

The cedar chest: A wedding tradition

The old-fashioned wedding is back. And it's back with all the time-honored traditions—engagement rings, organ music, three-tiered cakes—and some modern adaptations, such as the cedar chest.

Many of the customs and rituals with which today's brides and grooms pledge their troth are rooted in antiquity. The engagement ring, for example, goes back more than 2,000 years, while another marriage symbol, the wedding ring, has been with us since 800 A.D.

Roman custom called for a man to give his betrothed a ring that was, in essence, a promissory note on the terms of the marriage contract. The circle represents eternity and, in the marriage ceremony, the ring is a pledge of eternal fidelity.

Marriage lore ascribes the veil, which conceals the bride's beauty, to man's superstitious fear that a jealous demon might steal his beloved. Others say it represents an early form of courtship, in which the bridegroom captured his wife by force, wrapping her up in a "bridal veil" to carry her off.

For centuries, the cedar chest has been the heritage of young lovers and a legacy of their courtship, according to Linda Dalton, historian at The Lane Company.

During the Middle Ages, wooden chests were repositories of such church and state treasures as gold, silver, money and religious relics. More common folk used chests to store family clothing, especially the trousseau of a bride-to-be.

"As the Renaissance dawned," Dalton says, "bridal chests became virtual works of art, replete with intricate carvings, inlay work and beautiful paintings on the top and sides. Sometimes, the bridal chest would bear the coats-of-arms of the families being united."

In 13th century Italy, a bride was carried to her husband's house on top of her bridal chest. Throughout her life, everything inside the chest would remain her property, unlike her lands or money,

which legally passed to her husband at their wedding.

"Cedar became part of chest-making during the 15th century, and served almost as sacred material for storing and preserving ecclesiastical vestments," Dalton says.

"Soon, secular chests—and especially bridal chests—were made of cedar, walnut or oak, then lined with cedar. We still make cedar-lined chests this way today."

The custom of the bridal chest spread quickly from southern Europe northward to England and, from there, to the American colonies.

These sturdy boxes, with their sentimental associations, traveled across oceans and continents often to serve as the only real piece of furniture in a rugged colonial home.

Settlers arriving from other parts of Europe brought bridal chests bearing all the ethnic color and design endowed by culture and tradition.

Even in the New World, chests performed rites of courtship, and a young man announced his intentions when he gave his girl a "hope chest."

Today, Dalton says, cedar chests enjoy the same widespread popularity they have known for hundreds of years. While it remains a safe haven for precious heirlooms, today's cedar chest can function as a coffee table, window settee or bed-

side nightstand as well.

The Lane Company, maker of the finest quality cedar chests for 75 years, offers over 100 different styles of chests—from the traditional foot-of-the-bed design to caches, foyers and armoires.

"Today's women, who value practicality and versatility alongside romance and tradition, prize the cedar chest as much as their counterparts of yesterday," Dalton says.

"Cedar chests have a rich history of romance and tradition," she adds. "And tradition and romance are back in style. When they exchange wedding rings, share the first piece of wedding cake or fill a cedar chest with their hopes and dreams of a life together, couples give new meaning to old traditions."

A special gift

Give each child a gift to commemorate the day. Something that they can enjoy immediately, like a camera, engraved jewelry or tape recorder, will further remind them of how special the day was when you became a family.

Celebrate the return from your honeymoon (which you should take *without* your children) with a date for the whole family—tickets to the theatre, or a sporting event.



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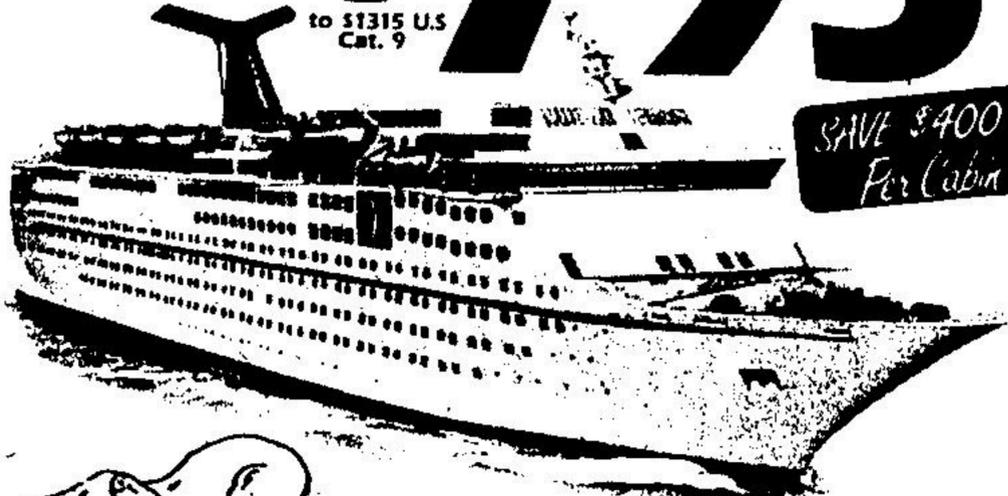
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