

Mistletoe - Inspiration For More Than Kissing

by Rebecca R. Kirtland
National Geographic News Service

WASHINGTON -- Mistletoe is more than an excuse for kissing.

The focus of elaborate Druid rites at Stonehenge and the powerful Golden Bough of mythology, mistletoe was once believed to promote fertility, protect from fire and lightning, cure epilepsy, and, some say, provided the wood for the cross of Christ.

Mistletoe, which flourishes without direct contact with earth, is probably poisonous to people, but

is a mainstay of the diet of birds. Although it grows primarily in the tropics, mistletoe inflicts more damage on U.S. forests than any disease.

Tree Thief

Belonging to the genus Phoradendron, which translates "tree thief," mistletoe is a semiparasite that grows in the tops of oak, mesquite, maple, and other trees. Mistletoe takes all its water and nutrients from the host tree, but synthesizes its own food, explains Delbert Weins, a biologist at the

University of Utah who has studied mistletoe for 25 years.

"The mistletoes make up a very large, complicated genus ranging throughout the world, but only about four species in the United States are used for Christmas decorations," he said. "These are found throughout the United States, except for the colder regions of the northern Rocky Mountains, the Great Plains, the northern Midwest, and New England."

If mistletoe has uses other than promoting holiday cheer, they have not been found. But it is significant economically for the damage it inflicts on timber trees.

Ed Wicker, plant pathologist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, says 3.2 billion board feet of timber growth a year is not realized because dwarf mistletoe saps vital nutrients and moisture from the trees -- enough wood to build 290,000 average homes.

Early Christian legends hold that mistletoe, once a tree itself, shrank in shame after Christ's cross was hewn from its wood. But that legend hasn't shrunk its holiday popularity in England and the United States.

Kissing Bough

Robert Tiemann of Priddy, Texas, whose Tiemann Holiday Mistletoe Co. has provided the kissing bough to eager customers for 29 years, says, "Our orders are up 50 percent over last year. We've shipped 45,000 pounds of preserved mistletoe to wholesalers already. And from Thanksgiving to mid-December we work 'round the clock to provide more than 60,000 pounds of fresh mistletoe to buyers in every state in the Union."

Mistletoe is harvested in much the same way it was gathered since before the time of Christ. Seasonal workers search it out in forests where it grows wild. They usually work in pairs -- one in the tree, another on the ground -- to harvest the mistletoe with a long-handled hook. It must be handled gingerly because the elegant white berries are delicate.

During the winter solstice in ancient Britain and Gaul, Druid priests also harvested mistletoe by hand -- but with a golden sickle. In flowing white robes and marching to the heralding of trumpets and the chanting of bards, they proceeded solemnly into the forest to sacrifice two pure white bulls to their gods before cutting the sacred plant.

The mistletoe was ceremoniously caught in white cloths because the Druids believed contact with earth would not only diminish its power

to promote fertility and cure numerous ailments, but would also bring bad fortune.

In Switzerland, Sweden, and Wales, superstition dictated that to retain its virtues, mistletoe had to be shot out of trees and caught before it touched the ground. Today, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where mistletoe is prevalent, shooting it out of trees remains one method of harvest.

Mistletoe's role in Norse legends has made it a holiday symbol of love and peace. In Scandinavian antiquity, warriors meeting by chance beneath mistletoe in a forest would lay down their arms and embrace.

A Fallen God

When the Norse god Balder was slain by a mistletoe dart, his mother's tears became the plant's white berries and she decreed that mistletoe would never again do harm. Because Balder's life was restored, his mother is said to bestow a kiss upon anyone who passes under mistletoe.

America's mistletoe tradition came more directly from England where strait-laced Victorians permitted it to sanction a bit of frivolity -- but with a caveat. Each kiss required that a berry be plucked. When the berries were gone, so was the magic, and no more kisses were allowed.

Magic or not, mistletoe's appeal is continuing. "Everybody likes to take his kisses," Tiemann said.



Mrs. Butler puts the Cape Fear Award medal on her husband. [Staff photo].

For Exceptional Service To Scouts

Butler Receives District Award

Julian Butler was presented the Cape Fear Award, the highest award presented on the District level, at the Western District Annual Recognition Banquet held in Laurinburg on December 10.

The Cape Fear Award is given for noteworthy service of exceptional character to boyhood by a registered Scouter within the district.

The award was presented by Council President Russell Lee. Lee stated "in honoring Julian Butler we honor all the wonderful volunteer Scouters in America."

