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Early Canadian Christmas memories include ice hockey

December 25 means more than Christmas day to many Canadians. It is the date when the first game of ice hockey was played anywhere in the world. On Christmas day, 1855, members of the Royal Canadian Rifles, stationed at Fort Henry in Kingston, Ontario, put on ice skates and played a game of hockey on the ice that had formed on the waters of Kingston harbour.

The game they played, of course, was a version of field hockey, and the sticks they used were field hockey sticks; instead of a puck they used a lacrosse ball. But it was from this game that ice hockey evolved to become Canada's national game, in much the same way as cricket belongs to England and baseball is so distinctively American.

Before ice hockey could become more than the English game of field hockey played somewhat clumsily on ice, a new kind of skate had to be devised. The skates worn in those days were long with curved points, ideal for gliding along an ice-covered Netherlands canal or a

frozen river in England. They were not built for the quick turns and rapid manoeuvring required in a fast game played on a comparatively small rink. This sort of skate, with short tough blades, was finally produced in 1864 by John Forbes, a hardware merchant in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

Forbes set up the Starr Manufacturing Company in Dartmouth to manufacture the skates, and within a few years the game the world knows as Canadian ice hockey started to emerge. In 1875, the students of McGill University in Montreal laid down a set of rules, and organized team games started to take place.

In 1885, cadets of the Royal Military College in Kingston challenged Queen's College, also of Kingston, to a game on the ice where the first ice hockey was played 30 years previously. This game is re-enacted annually in Kingston, but it is now played in an arena and not on the harbour ice.

By 1893 the Governor General, Lord Stanley, awarded a cup for which teams



The tradition of setting up a Christmas tree began in Halifax, Nova Scotia 130 years ago.



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