

# THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY: THE EMERGING FESTIVAL SYSTEM OF THE AMERICAN WEST

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IT IS GENERALLY RECOGNIZED that American communities have been undergoing a "crisis" mentality for the last three decades as they have yielded Main Street economic dominance to regional shopping centers. In response, over roughly the same three decade period of time, there has emerged a new "regional community" which has come to be celebrated by yearly festivals such as found today in the Upper Midwest. An ongoing observational study of festivals in the "Coulee Region," which is found on either side of the Upper Mississippi River, shows that the newly established festivals differ considerably from older secular festivals such as harvest festivals, ethnic celebrations, or nationalistic celebrations such as the Fourth of July. They appear to be unconscious representations of the fact of American pluralism and display distinguishable components of regional cultures. As American communities overcome their economic crises, they are at the same time presenting a new sense of regional consciousness and identity in such festivals as Oktoberfest, the Syttende Mai celebration, Apple Fest, Sunfish Days, Pickle Days and other strangely named occurrences, which it would appear are all the same pluralistic festival costumed to fit regional identities.

Generally speaking, these are not old festivals but are relatively new inventions with their own internal logic and symbols, symbols which have little to do with the past they allude to. For example, Cottage Grove's (Oregon) Bohemia Mining Day Celebration has little to do with that community's past since its background was the woods product industry, not mining. But, the community of Junction City to the north had "captured" the symbolism of forestry, and Cottage Grovians decided that they needed a different set of symbols with which to identify, and so they borrowed those of the Bohemia Mines, a mining complex some fifteen miles away from Cottage Grove on Bohemia Mountain. Today, the Bohemia Mining Day celebration is a great regional festival focusing on the Village Green (a luxury motel), a rebuilt steam locomotive, train rides to the Bohemia mines,

parades, fiddle contests and carnival operations. La Crosse's attachment to German symbols also has an accidental quality to it, though the city was primarily German at the turn of the century. Originally, in the early 1960s, community leaders wanted to put together an ice festival, for which the community had some historical right since there was an ice festival during the 1920s. However, in the meantime, St. Paul had cornered the market on the set of symbols having to do with the stern winters of the Upper Midwest with its Winter Carnival. La Crosse leaders turned to the idea of developing a festival around the symbolism of its Germanic heritage, a heritage which had been battered and bruised by the two world wars, several generations of distance, and the re-naming of "Berlin Street" to "Liberty Street." However, some employees of the Heileman's Old Style Brewery had just visited Munich and had been impressed by its Oktoberfest, the fall colors and the merriment of beer drinking crowds that are entailed in that celebration. Today there are many citizens of La Crosse who sincerely wish that the city had constructed its festivals around the symbols of ice, not beer, but it is too late. There are similar stories about other festivals. But the "identity" of the festival is of much less importance than the fact of the festival.

There have been surprisingly few studies of folk festivals in highly industrial societies. One of the very few is Gwynn Kennedy Neville's paper on Scot folk festivals. Her study shows that Scot festivals tend to reflect the community organization of the places in which they are generated. She relates three types of festivals to three types of Scot community organizations: town, clan and church (1977). An earlier, not well known but extremely interesting study of an American festival is included in Lloyd Warner's *Family of God* (1961), a study of the tricentennial celebration of the founding of Yankee City (Newberrysport). Although Warner was less consciously seeking the relationship between community organization and the expression of the festival, his study does report such relationships. Class stratification, the value of female virginity,

male dominance, the dignity of labor, the importance of the frontier and forest, the emphasis placed on patriotism are all clearly expressed and represent the community culture of Yankee City during the late 1930s.

How do the festivals and celebrations of the Upper Midwest reflect the communities of the region? They are like explicit mirror images. What we say about ourselves when we celebrate ourselves may be much more accurate than what we say in self criticism. Our festivals, unlike earlier "folk" festivals, celebrate our contemporary pluralism. These are celebrations that show us to have matured to the point where we can enjoy one another's differences. Perhaps not yet to the point where some would like with a complete acceptance of racial differences, but certainly further than is true for the more industrial populations of the world today. What does it mean when a woman of Polish/Irish/English descent dances with an Italian/Spanish/German to a German polka played by a Norwegian band from the agricultural town of Westby, Wisconsin? If the symbolic statements we make during our celebrations have no meaning then those of the Ndembu as expressed by Victor Turner are empty statements (Turner 1967). But these (and those of the Ndembu) are not empty statements; they are full of meaning to the person who is willing to stand back and watch a parade and ask what the symbols of the parades signify? What does a dance mean to the dancers? What does the organization of the celebration mean in relationship to the organization of the community?