For the past two years, Butler

has served as Scoutmaster of Troop 404 which is sponsored by Raeford United Methodist Church. Prior to becoming Scoutmaster he served as assistant Scoutmaster and chairman of the Troop Committee, and was instrumental in organizing cub Scout Pack 404 and Boy Scout Troop 404.

Troop 404 has one of the best advancement programs in the Western District.

Butler is a member of the Cape Fear Council Advisory Board and also is serving as chairman of the Board of Deacons of Raeford Presbyterian Church.

Cumberland Man Charged

Hoke Man Slain

A Hoke County man was shot to death shortly after 1 a.m. Tuesday, and a Cumberland County man has been charged with murder in the shooting, Hoke County Sheriff David Barrington reported Tuesday.

He said the victim was Willie Dixon, Jr., 30, of Rt. 1, Box 528, Raeford. A warrant charging murder was issued against Tommy McEachern, 34, of 670 Hoke Loop, Fayetteville, the sheriff said. McEachern hadn't been arrested up to late Tuesday afternoon.

The sheriff said the shooting occurred in the mobile home of Mattie McPhaul, Lot 146, Harmony Heights Mobile Home Park, near Wayside, north of Raeford. The area is near the Ft. Bragg boundary. Dixon was found by officers with a bullet wound in his right chest when they responded to a call received at 1:13 a.m. by the sheriff's department reporting that "shooting was going on" in the mobile home park.

Dixon was lying on his back on the floor of the living room and still breathing when the sheriff's depu-

ties arrived. The officers tried to revive him but he died before the ambulance arrived, the sheriff said.

He said the shooting grew out of a domestic problem, the investigation showed. He said the officers were informed that Dixon and McEachern had an argument, McEachern drew a pistol and fired two or three times, then Dixon got a pistol and was fatally shot. Whether Dixon fired his weapon was not determined immediately, the sheriff added.

He said Dr. Riley Jordan, a Hoke County medical examiner was summoned, and after he examined the victim, Dixon's body was sent to the State medical examiner's office in Chapel Hill for an autopsy to be made to determine specifically the cause of Dixon's death.

Barrington said there were five witnesses to the incident.

The officers who went to the scene after the department was notified of shooting there were Deputies Osie Finin, Weaver Patterson, A.R. Odom, Alex Norton and R.C. Hart, a sheriff's department detective.

Faculty, Staff, Others Honored At W. Hoke

The true meaning of Christmas was displayed at West Hoke School on Thursday evening when Milton Williams, principal of the school, feted the faculty, staff and honored guests with a Christmas dinner in the school cafeteria.

Prior to the meal, Williams extended words of welcome.

The entree, a steak, was prepared by specialists Frank Baker, Jim Fant, David Warren and Jim Lupo. The West Hoke Cafeteria staff, under the management of Margaret Quick assisted with the preparing of the meal.

Williams paid recognition to special guests, who included his spouse, Mrs. Gloria Williams; school board members Bill Cameron and his wife Mrs. Rhenda Cameron, Mrs. Ruth McNair and her husband, Ivey McNair and Robert Wright and his wife, Mrs. Shirley Wright; Associate Supt. J.D. McAllister and his wife, Mrs.

Juanita McAllister; and County Commissioner N.W. McPhatter and his wife, Mrs. Artie McPhatter.

Mrs. Mary K. Thomas, a kindergarten instructor at West Hoke School, gave the invocation.

To complement the gala affair, Ethelyn Baker read letters to Santa written by some members of the faculty.

Mrs. Donna Bernhardt presented Williams with his most desired gift, a Mercedes Benz (Ha!). Afterwards other members (Mesdames Joanne Bease), Kay Meyers, Emma Thomas and Ms. Debbie Little) assisted with the exchange of gifts.

The plans for the dinner and the program were made by the publicity committee of Janet Desist, chairman, and Ethelyn Baker, Mrs. Willie Horsley and Martha Wood; and the hospitality commit-

The Advent Wreath Is Harbinger of Christmas

In many churches and homes, during the four weeks before Christmas, wreaths with candles are displayed to remind the faithful of the approaching holiday.

These decorations are known as Advent wreaths, symbolizing the eager awaiting of mankind for its redeemer.

Originally, the Advent wreath may have been part of pagan observances. Tribes in northern Europe would display cartwheels decorated with greens and lights in their homes during the winter season.

The custom became Christianized in time, with the wreath's circular shape symbolizing God's unending nature, and the evergreens symbolizing His unchanging nature.

There are four candles on the wreath, one for each week of Advent. Three of the candles are violet in color, as a reminder of our repentance and our longing for the Savior. One candle is rose colored, symbolizing our joy and hope in the coming of the Messiah. All the candles are tied with purple ribbon, again as a symbol of longing and repentance.



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