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Yuletide Celebrations In Other Lands

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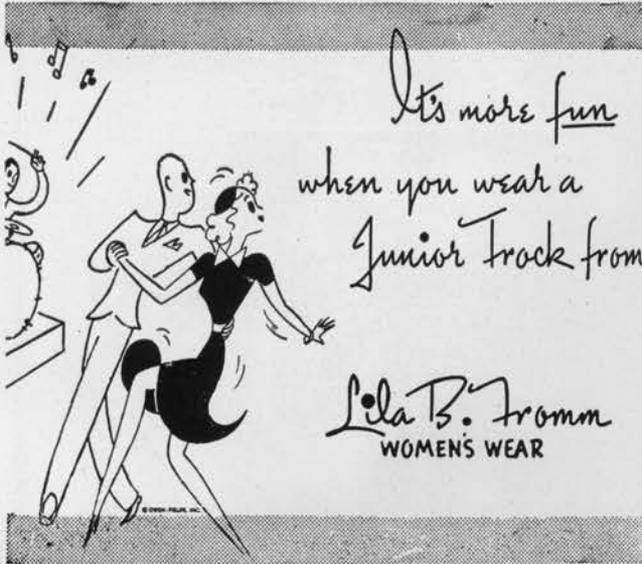


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Yuletide Celebrations In Other Lands

Mary Rothacker describes Christmas customs in the countries of the foreign students

THE festivity of Christmas and the feeling of "peace and good will toward men" is expressed throughout the world in many ways which differ from the yuletide customs of the American home. The countries of foreign students at Iowa State have their individual Christmas celebrations.

In Brazil, the home of Raul Briquet, Marcos Silva and Edson Magalhaes, the traditional celebration begins on Christmas Eve and ends with the Feast of Epiphany on the sixth day of January. The Christmas season comes in midsummer. It has all the varied and alluring characteristics of summer festivals which include fireworks, picnics, open air fiestas and boating excursions. Christmas at this time of the year is especially welcome to the school boys and girls because it comes directly after the closing exercises at school and starts their summer vacation with a celebration. On Christmas Eve there are carols and open-air dancing before the supper preceding midnight mass.

Six Chinese students, S. T. Chao, C. L. Feng, T. Y. Hsueh, S. L. Jung, P. K. Feng and Francis Mar would celebrate *Sheng Dan Jieh*, the Holy Birth Festival, if they were in their own country. Paper decorations and evergreens adorn the churches and homes. The white walls are decorated with large posters on which elaborate characters spell peace and joy. Carolers sing the Chinese words to familiar Christmas songs including "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." Their church service is similar to American services.

Rudolfo Santamaria, Francisco Mendez and Jose Iriarte would begin their Christmas celebration early in Mexico. Every Mexican home must be decorated and ready to receive guests by December 16, and for the following nine nights there is great festivity. Homes are made gay with decorations of white lilies, Spanish moss, evergreens and colored lanterns. Every home erects an altar, with a *pesebra*, which represents the Nativity.

The most lavish celebration is held the last night. The altar is beautifully decorated with flowers and



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the party continues until it is time to go to the cathedral for midnight mass.

Instead of a Christmas tree the Mexicans use a fragile earthen jar, which they elaborately disguise and decorate with tissue paper and tinsel. It often takes the form of a doll's face or a bull fighter and is filled with nuts and candies. Each child is blindfolded, given a club and allowed to break the *Pinata*. The fragile earthen jars are easily shattered and a shower of fruits, gifts and candy results.

On Christmas Eve the children put their shoes in the window and the next morning they are filled with presents.

Costa Rica, the native country of Beatrice Mar and Guillermo Morales, has its special Christmas customs. Each home has a *portal*, a replica of a holy scene. At midnight mass the Holy Child is carried in a long procession on a pillow of embroidered silk. Since the earliest times the Christ Child has been accepted as the giver of the gifts, but due to the influence of Europe and the United States the shops have changed to Santa Claus.

On Christmas Day the children of Bulgaria receive gifts from Grandpa Koleda, an ancient winter god. Before breakfast, corn is put into a stocking and a portion sprinkled on the doorstep by the head of the house. Sparks are struck from the Christmas log and with each blow goes a wish for health to the farm and a plenteous crop. The ashes of the log are gathered, a coin is hidden in them, and a wish is made for a good harvest.

Svaty Mikulas, the patron saint of the Czechoslovakian children, is said to descend from heaven on a golden cord. He is conducted to earth by a white-clad angel and leads an evil spirit Cert, in a black hood. Friends of a family dressed as these three characters bring gifts to those children who know their prayers.

St. Nicholas, the Dutch Santa Claus, comes on a horse accompanied by his servant, a Moor named Black Pete. The children place their wooden shoes filled with hay and a dish of water for St. Nick's horse in front of the fireplace. St. Nicholas' presents, which must be hidden and disguised as much as possible, are accompanied by rhymes explaining what the gift is for and for whom it is intended. The smallest presents are sent in immense packing cases and sometimes the gifts are baked in a loaf of bread. The longer it takes to find the present the more successful it is.



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