It seems proper to begin with the origins of the folk festivals of the Upper Midwest. In his book *Festivals U.S.A.* published in 1950, Robert E. Meyer, Jr. mentions only one festival which was active then and which still takes place today, the Swiss festival of New Glarus, Wisconsin. None of the other close to one hundred contemporary festivals found in Wisconsin were mentioned. The following is a select list of the names of a few celebrations: Syttende Mai (17th of May, Norwegian Independence Day), Broiler Days, Sunfish Days, Oktoberfest, Funfest Days, Pickle Days, Polish Days, Wadu Shadu Days, Fire Department Dance, Black Powder Shoot, Steam Engine Days, Apple Festivals, and so on. It would appear that since the early 1960s, every community of justifiable size has attempted to generate a folk festival.

The pattern of emergence of the festivals is remarkably similar. The story of La Crosse has

currently achieved the level of a folk story in and of itself. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the city of La Crosse (pop. 50,000) suffered from a flood, which did considerable damage to the downtown, and from the transfer out of the community of major business firms: Allis Chalmers, Autolite and Northern Engraving. There were also several painful strikes and several antagonistic class oriented splits which resulted from the strikes. At least one major reason for the development of Oktoberfest was the attempt by downtown businessmen to reverse the economic stagnation of the city which resulted from the flood, the removal of key industries and the strikes. The key role was played by the G. Heileman Brewing Co. (makers of Old Style and Special Export beer). The House of Heileman has played a strong role in the development of the community for a considerable period of time. Employees of the firm are expected to be active in community activities. There is considerable distrust by some community leaders, particularly those on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, over Heileman's role, particularly a concern that Heileman's reaps vast profits from its sale of beer at the downtown beer tents, but this is disputed by community officials. One observation, however, is that without Heileman's there would be no festival.

Winona, Minnesota, went through a parallel set of problems to those of La Crosse, although it did not suffer a catastrophic flood. In its case, the major ills were the results of the inability of downtown merchants to compete with regional shopping centers constructed to the north of the city. Nonetheless, as with La Crosse, economic ills were attacked with a regional festival, Steamboat Days, which plays up the history of the community as a Mississippi River port (La Crosse was also a major river port, but this role is not played up in La Crosse's festival; it is as though each community agrees not to compete on the symbolic imagery of the other community). As with La Crosse, leaders will tell you that what started off as an economic strategy to deal with economic woes turned into an institution with different functions, those that drew communities together.

Westby, a Norwegian agricultural community between Madison and La Crosse, has always had economic problems because of its proximity to the larger community of Viroqua. While not having to fight regional shopping centers, it did suffer from a progressively deteriorating downtown. According to Ibarra (1976), its regional festival, Syttende Mai, was

developed by two "Anglos" who had trouble having their businesses on Main Street accepted by the predominantly Norwegian residents of the area. Local Norwegians are known for their clannish behavior and have a tendency to deal only with one another on commercial matters. The two businessmen decided that a Norwegian festival would be economically good for the town and would help in getting them accepted by the community. The two Anglos suggested the Syttende Mai theme to local Norwegians and did some of the original organizational work, always "swimming upriver" since conservative community members resisted the idea. Many felt it would be undignified and "un-Norwegian" to advertise their ethnic history, and perhaps even unpatriotic to invite non-Norwegians to celebrate their independence day. However, several members of the energy co-op saw the potential advantage of the festival in helping to rescue the community's ailing economy and they began to develop the festival. Interestingly, the two Anglos were subsequently excluded from the festival proceedings, as they had previously been excluded from the community. In an effort to "get back in," they played around with a bit of entrepreneurial symbolism. One of the major events in Westby during the celebration of the Syttende Mai celebration is a dramatization of the story of William Tell. During one presentation of the play, the two Anglos dressed like Norwegian trolls and popped onto the stage. And, so the story goes, because of their sense of humor, they lived in the community happily ever after, having embraced Norwegian culture from the inside (as it were).

The importance of the human and mammalian tendency to congregate and disperse has often been noted by anthropologists (Arensberg and Kimball 1972). In the Upper Midwest, in earlier times, the rhythms of the congregation and dispersal were determined by the wheat, corn and dairy farmers coming to town on weekends and by county and state fairs. These no longer exist, or they have been vastly transformed, as has been noted by Arensberg and Kimball in their *Culture and Community* (1972).

Community festivals of a secular nature have long been a part of American culture. There were, and are, celebrations of patriotic events, such as Independence Day, or those which mark the harvest period, such as county fairs, and there are the rarer centennial celebrations. However, it is difficult to explain the recent proliferation of secular festivals.

Looking beyond the United States, there also appears to be a world wide trend towards festival celebrations, as for example, reported for Wales (Khleif 1978: 102-119) as well as French Canada, Ireland, England and other industrial countries (Williams 1978). One popular interpretation is that this trend is a process of "retribalization" that is related to the redefinition of ethnic identity in a post colonial world (Williams 1978).

