

Little David Frey takes a look at one of the many shadow boxes on display at the Mount Joy Union National Bank. Florence Miller, an employee of the bank, came up with the idea of portraying one scene from

various children's books. David is looking at WILLIE THE SQUOWSE. There are many others available for both children and their parents to enjoy during this holiday season.

Facts about mistletoe and holly

'Tis the season to deck the halls, but before you bring home boughs of holly you ought to know some of the history and superstition surrounding that tough, prickly-leaved, berry-bearing plant, according to the current issue of National Wildlife magazine.

Since the days of the ancient Celts, magical powers have been ascribed to holly, the National Wildlife Federation be-monthly reports. And one legend holds that weather conditions at the time Christmas holly is brought in will determine who runs the household—the husband or the wife.

Holly's use as a decoration dates back to the Druids, a religious order that thrived in pre-Christian England and France. "These woodsy priests considered the plant's eternally green leaves proof that the sun would never desert them," the magazine explains.

The early Romans extended this tradition by hanging holly indoors during the feast of Saturnalia, a mid-winter festival celebrating the return of longer days. Early Christian converts also adopted this ritual by designating Christmas Eve as "templum exornatum"—"temples are adorned." It was forbidden to bring any greens into the home before that night.

"Because of this ban on early decorating, many Christians believed that bringing holly into a house too soon would cause family quarrels and misfortune," National Wildlife says.

As Christianity spread, so did holly legends. In one tale, the plant was said to have had white berries until the Nativity. When a visitor broke off a branch of a holly tree growing outside the Bethlehem stable and offered it to the Christ Child, the

baby pricked his finger on the sharply pointed leaves. "Horribly embarrassed, the holly blushed, and its berries have remained red ever since."

Another holly superstition was promoted by Pliny, the early Roman naturalist. He asserted that a wild animal could be subdued merely by throwing a stick of holly at it. "He also alleged," notes National Wildlife, "that holly flowers could make water freeze, and that if the tree was planted near a house it would protect the inhabitants from bad weather, poison, and witchcraft."

Medieval English physicians thought holly berries could cure colic, but patients who followed their doctors' orders sometimes died from the violent vomiting the berries induced. Holly leaves, however, are harmless when roasted and brewed for tea. The brew was often drunk by South American Indians, who thought it gave them extra strength.

The subject of all these legends comes in more than 200 varieties, including some that lose their leaves each autumn. Nearly two dozen species are found in the U.S., the most common of which is American holly. This variety once grew thickly in forests throughout the eastern U.S., but now only a fraction of those wild stands remain, according to National Wildlife.

Like other varieties, American holly trees are single-sexed. Only the female plants produce the scarlet berries, and not until they are at least 8 years old. Their berries are food for mockingbirds, thrushes, robins, bluebirds, and many other animals.

"Beneath its rough gray bark, holly wood is chalky white and hard as rock," says National Wildlife. Once

prized by cabinetmakers for its indestructible quality, the plant is now considered a nuisance because it's tough enough to break a chainsaw.

Most of the holly boughs seen at Christmastime come from English holly, which grows wild throughout much of southern Europe. It was imported into the Pacific Northwest by a group of British immigrants and now about 1000 acres in Washington and Oregon are used to cultivate the plant and fill our Christmas decorating needs.

If you contribute to the \$3 million Christmas holly industry, maybe you'd better check the weather first. An old Irish Catholic legend has it that if holly is brought inside during fair weather, the wife will rule the household forevermore. But if boughs are brought in during a storm, the husband will be master.




Peace

Glorious sounds of Christmas fill the air. May the holiday hold peace for you.

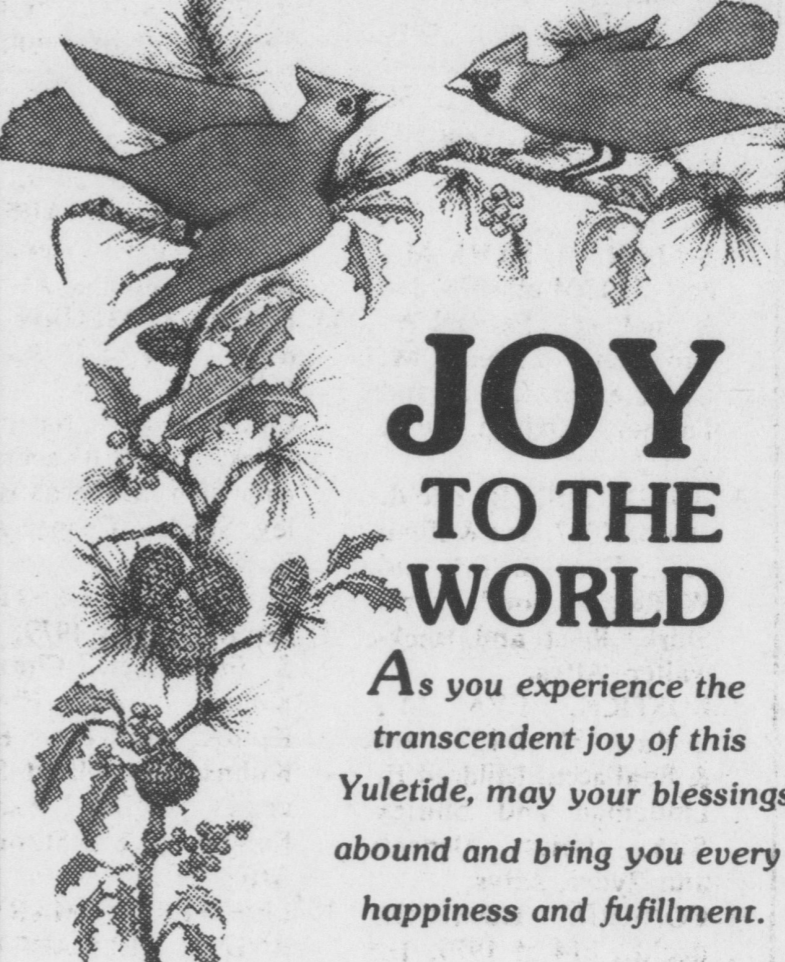
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