IN ACADIANA AND ELSEWHERE

Christmas Customs, Traditions Abound

By PATSY HAWTHORNE
Women's News Writer

Everyone remembers Christmas for a special tradition or custom.

For some, Christmas is not Christmas without that special tradition that ushers in or marks the holiday.

Food is probably the one thing that most people associate with the Christmas season. The American Christmas dinner includes turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce. Different parts of the country often have special dishes that seem to signify Christmas. Some say that it is not Christmas without plum pudding...or ambrosia...or oyster dressing...or a brandy milkshake...or bread pudding with lots of whiskey sauce.

The most interesting Christmas traditions and customs center around the French-Catholic culture, according to Dr. Pat Rickels, a folklorist and USL professor of English.

"Christmas for French families was not always a merry holiday. It was a holy day. The French celebrated Christmas the way we do, but they did it on New Year's," Dr. Rickels commented, laughing.

That was the day children received gifts from Bon Homme Janvier, Papa Noel and Ti Homme. The gifts the children received were hardly the elaborate ones that make a child's Christmas today. Fruits, small trinkets and candy were the usual gifts found in the stockings that had been hung on New Year's Eve.

Dr. Rickels notes that before American influence gained prestige, old French families considered American customs barbaric. The term "American" was used in a derogatory manner when they spoke of the "uncivilized inhabitants" of the New World.

Whereas Advent was once the season of penance before the festive 12 days of Christmas, it has become popular to start celebrating Christmas as early as Thanksgiving, Dr. Rickels said.

"In a culture as festive as ours here in Acadiana, I feel we need all the Advent or Lent we can get," Dr. Rickels commented, laughing. Once Acadians are through the Christmas season, there is the Mardi Gras season just around the corner.