While this explanation may be useful in discussions of in-group, out-group relations in post colonial cultures, it makes little sense in light of the current American experience (although obviously there are many "ethnic" festivals in the large cities of the United States which are, indeed, political statements of ethnic reawakening).

It would appear, then, that an explanation of the proliferation of American folk fests lies in a different direction. Another interpretation is that the current vogue of festivals is a process of reaction against the growing impersonality of American community existence. It is also a reflection of a transformation of the nature of community organization from traditional "local" American communities, whose identities roughly conformed to town boundaries, in the case of ethnically homogeneous communities, or when "community" meant an ethnic neighborhood, to regional communities, that is, several overlapping communities within an identifiable region. The transformation is successful but cannot be understood outside the histories of the communities in question. La Crosse is a good case in point.

From its inception in the 1840s until the late 1930s, La Crosse was a class stratified and ethnically divided community, like most American communities studied by sociologists in the 1930s (Warner and Srole 1945). While there were many "community" events, very few were really community wide, and none were regional with the exception of the county fair. The majority were church and neighborhood events, ethnic celebrations and family gatherings (the family gathering is still a common event among blue collar families in La Crosse). The ethnic neighborhoods were usually focused in their activities around a church or beer hall, depending on the tolerance of the ethnic population. The most important ethnic groups were German, Norwegian, Yankee, Irish and Polish. After World War II the ethnic neighborhoods disappeared along with the ethnic churches. As ethnic/religious affiliations evaporated, so did the

wide variety of ethnic festivals. In this sense, there was an absolute decrease in the number of solidarity oriented celebrations. And, as these groupings broke down, the city suffered from the wide variety of economic dislocations described earlier. Also, an old elite, which had controlled the town (composed of intermarried German and Yankee families) died out and or moved out of the city. Successful businessmen and professionals did not move into the power vacuum, which was filled, to a great extent by small businessmen and employees of large corporations. These individuals had overlapping and refractory power bases.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the city's downtown suffered a series of economic ills which also affected many other American cities and primarily resulted in an inability to compete with regional shopping centers. In addition, key industries moved out of town. The details of the political machinations which consequently took place are difficult to nail down and are not of great importance here. Events resembled a transformation of political organization such as took place in Cottage Grove, Oregon at roughly the same time (Smith 1972, 1976). In both cities, successful attempts were made to attract Federal dollars and private investments to the downtown. In La Crosse, the results were the partial reconstruction of the downtown with the building of the Radison La Crosse Hotel, the La Crosse Center (a convention center), a municipal parking lot, the new Heileman office building and most recently a ten story office building, First Bank La Crosse.

While the community leaders who worked to organize the downtown and the ones who helped organize Oktoberfest are not identical, there is a broad overlap focusing on the Heileman brewery. The redevelopment issue and that of the festival were seen by key business and professional leaders as a means of overcoming the community's economic deficiencies. However, it would be a mistake to look at this overlapping group as some kind of elite. Rather, the leaders formed a complex of overlapping networks, the memberships of which were drawn primarily from downtown merchants, city politicians, a few real estate agencies and the Heileman brewery.

In the meantime there has also occurred the construction of several regional shopping centers, the largest of which is Valley View Mall. These centers have had the effect of draining shoppers from downtown La Crosse and creating a regional

shopping system which is roughly isomorphic with the La Crosse region, containing several different communities including South La Crosse, North La Crosse, Onalaska, Medary, Campbell, Shelby and Barre Mills. With this economic shift there is a present debate going on about consolidating various political community organizations into a county political system, but the final political restructuring of the region is years away. The current political debate does underline the recognition leaders are giving to the fact that they now live in a regional community with a different identity than twenty to thirty years ago, one which is the celebrant at the yearly Oktoberfest.

#### *Festivals of the Upper Midwest*

Despite the fact that the festivals may have ethnic names, the name of some historical experience, or a regionally produced agricultural good, all of the festivals blend ethnicity, history and commercial activities along with symbols of importance to the region. Furthermore, almost every component of community is brought into coparticipation: extensive attempts are made to assure that no one is left out. For example, in Westby, the local Amish, whose religious rules preclude participation in such worldly events as Syttende Mai, are still represented through a variety of folk arts, such as patchwork quilts, which are sold through the Westby electrical co-op.

