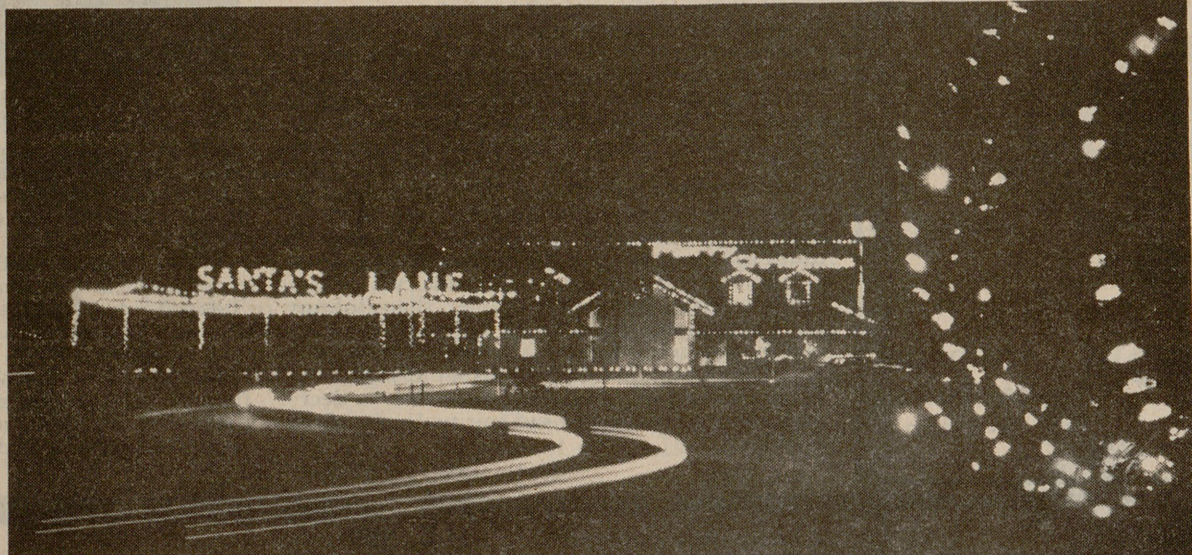
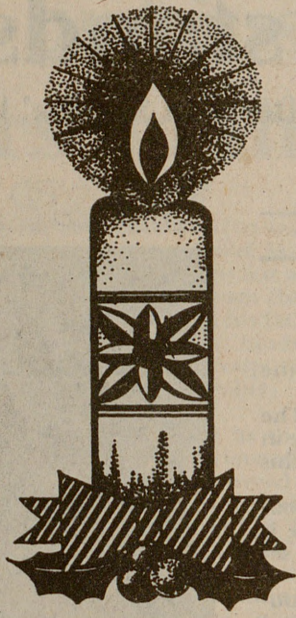




Photo by Kathy Haveman

Decorating a Christmas tree often calls for a final touch — placing a papier-mache or wax angel at the top.



Battalion file photo

In many neighborhoods, traditional Christmas decorations and symbols have given way to more modern trimmings, as on this house which glows with the light of 40,000 bulbs.

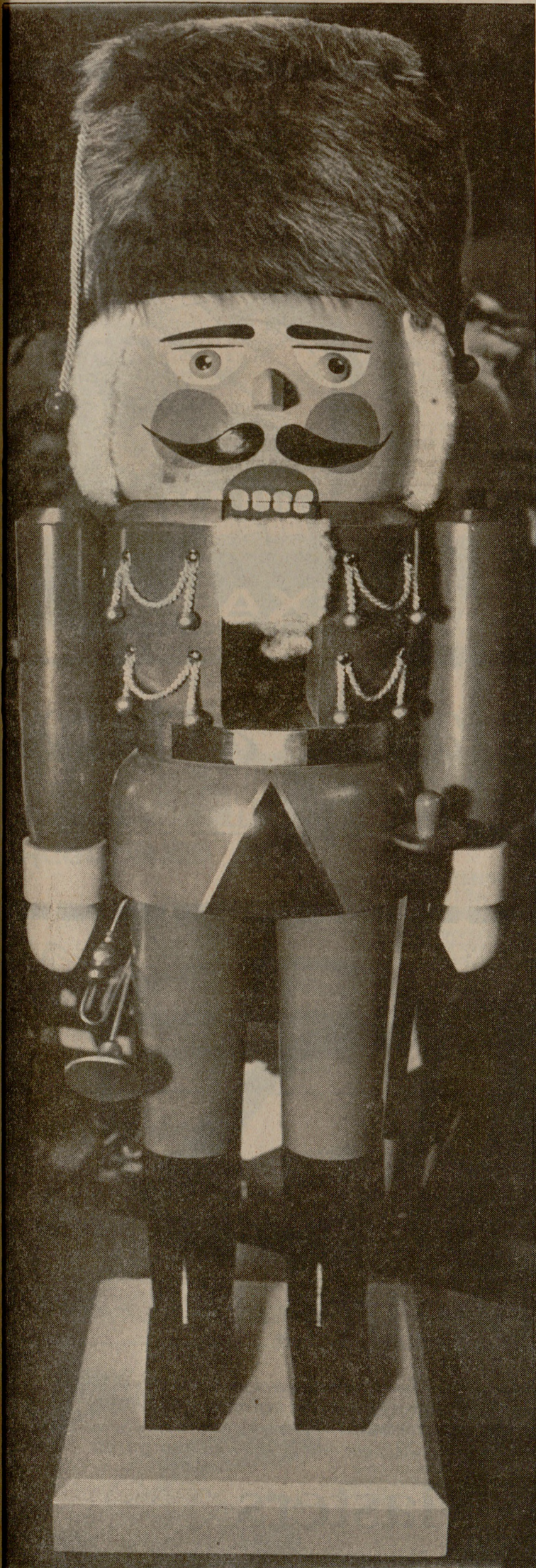


Photo by Kathy Haveman

One of the most famous gifts ever placed under a tree, the wooden nutcracker toy is changed magically into a prince in Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Ballet, which is performed annually at Christmas time.

