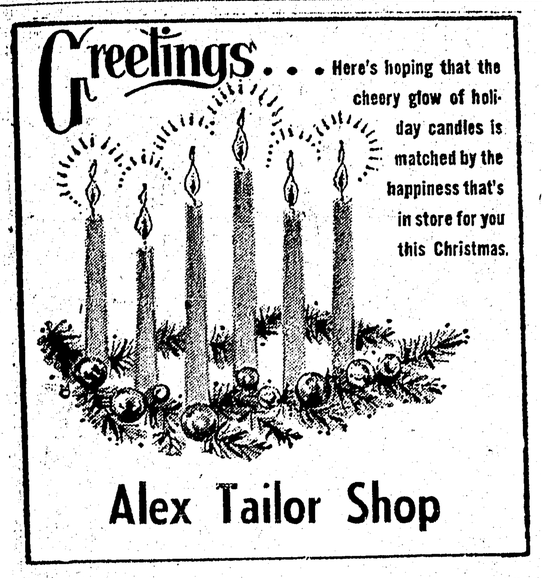
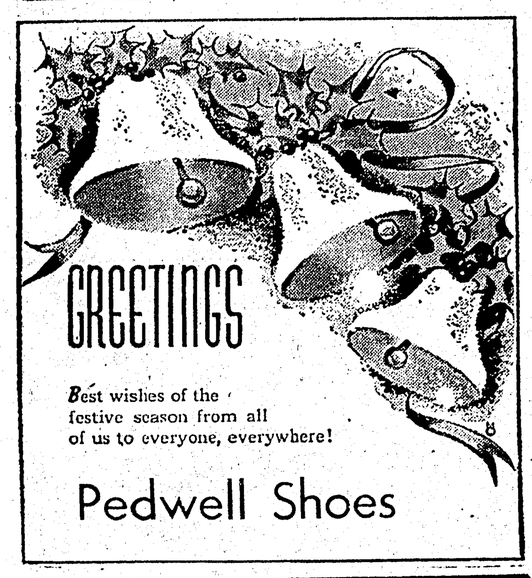
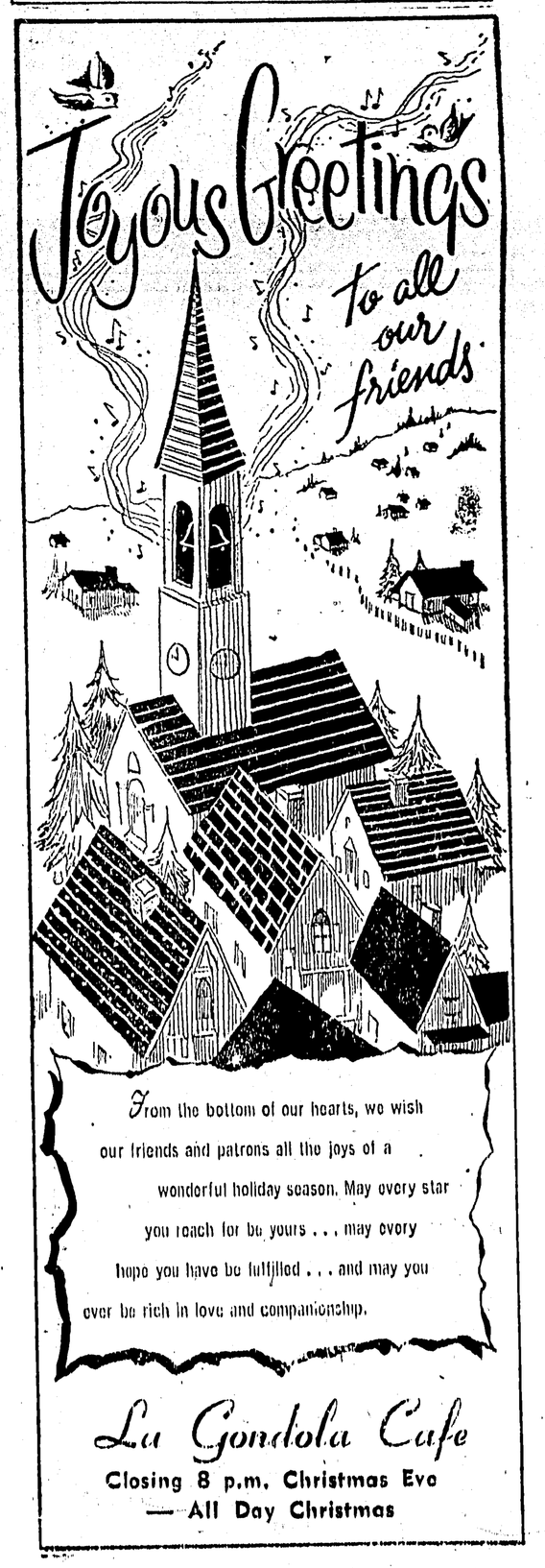
No one knows for certain on what day Christ was born, but a very early Christian tradition said it was December 25. After a careful inquiry into available evidence, Pope Julius I (337-352) decided the traditional date was probably the true one.

