weld Bonds of Family

By JOE WING

It never is too early, nor too late, to develop a family's Christmas traditions.

And let it be said, in case of any doubt, that traditions with their nostalgic associations are a very important thing in this fast moving world.

Just think back, if not to your own childhood then to stories from elders, about Christmases in the old home. Remember the midnight church services that the family attended together? Or that certain spun glass angel that made its appearance year after year at the top of the tree? There was a feeling about such things, and about the people involved, that arises on no other occasion.

If you want to make a conscious project of it, establishing a tradition is not at all difficult. Just follow out some appropriate little ritual or action that leaves happy memories. Do it again a year later—and there you have it, a real, living tradition.

At no time more than at a tradition-steeped Christmas celebration does a bunch of relatives become a close-knit family.

THE MAKING OF GIFTS

The buying and giving of gifts at Christmas has a long and honored history. Especially in a family of small children, to whom prestige among their fellows means so much, it hardly would be possible to get away from the custom even if desirable. And the making of a few personal gifts at home establishes another tradition.

What better token of a little boy's love for his mother than a tray hacked out of plywood, sanded and varnished ever so neatly? And how many wives have laid up more pennies than they realize in the heaven of their husband's regard by knitting him a pair of long woolen socks, dropped stitches and all, for that extra gift, instead of just saying "charge it"? Not for nothing do cartoonists make merry each year with the figure of a family man staggering under the debt load of his own Christmas presents.

TRIMMING OF THE TREE

Though rooted in old pagan ritual, the lighted tree has become such a part of Christmas that for most families the season would hardly be real without one.

Setting up and trimming the tree can be a comradely job. This is one project in which Father can take a leading part He hauls the stand out of its attic hiding place. Even a bit of paraphernalia like this can have amazing significance for youngsters. One man we know still remembers the old box, with holes providentially bored in it, that appeared each Christmas morning, holding up the lighted tree. It was all the work of Santa Claus, his parents assured him—but how did Santa know where to find that box each time?

Now for the trimming. If you are wise, you have saved as many as possible of the ornaments, including perhaps some home made ones, from last year and from the years before that. New ones can be added of course as the old ones break, but the youngsters will greet old favorites as friends.

Be sure that the little ones not only help in the actual trimming but that they really have something to say about the way it is done. Their job may not be as neat as if you did it all yourself, but it will be far more satisfying to them. And that, after all, is what you are thinking about, isn't it?

PLACING OF THE GIFTS

Whether gifts are opened in your family on Christmas eve or Christmas morning, build up around the occasion some body of tradition.

Such things should be done this year, and next year, much as they were in the past—with modifications of course as the children grow older.

"The stockings were hung by the chimney with care" is so ingrained in the national consciousness that you can hardly err by having each member of the family hang a stocking. From the mantel preferably, but just about as well from some piece of furniture. Have them placed each time in a certain order. If you do not care to press thumbtacks into the mantel, obtain a heavy board that fits neatly on top and drive nails into it. This board can be saved, along with the other Christmas paraphernalia, from year to year.

Santa Claus, or Father or Mother, as the case may be, probably will see to it that each stocking on Christmas morning holds an apple, an orange, some candy and a small gift or two.

For additional gifts, a spot may be designated for each member of the family. And once more, let that place be constant from year to year.

THE SINGING OF CAROLS

Too few parents realize that the singing of carols need not be a formal, public thing. At their own fireside, with just family members and close friends present, it can instill greater feeling and create more memories than all the professional performances on radio and in concert halls will ever be able to do thereafter.

For such a ritual, Christmas eve seems the proper time. It should never be a question of course of who can sing and who can't sing and who can sing best. Perhaps one of the older children can play accompaniment on violin—or mouth harp. In one household we've heard about, the mother, who hasn't touched the piano for 20 years except on these annual occasions, manages to bang out the tunes. The grade schoolers join in and the college student daughter, though a professed skeptic now, wouldn't think of being left out on this occasion.

After the old, dear songs have been sung, it seems only natural to open the family Bible and read once more the Christmas story from Matthew or Luke. The youngest child starts it off and there are exclamations after he has completed his turn about how much his reading has improved since last year. His older brother or sister finishes off the sacred passage, of course, with a flourish.

OPENING THE GIFTS

Christmas morning can be a mad scramble if you don't watch out. Some families like it that way and chuckle in later days about the way the youngsters vied to get down to the business first.

Perhaps a better system—better on the nerves and better for stored memories—is to bring a little organization into the ritual.

Even without an early morning run for the Christmas tree, there is likely to be little enough sleep for the youngsters, and for the worn parents too, on Christmas night. If the ground rule is laid down that breakfast must be eaten first and that the ceremony will not come off until 8 a.m., or some such half way reasonable hour, the tension is likely to be a little easier.

