THE YULE LOG
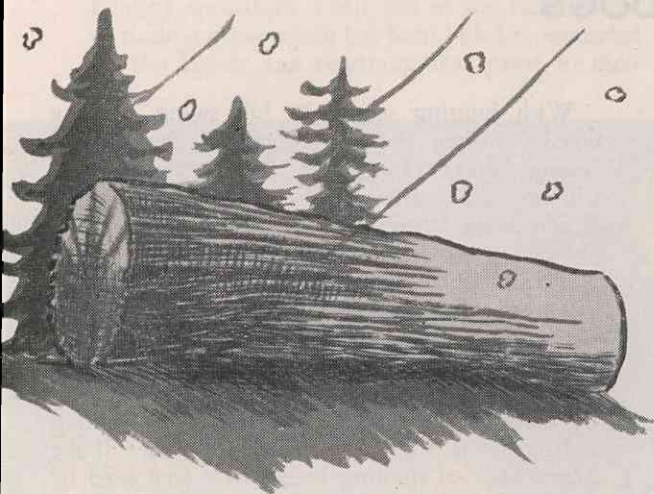
Among the Norsemen who originated the idea, burning the Yule log was a tribute to the Sun Spirit. The custom took a deep hold in England where it acquired a Christmas connotation.

Selected and cut weeks in advance, the huge log was dragged into the great baronial hall. Each person in turn sat astride it and bellowed a carol. Then it was thrust into the enormous fireplace and kindled from the stub of the previous year's log. During twelve days and nights of burning, the log was the center of continuous roistering.

As feudalism gave way to democracy, the burning of the Yule log became more of a family affair. In thousands of homes, the custom of the Yule log survives today, no matter how modest the fireplace nor how small the block of wood.
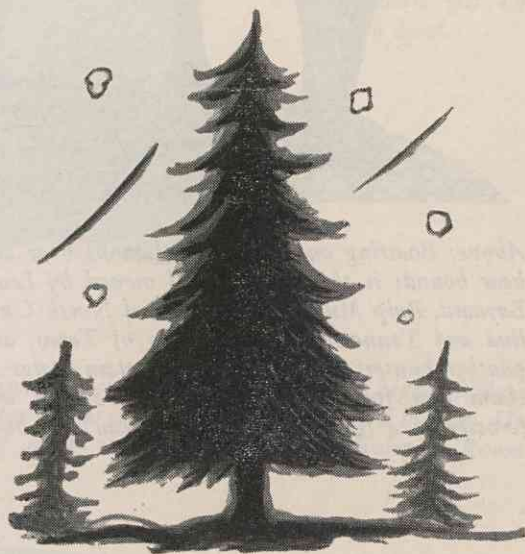

CHRISTMAS TREES

St. Wilfred in the seventh century is said to have declared the fir tree holy. "It is the wood of peace for your houses are built of it. It is the sign of an endless life for its leaves are ever green. Let this be called the tree of the Christ Child."

Another story relates that Martin Luther, wandering through the forest one Christmas Eve, became enamoured with the wonder of the starry night. He cut a snow-laden fir, carried it to his home and added candles to represent the stars.

Other legends of many lands and the imagination of people through the years have further contributed to the beauty of the modern Christmas tree.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Christmas greeting cards originated with English school children of the early 1800's who made "Christmas pieces" dealing with events of the year, the scriptures and other appropriate subjects. In 1846 a British nobleman found himself without time to write his usual Christmas letter to his friends and, adopting the children's idea, sent out printed greeting cards.

While the idea was gaining wide acceptance in England during the 1870's, a Massachusetts printer introduced the greeting cards to the United States. The idea captured the people's fancy and now millions of cards are mailed every Christmas.