Many Christmas customs have roots in pagan ceremonies.

Christmas celebrations became so irreligious during the Middle Ages that when the Puritans came to power in England they forbade all celebrations, both religious and secular.







Singer Rise Stephens relaxes with husband, son.

Star Rise Stevens' husband casual, practical shopper

By WALTER SUROVY

Husband of opera singer Rise Stevens

In our crazy household it is impossible to generalize my choosing a Christmas present for Rise. Last year I had given her a big diamond-emerald necklace in November for no particular reason, and for Christmas I felt she should be enchanted with a nice casserole for the kitchen. She was!

Matters are even more complicated since she has little time for shopping and it is my regular lot to go hunting for almost everything.

So, my philosophy is that the biggest present I can give Rise is to have her go all by her lonesome self and do some shopping for me. However, this has not always been notably successful. Christmas four years ago we surprised each other with the same, identical watch.

In thinking seriously about a present for Rise, I stay away from regular artcles of apparel, since these are essentials in her career and must be bought throughout the year. I concentrate on play-clothes(no sweaters, since she is a furious knitter on her concert tours), pieces of furniture which do not necessarily make life more beautiful but more comfortable, things for her private use in the kitchen, or paintings. The latter is a happy choice! Rise is crazy about art, and my practical mind considers it sound investing.

There are two presents which my better half receives from me each Christmas: a new umbrella and a pair of overshoes. They are my gentle way of saying: "Stop losing them!"

MRS. ELEANOR ROOSEVELT does her Christmas shopping all year round. A fast shopper, Mrs. Roosevelt says she can buy a dozen or more presents during an hour's shopping in a department store. She also does quite a bit of shopping when she's abroad as she did this year in London, Paris, Israel and Iran. Above she is shown at a Christmas party for 300 New York youngsters one of whom she is holding on her lap.