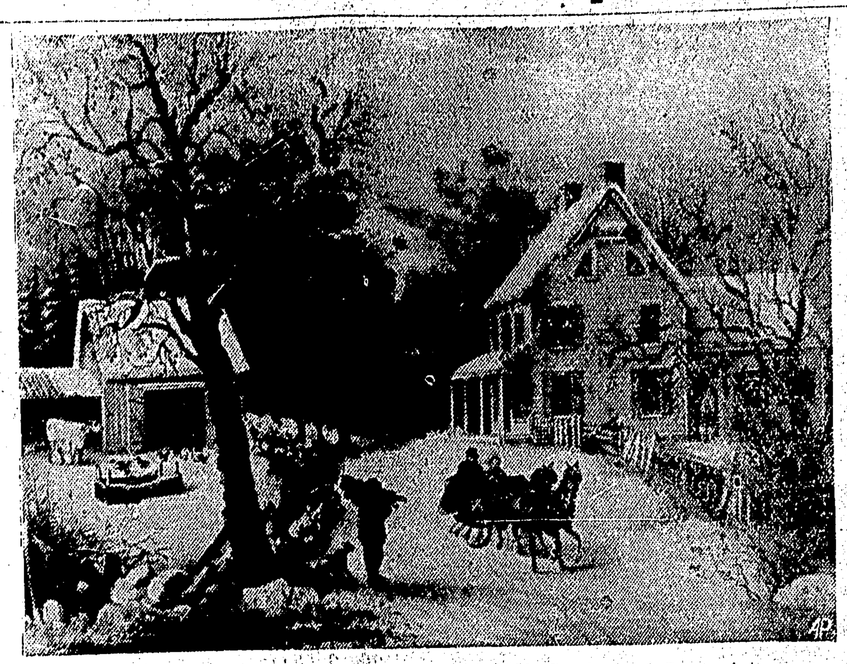
Comes 8 o'clock, with all members of the family present and accounted for and perhaps even fed. No one of course has dared to peek in the living room, with the rules being what they are and a curtain hung up to boot.

Now the youngest stands first in line, with others following according to age. Father says "let's go," and the curtain parts.

Somehow there isn't the rush you had expected. This is the big moment, the moment of the year. No one quite wishes it to pass. But the children crowd in at last, start opening a package here and there—not necessarily the big and showy ones. And then the exclamations, the comparisons, the little yelps and cries! Christmas does come just once a year thank goodness, you say, but this makes it worth every bit of time and effort and expense.

SETTING CHRISTMAS DAY

In the 4th century, Dec. 25 was set aside by the church as the official day of Christ's birth. In some of the Eastern branches of the church January 6 is still celebrated as the great holiday.



"AMERICAN HOMESTEAD WINTER" — an old Currier and Ives print.

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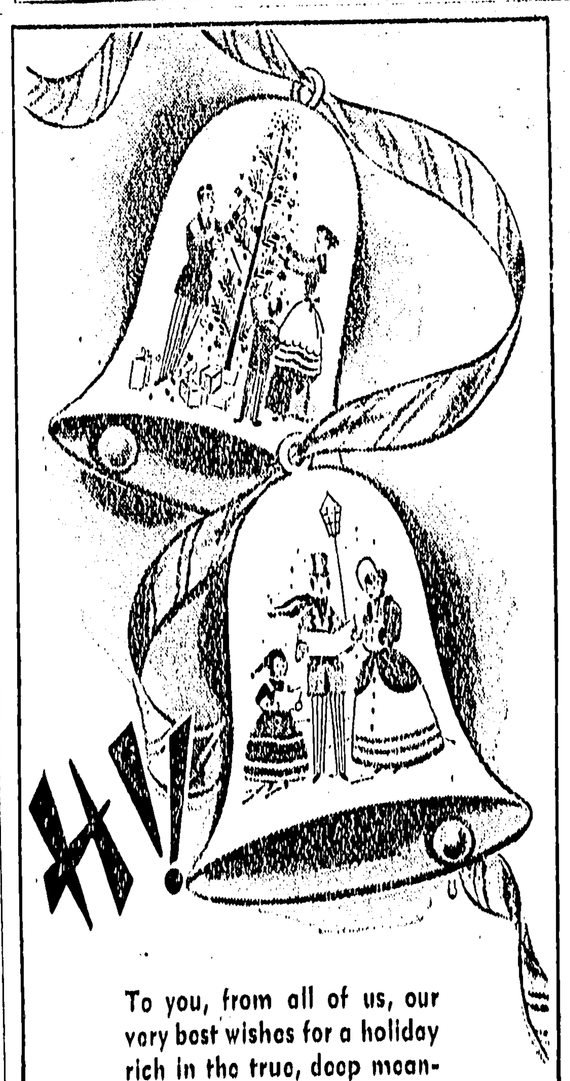

To you, from all of us, our very best wishes for a holiday rich in the true, deep meaning of Christmas.

