

Decorating an evergreen tree in honor of Xmas became popular in the Middle Ages, especially in Germany. The decorations then consisted of candles and wafers, to symbolize Christ and the Host. The tree became popular in Europe and America in the 18th century and the Victorians started decorating them with candies and cakes hung with ribbon.

Christmas, St. Mary's Bay 1910

How our customs, our beliefs, our tradition have changed over the past seventy-five years! Take Christmas for example; recall the Christmas of 1910.

You are a young lad of about seventeen years, living in a Newfoundland outport. Two or three days before Christmas Eve you get busy sawing up wood and piling it in the wood house so you'll have enough to do for the twelve days of Christmas.

You know also that your brothers as well as your father have slaughtered a young calf and a sheep or two so you will have some fresh for the festive season. Your mother and older sisters have been busy for weeks now, washing down, putting up new curtains, preserving jams and other good things for the holidays.

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Mr. Nolan has made his last run to St. Peter's and every man-boy around has a jar or two under water in his own bog pond.

When Christmas Eve comes round all hands go to Midnight Mass. The church is packed. The choir sings grandly and the hats from Boston make every lady look splendid. When Mass is over the festivities begin.

Everyone is home for Christmas dinner which is baked fowl with dressing, potatoes, turnip, cabbage, carrot and gravy. There's sweet bread made with molasses and



Mistletoe is associated with many pagan rituals. In fact, the Christian church disliked the plant so much, thanks to its pagan associations, that it forbade its use in any form.

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raisins. For dessert there is baked apple jam and lots of scalded cream, plenty of fresh butter, all washed down with cups of scalding tea.

You and your brothers and father now begin to make your rounds.

You go from house to house, singing, dancing, dressing up as the darbies, frightening children and little old ladies with your masks and the hobby-horse, and you have a wonderful time chasing, finding and blackening your friends, particularly the ones who showed any sign of fear of the darbies.

Of course it wouldn't be Christmas at all without a spree or two. You all meet at Christie's house. The men have brought the rum and stolen a few hens or brought along a couple of braces of rabbit from home. The women have brought the vegetables and the fancy stuff. While the meal is cooking you are having a breaker-down on the kitchen floor to the accompaniment of Alf's fiddle and Christie's accordion.

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What wonderful times b'y! You'd know that anyone who'd visited your home when you were gone was always treated well. The men were given a drink of rum, or punch if they preferred, and the women were treated to cake and ginger wine. Any children who came were given cake or a slice of molasses bread.

Your sisters were often taken for sleigh rides. Bundled in fur rugs, a hot brick placed at their feet, they thrilled to the excitement of the sleigh bells and fast rides over the frozen ground to a neighbor's house or the home of an admirer.

Remember your youngest sister, lad. She was a wee lass of six at that time. How her bright blue eyes sparkled with that little rag doll that Santa left in her long woollen stocking behind the stove.

How pretty she looked, bedecked in her made-over coat, woollen mittens, cap, muffler and long stockings as she sat beside your mother and father as they

left on the afternoon of Christmas Day to take her to see Grandma and Grandpa. When your Mother and Father came back that night she looked like the littlest angel, asleep between them.

Can we not revive some of the past? Are we not letting too much slip by, and thus go beyond our reach? I think the past holds much to enrich our present and strengthen our future. There are some things we must cling to.