Sneeze trees

DALLAS (AP) — Christmas trees are beautiful, traditional, and heart-warming. They also can make you sick.

So says Dr. Timothy Sullivan, who heads the allergy and immunology division at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

"People with pre-existing allergic conditions or respiratory difficulty should be aware that if their symptoms worsen during the holiday season, their tree might be the cause," Sullivan says.

Sullivan cautions those allergic to mold to be especially wary of trees from commercial tree lots, which he says are breeding grounds for mold. He adds that some trees grown for commercial sale are chemically treated and can trigger allergic reactions.

On the other hand, cutting down a live tree has its problems, too.

One of the most common and attractive trees in the United States is the mountain cedar, which he says causes more respiratory allergy among more people than any other source except ragweed.

In winter, male mountain cedars pollinate, so if one is used for Christmas, it can release pollen in the house. To identify female trees, look for those that produce small blue berries. The male trees have a characteristic brownish or golden color during pollination.

Sullivan is conducting research about the mountain cedar to determine the genetic makeup of people predisposed to the allergy, in hopes of developing a vaccine.

'The Tree'

NEW YORK (AP) — To most New Yorkers and many Americans, the Christmas tree in New York's Rockefeller Center is "The Tree."

As this year's giant evergreen from Rockland County, New York, lights up (with 18,000 colored bulbs) in midtown Manhattan, it joins a long line of memorable trees that began with a simple tree put up by construction workmen grateful for work during the Depression.

A 1931 photo shows several dozen men grouped near the tree, festooned with droopy streamers, set up in the rubble of the demolished brownstones

which stood on the site of today's Rockefeller Center. Under the tree an earthly version of Santa Claus is pictured handing out the best thing to come in time for Christmas during the early 1930s: paychecks.

Two years later the tree returned more formally, set up in front of the newly completed RCA Building, the flagship skyscraper of the new center. Since then, the tree tradition at the Rockefeller Center has continued unbroken — if occasionally altered — and is now a prime tourist magnet during the holiday season.

Its arrival, hoisting, decoration and official lighting at the Center's skating rink is something of a ritual in itself, heralded by press releases, news reports, and televised entertainment. Then, right after New Year's, the whole show comes down and disappears overnight.

Decorations have reflected the times. During World War II, the tree was decked with red and white plastic globes and stars instead of lights because of wartime restrictions on electricity. The lights returned in 1945. Similarly, the number of lights was reduced in response to the energy crisis in 1973, with colored reflective disks added to compensate.

Festival of Lights celebrates religious miracle

By Chuck Lovejoy

Of The Battalion Staff

The Jewish holiday of Hanukkah does not suffer from commercialization as does the Christian holiday of Christmas, a local rabbi says.

Dr. Peter Tarlow, who also teaches sociology at Texas A&M, says advertisers do put pressure on Hanukkah gift-buyers, but the emphasis is not nearly as intense as that placed on Christmas shoppers.

"Hanukkah is a much less important holiday in the Jewish religion than Christmas is to Christianity," he says. "So it isn't affected as much commercially."

Hanukkah is the Jewish Festival of Lights. It is celebrated from the evening of the 24th of Kislev to the first night of Tevet on the Jewish calendar.

The observance this year will begin on the evening of Dec. 22 and will end Dec. 29.

According to tradition, the celebration of Hanukkah was begun by Judas Maccabeus and his brothers in 165 B.C.

They commemorated the creation of a new altar in the Temple of Jerusalem three years after the Syrian king had desecrated the temple in an attempt to end the religion.

Judas and his family had been forced into exile after Judas' father had killed a Jew who complied with the king's decree that Jews must offer sacrifices to idols.



When they returned from exile, they found in the temple a single container of oil that should have lasted only one day.

But to their amazement, the oil provided light for eight days.

The faithful celebrate the Festival

of Lights in remembrance of that miracle.

On each of the eight evenings of the celebration, candles are lighted and displayed in an eight-branched candelabra called a menorah.

One candle is lighted the first night, two the second, and so on until the eighth day, when all are ablaze and displayed prominently in the house or synagogue.

According to "The Book of Religious Holidays and Celebrations" by Marguerite Ickis, the eight candles symbolize eight virtues: faith, freedom, courage, love, charity, integrity, knowledge and peace.

Blessings are said before the candles are lighted. Religious carols also are sung.

Other Hanukkah traditions vary from country to country, Tarlow says, but all involve lighting candles and eat some sort of fried food in remembrance of the oil Judas found in the temple.

Latkes, or fried potato cakes, are popular in the United States.

Giving gifts is a popular Hanukkah activity, Tarlow says. The Ickis book lists other events in celebration of Hanukkah, including parties, special programs and assemblies and Hanukkah dances, concerts and dramatic presentations.

An "Aggie Hanukkah" will be held at 8 p.m. Friday in the Hille Center, located at the corner of Jersey and Dexter Streets in College Station.