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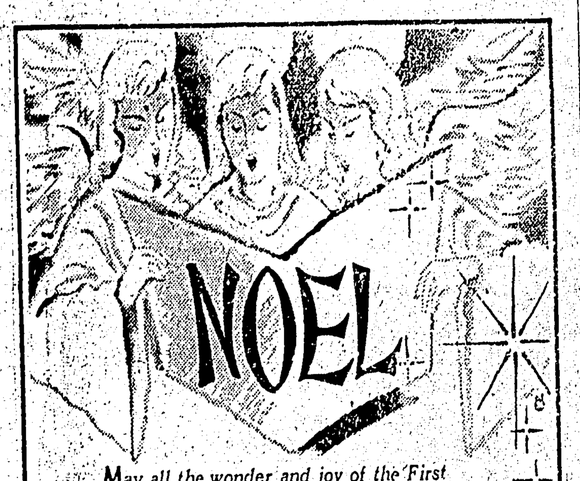

May all the wonder and joy of the First Noel dwell in your heart once more this Christmas.

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Our heartfelt good wishes for this joyous season to all of our wonderful friends and customers.

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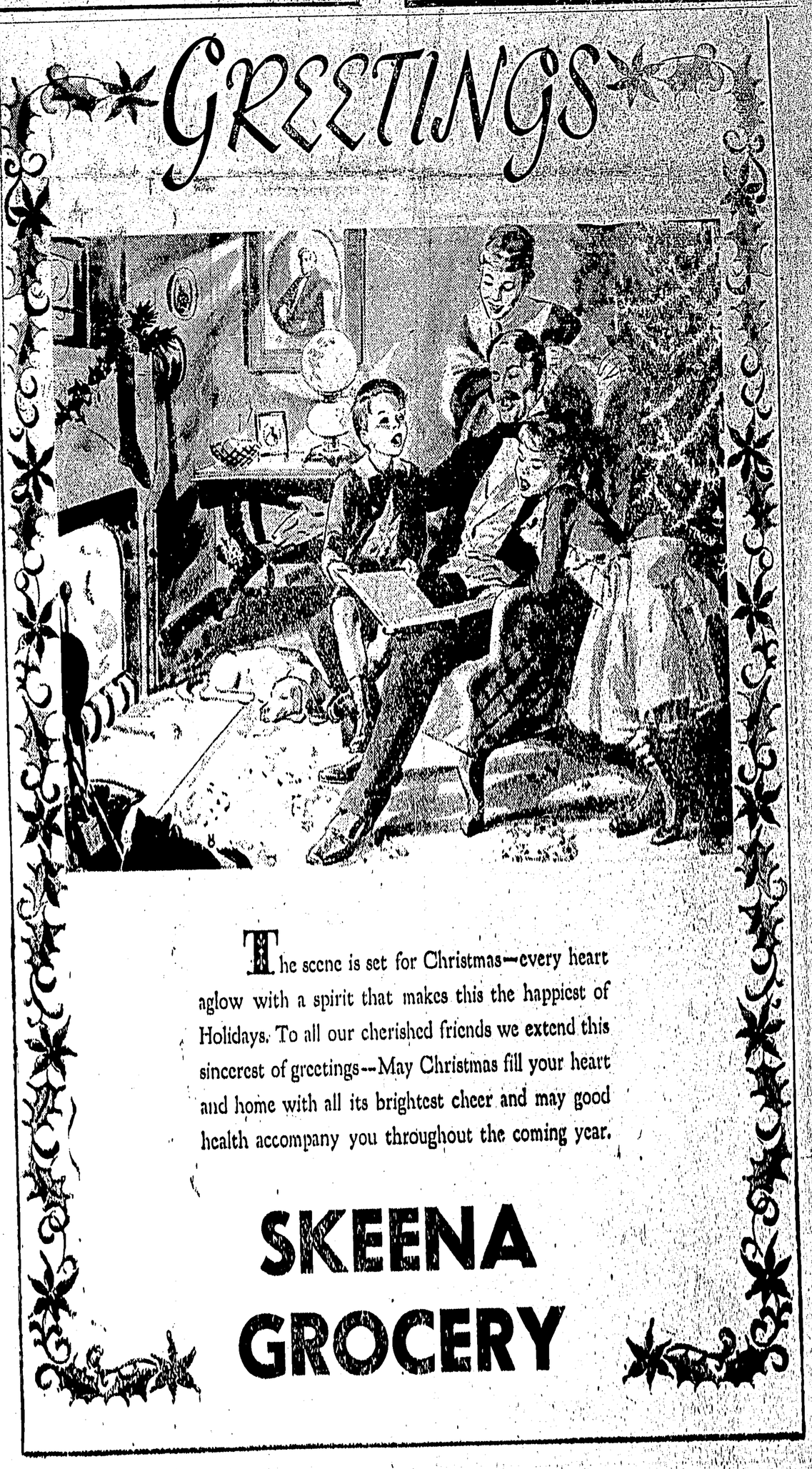

The scene is set for Christmas—every heart aglow with a spirit that makes this the happiest of Holidays. To all our cherished friends we extend this sincerest of greetings—May Christmas fill your heart and home with all its brightest cheer and may good health accompany you throughout the coming year.

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