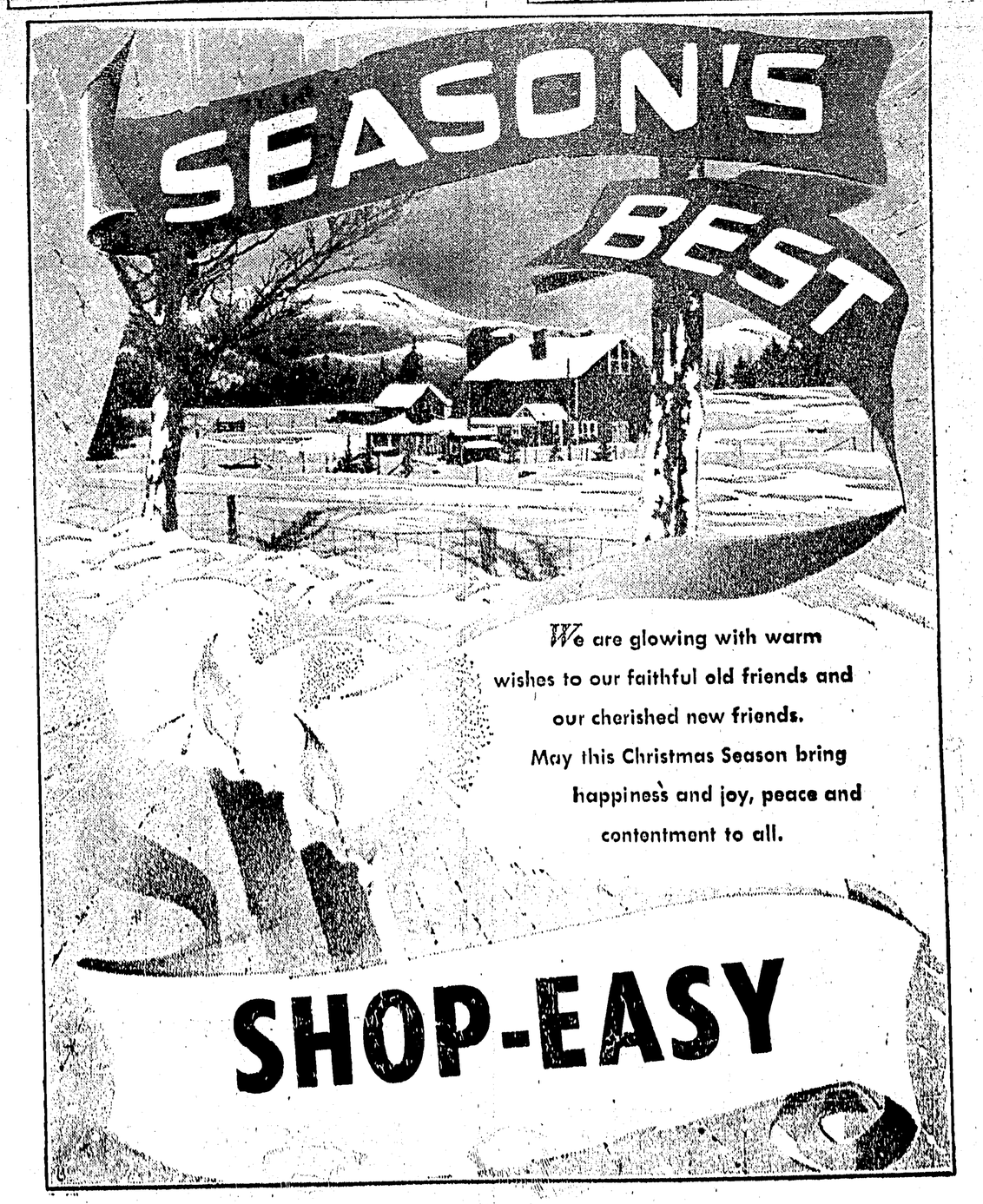
Mistletoe taboo "down under"

MELBOURNE (Reuters)--Mistletoe, the happy symbol of Christmas kisses and good luck, has been condemned to death in Australia.

After years of research, agricultural scientists believe they have solved the problem of how to conquer mistletoe, which each year causes great losses through diseased timber and reduced farm land.

England's Druids held mistletoe sacred for its supposed power to ward off evil. It still commands a certain superstitious regard in older countries as a plant of good luck. But in Australia it is regarded as just a plain pest. It is not even used here as a Christmas decoration.

The Australian species of mistletoe is different from the European, which never has been classed as a pest.

nI all six mainland states of Australia, mistletoe has become so prevalent that the destruction which it causes has become a matter of national importance. In New South Wales and Queensland, particularly, there are many areas where practically every tree has been attacked by mistletoe. Many of the trees dies. Those which survive produce less timber.

The custom of decorating trees at Christmas came originally from Germany.