

A partridge in a pear tree —

By Mary Fastenau

If you don't want swans swimming in your bathtub, parrots and 23 musicians competing with your stereo, 19 people dancing over your desk and a bird that sits in a tree without moving, the gift of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" is not for you.

But just for kicks, what would the gift cost? With a few modern substitutions—around \$8581.92.

Times have changed since the advent of the Christmas favorite "The Twelve Days of Christmas" and so have the prices.

The \$8581.92 price tag cannot be regarded as undisputable because the song is not specific in its gift descriptions.

For example, how would you buy a "lord leaping" or a "piper piping?" Along with a change in time, there appears to be a change in vernacular. And there have not been many lords doing their thing in Lincoln.

Another problem is that the song fails to say if the dancers and the musicians are professional or amateur. The phrase, "twelve professional drummers drumming," might not have fit with the melody line, but it would have made obtaining the price list much easier.

The birds also lack clear definition. There are no breed specifications on any of the birds, and prices vary according to pedigree.

For example, the partridge is mentioned 12 times during the song, and not once do they say if it is albino, buff or normal. It is not even clear if the swan is an endangered species or not.

If that is not enough, there is also concern the price list should include the cows so the maids have something to milk or drums so the drummers have something to pound or instruments so the pipers do more than stand around. It would appear that a "maid a milking" would not be worth much without a cow, but the song doesn't say that.

Juggling all of these factors and always looking for the bargains, the \$8581.92 figure was obtained. It includes professional dancers and pipers and amateur

drummers and leapers. It is also figured without cows or drums or pipes, but with frozen French hens.

If you would prefer the gifts, instead of the money, the bill for the first day would be \$19.75.

For convenience the pear tree would be a potted Bartlett pear tree four to five feet high, according to the owner of a Lincoln nursery.

The partridge, which lists for \$10, would be a normal chukars partridge, Kim Meyer, an attendant at Ager Memorial Zoo said. If you want to get the more expensive variety, she said the albino variety lists for \$25 and the buff for \$35.

Meyer also said the bottom price on doves for the second day would be \$5 for a white or a ring neck dove. The total price tag for that day would only be \$10.

French hens are not popular around Lincoln, but Cornish hens are, especially when they are packaged and frozen, according to the owner of a Lincoln grocery store.

He said Cornish hens are currently on sale at \$1.39 for the 22 ounce size, making day three the least expensive at \$4.17.

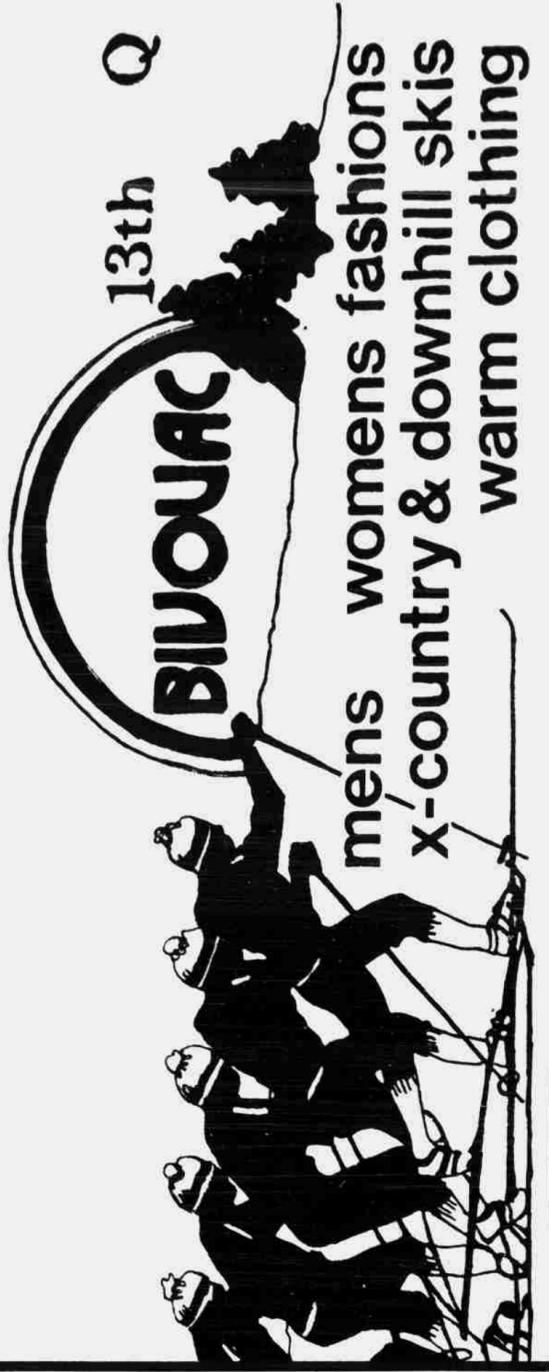
Calling birds are also subject to a few definition problems. Parrot would appear to be the modern day counterpart and they sell for \$38 at a local pet store.

An employee said that \$38 would buy a "love bird" with green and pink feathers making the figure for the day \$152. If Christmas is your time to splurge, she said the store also has parrots that sell for \$99.

The fifth day presents another problem because it is the only day where the song slows down and emphasizes the gifts. If you want to emphasize the day with wide golden rings, each would sell for \$250, but if you just want to acknowledge the day, a thin band would cost about \$55, according to a local jeweler.

Since economy has been the motivating fact or in other days, the less expensive band was included in the figure, making the day cost \$275.

If you want the geese to be laying at the time of arrival, they will cost about \$15 apiece. There is also the possibility of buying goslings for \$2.70 to \$2.80 and



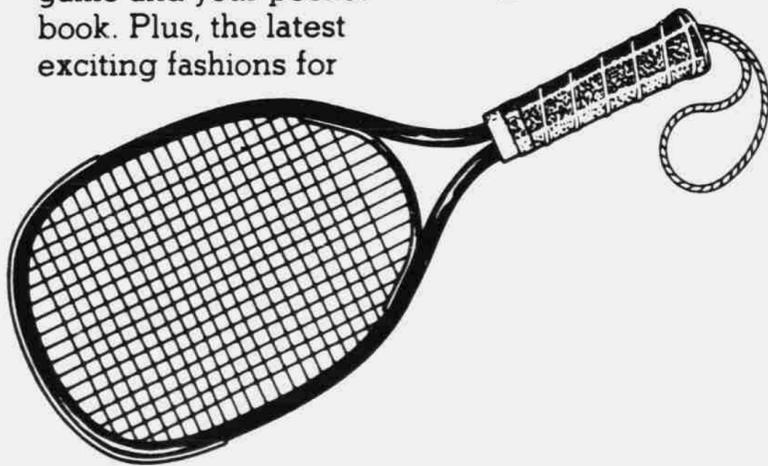
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