

BRIDAL CORNER

Bridal traditions evolved from ancient 'wedding' methods

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Special to The IFP

Congratulations on your upcoming wedding. You are planning to have a traditional wedding with all the trimmings. But where did all these traditions come from? Let's take a look.

The engagement dates back to handfasting and banns in the medieval period. When a couple was very young— long before the wedding— they were handfasted. During this ceremony, vows were exchanged and the price for the bride and her dowry was exchanged. A drink and a kiss sealed the ceremony.

A wet ceremony was more binding than a dry one, and if a kiss did not happen and the couple later backed out, they both had to return the wedding gifts.

If the couple did kiss and backed out later, the groom had to return all of his gifts and the bride only half.

Banns were a public declaration of a couple's intent to wed. In the 1300s, the Archbishop of Canterbury decreed that a reading of the banns for three consecutive Lord's days or holidays should precede all weddings.

The tradition went on to be the publication of an engagement announcement.

The bachelor party began with the ancient Spartans. The night before the wedding, soldiers would hold a feast for their fellow soldier who was getting married. The soldier would say goodbye to his bachelorhood and swear unending allegiance to his fellow soldiers.

The first type of marriages involved a man (the groom) making his way into another tribe's camp and kidnapping the woman (the bride) of his choice. While fighting his way out of the camp, the man would hold his sword in his right hand and the woman in his left.

This is where the custom of the bride standing on the groom's left during the ceremony got its start.

The groom's fellow warriors would hide the couple so her family couldn't find her. For one full lunar cycle (28 days), the couple would be in hiding. During this time, they would drink honey mead because honey and the moon were closely tied to fertility.

Thus, the honey-moon was born. The bride would most likely be pregnant by the time the couple was found.

After a time, marriage by kidnapping gave way to marriage by purchase. The word "wedding" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "wedd" which means to wager or gamble.

This was the vow a man gave a woman's father to marry her or to the goods or bride price.

Grooms would buy their brides for the purpose of breeding and fathers would sell their daughters for land, cash or political alliances.

The tradition of arranged marriages, most often happening at birth, meant neither the bride nor groom had anything to say in whom they could choose. With an arranged marriage, the father of the bride could get land, cash or political alliances. Most of the time, the couple would not see each other until the groom lifted the bride's veil.

The Anglo-Saxons are responsible for the tradition of having a bridesmaid. The Druids believed that evil spirits, jealous of the couple's happiness, would try to make mischief with them. To confuse the spirits, the bride and groom would surround themselves with close friends who were dressed just like them.

With the arrival of Christianity, the belief in evil spirits dwindled but the custom didn't.

During the medieval period, brides would surround themselves with unmarried friends. The senior friend would attend

her for several days before the wedding, helping with the wedding decorations and feast.

The origins of wedding cake can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians who would crumble grain cake over the bride's head as a symbol of fertility.

In the Middle Ages, the bride and groom would kiss over a tower of smaller cakes. If they did so successfully, the couple would be prosperous. In the Middle Ages, edible centerpieces were also popular. During the Renaissance, these grew to enormous heights.

The reign of Charles II of England saw the birth of the wedding cake, as we know it. The cake was designed to look like a palace with figures of the lord and lady of the manor adorning it.

A wedding tradition from the Victorian times is "something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, a silver sixpence for her shoe."

The superstitions involved in the rhyme can be traced back to antiquity. "Something old" refers to sympathetic magic. Wearing something that belonged to someone like a great grandmother meant the ancestors blessed the union.

"Something new" refers to the bad luck of starting a new household with an old broom or giving a new ring to represent a new love.

"Something borrowed" refers to the belief that borrowing something from a happily married woman would ensure happiness.

"Something blue" can be traced back to the time when brides wore blue to symbolize their purity. "The silver sixpence" in her shoe can be traced back to the ancient Greek custom of the bride carrying three silver coins on her wedding day. One was for her mother-in-law, one was for the first person she met on the road after the wedding and the third one she carried to her new home so the couple would have prosperity.

The origins of most wedding traditions can be traced back hundreds of years. When the big day rolls around, think of all those who got married before you and thank them for giving you many traditions.



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