

Editor's notes:

Don't feel guilty if you yield to your cravings for gingerbread this season because molasses, a key ingredient, is actually good for you. Molasses is mineral rich, with high levels of iron, magnesium, calcium, and phosphorus. It's also a good source of vitamin K. For these reasons, molasses makes a healthy replacement for brown sugar in many recipes. So, eat up!

And while you're eating, here are some important dates to consider this month:

St. Nicholas Day, December 6 -- St. Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors, bakers, travelers, and children, was a Christian bishop in Turkey during the fourth century A.D. His spirit was believed to bring gifts to children on the eve of his feast day. Over time, he was associated with the gift giving at Christmas and evolved into Father Christmas, with Dutch calling him, "Sinterklaas," ultimately translating into our Santa Claus.

Hanukkah, December 8-15 -- The word "Hanukkah" means "dedication" in Hebrew and refers to the rededication of the altar and Temple of Jerusalem after the victory of the Maccabees over the Assyrians in 165 B.C.E.

65th Anniversary of Gone With The Wind, December 15 - This movie epic premiered on this day in Atlanta in 1939. More than 1,000 actresses were interviewed for the role of Scarlett O'Hara and another 400 were screen tested before the producers settled on Vivien Leigh. The film won 10 Oscars and is one of the highest grossing movies of all time.

Winter Solstice, December 21 -- The winter solstice and the start of winter occur when the sun is directly overhead at noon along the Tropic of Capricorn. Some historians contend that "yuletide" -- the term for the winter solstice -- comes from the ancient Anglo-Saxon "yula," meaning "wheel," because the wheel of the year comes full circle at that time.

First Night Celebrations, December 31 -- First Night International is a group that promotes alcohol-free New Year's Eve festivities. Celebrations focus on art and music and are held in over 130 cities in the United States, Canada, Great Britain and New Zealand.

Pretzels and Religion

You may not think of munching on pretzels as a religious experience, but these three-holed snacks were devised by monks to remind people of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The first pretzels were made from dough left over from bread baking at monasteries. The earliest pretzels were so large that people could wear them around their necks.

The Story of Silent Night

The words to this favourite Christmas carol were written in 1816 by Joseph Mohr, a young Austrian priest. Two years later, Mohr asked a music teacher to write a guitar melody to turn the poem into a song so it could be sung on Christmas Eve at midnight Mass because the organ was not working. (Some historians say that mice had eaten the bellows.)

An organ repairman is believed to have introduced the song to other churches. Two families of travelling folk singers (much like the von Trapps of *The Sound of Music* fame) added the song to their repertoire, thus spreading its popularity.

"Silent Night" -- The Song Heard Round the World -- has been translated into hundreds of languages and is sung by millions of people.

The Story of the Christmas Tree

The ancient Egyptians and Romans would decorate their homes with evergreens on the winter solstice as symbols of fertility because the trees stayed green even in winter. In the 15th century, Germans made the trees a Christian symbol of rebirth. One legend holds that a missionary came upon a group of pagan Druids circling an oak tree, preparing to sacrifice a young boy. The missionary chopped the tree down and a small fir sprouted in its place. He told the Druids it was a holy tree that represented peace and Christ. Another legend tells of Martin Luther, the protestant reformer, seeing starlight shining through the branches of a fir tree. To duplicate that scene, he brought a fir into his house and decorated it with candles. Over

time, other decorations, such as apples, paper chains, and wafers were added.

German immigrants brought their custom to America in the 1820s. In 1841, Prince Albert of Germany presented a Christmas tree as a gift to his wife, Queen Victoria of England, which helped to spread the tradition in England.



Where do these superstitions come from?

Bad Luck

Black cats -- During the Middle Ages, black cats were believed to be witches in disguise.

Spilling salt -- Years ago, salt was rare and expensive, so to spill anything of such value was careless and unlucky.

Breaking a mirror -- a reflection in a mirror was once considered part of the soul, so to break a mirror was to separate body and soul.

Good Luck

Rabbit's foot -- It was believed to ward off evil because rabbits live underground and therefore were thought to have connections with the forces of darkness.

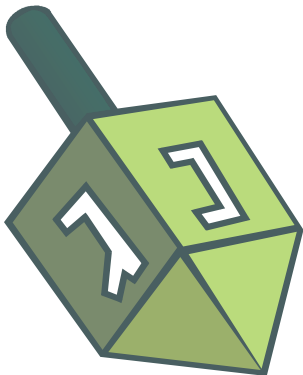
Crossed fingers -- Overlapping the forefinger and middle finger was a way for early Christians to surreptitiously make the sign of the cross, thus averting the notice and wrath of pagan oppressors. Horseshoes -- Mars, the god of the iron out of which horseshoes are made, was the enemy of Saturn, god of witches, and that, supposedly, makes horseshoes lucky.

What's in a fruitcake?

Fruitcake sales in North America usually exceed 4 million pounds a year, costing more than \$100 million. According to some market survey though, only 28 percent of North Americans say that they eat the Christmas standby. If you're one of those relatively few fruitcake lovers, here's the good news in these otherwise calorie-laden treats:

- The flour contains iron, B vitamins, and folic acid.
- The candied fruit offers vitamins C and A.
- The nuts have vitamin E.
- Most fruitcakes contain brandy or whiskey, but baking evaporates the alcohol content.

Spin the Dreidel



Dreidels are spinning tops engraved with four letters of the Hebrew alphabet -- nun, gimmel, he, and shin -- which stand for "Nes gadol hayash sham" or "A great miracle happened here." Traditionally, Jewish children play a game with dreidels at Hanukkah where they exchange "gelt" -- chocolate coins wrapped in gold foil -- depending on the letter on which the top lands.



The Tradition of the Ball Drop on New Year's Eve

Millions of people around the world watch on TV as the ball drops in Times Square in New York City on New Year's Eve. This Big Apple tradition traces its origins back to the 1800s, when sailors had no way to check the accuracy of their ships clocks, though knowing the correct local time was essential for navigating. In 1818, Royal Naval Academy captain suggested that a ball be dropped at 1:00 p.m. from a high pole each day so nearby ships could note the local time, a practice that many port towns around the world adopted. In 1904, the owners of One Times Square began holding roof-top celebrations on New Year's Eve. The ball drop to mark the stroke of midnight was added three years later.

All the Time in the World

Before 1884, literally hundreds of different places around the world observed different times. To end the confusion that resulted, the International Meridian Conference met in 1884 in Washington, DC., and officially adopted 24 different time zones. They divided the Earth's surface into 24 adjacent and equal wedges all perpendicular to the equator. At sea, the imaginary lines for the time zones run straight; but over land the lines zigzag to account for state and country borders. Greenwich Mean Time (also called Universal Time) came from the mind of famous Canadian railroad engineer and thinker Sir Sanford Fleming. Mr. Fleming's great-great-niece, Wendy Carruthers, works right here at Helix Courier Limited as our General Manager and helps us deliver your envelopes and parcels on time.

Dear Friends:

This will be the last Helix Messenger newsletter of 2004.

To all of our customers, suppliers, agents and friends of every description, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks for being able to serve you and to enjoy your friendship. In this topsy-turvy world, we are happy to be able to depend on your patronage and are honoured that you also depend on us to give you the service you deserve.



We hope you all have a very **Merry Christmas** and a **Happy New Year**.

We all look forward to sharing 2005 with you!

Sieg Pedde & Wendy Carruthers & Patrick Garratt
& Sharon Coll & Lori Mitchell & Ann Boothe
& Ted Collins & each and every one
of our wonderful drivers.