Taking a broad regional perspective, it is apparent that there is also an overlapping of the spatial distribution of the festivals and their events, much in keeping with Walter Christallers's central place theory as used in William Skinner's analysis of markets in China (Skinner 1967: 63-98). That is, within a region, most communities participate in each other's festivals. As an example, most small communities near La Crescent, Minnesota (across the Mississippi from La Crosse) are represented in one way or another at the La Crescent Apple Fest and small communities around La Crosse participate in Oktoberfest, and Apple Festers and Oktoberfesters participate in each other's festivals, both actively and passively. As one moves away from the La Crosse/La Crescent regions, fewer and fewer nearby communities are represented in the festivals of more distant communities. However, the larger the community, the more apt it is to go a greater distance to participate in another city's celebration. Elements of Oktoberfest appear in the Minneapolis/St. Paul festivals and vice versa. And, at these festivals one

will find participants from Madison, Milwaukee and Rochester.

In part it may be the overlap of celebrations that makes them all look so similar. However, it is not the specific content of the festivals to which this writer refers when stating that they are all the same festival, but rather the overwhelming inclusion of community and regional variations within the festivals at an organizational level. Here we can look more closely at the two festivals of Oktoberfest and Syttende Mai to demonstrate their pluralistic, regional natures, and to show that there is at the same time a reflection of community social organization, despite similarities.

Oktoberfest and Syttende Mai are two American folk festivals with great similarities but with clear distinctions reflecting distinct forms of community organization. Both are pluralistic festivals which attempt to bring in as great a participation as possible. Both begin with cross-country races (the Oktoberfest Maple Leaf Marathon and Fun Run, the Syttende Mai Fun Run), both have an elected queen and court, both have a series of folk art for sale at the Westby High School (one display of which is often cared for by a woman of Irish descent), both have concession booths manned by local service clubs (the money from which is supposed to go to community programs), both have open air barbecues selling bratwurst and beer, both have commercially run carnivals, and, as is generally true for all festivals, they have parades. It is the parades that tell us the most about the fests and the culture of the region because that is what they are meant to do, they are meant to tell us about community, its pride and purpose. But before considering the parades, it is necessary to sketch out some of the differences between the two fests which are reflections of differences to community organization.

First, there is the obvious distinction of size. La Crosse's population is about 50,000 with a combined satellite population of 150,000. That of Westby is 1,500 and the regional population is about 3,000 to 4,000. The size of the two celebrations is scaled to the size differences of the two communities. Oktoberfest is a very large operation and has all of the requisites of large celebrations: disorder, necessary police control and surveillance, and so on. However, beyond these predictables, there are other less noticeable characteristics which are community based. Westby is a small, Norwegian, conservative, family oriented town of predominantly Lutheran persuasion. Because of its Lutheran outlook, while drinking alcohol is not against the law, it is

primarily a hidden form of behavior and this shows up at the festival. While there are a few beer stands, it is not publicly consumed; that is, people do not stand around and drink beer in the street or on the sidewalks. There are two bars in the city, but very few of the celebrants enter them. Imbibing, when done, is in the home in small friendship/kinship groups, very much the Norwegian style. One finds safety drinking with cousins and insiders, reflecting a certain "privacy" characteristic of Norwegian culture. Such is not the case in Germanic La Crosse, which at one time is supposed to have had more bars per capita than any other city in the United States. During Oktoberfest, gangs of people stand on street corners and rooftops, on lawns and porches openly drinking beer (the only time of the year when public consumption is allowed).

The makeup of the crowds also reflects community characteristics. The onlookers in Westby are organized into small family clusters, often multi-generational, with oldsters often speaking Norwegian. It is also common for relatives from Norway to visit during Syttende Mai. Events are intimate; people know one another. Children are given free rides on the La Crosse Jesters' ancient fire truck (but not in La Crosse). The audiences know the participants.

The La Crosse Oktoberfest is more complex, as is the town, and therefore, harder to generalize about. First, there are really two communities in the city of La Crosse. There are a North La Crosse and a South La Crosse. The differences between the two communities are reflected in the festival, or festivals, since there are really two festivals: the North Side fest and the South Side fest. The North Side fest, with the exception of the public consumption of beer, is very similar to Syttende Mai. One sees family groups going from event to event and there is a distinctly Old World, almost courtly flavor that reflects the conservative working class culture of the North Side with its modest but well cared for homes.

The South Side is composed of a mixture of working and middle class neighborhoods. It is "downtown" La Crosse, Viterbo College, the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Lutheran Hospital, St. Francis Hospital, Trane Corporation, and the G. Heileman Brewing Company's corporate headquarters. In short, the South Side is a true city while the North Side is closer to being a village. And the South Side festival reflects these distinctions. To it are drawn every mix of people. There are rowdy as well as quiet students (who shout "ee-ay-ee-ay-ee-ay-oh" in the beer tents, a drinking shout with no

meaning); all kinds of visitors (including tough looking bikers) who stay in crowded local motels or camp in local campgrounds. Hard as it is to generalize about the crowd, it does reflect the more anomic nature of the South Side where the university is located. The exuberance of the student community is apparent in every South Side nook and cranny during the fest. It is generally interesting to observe that about the only people one does not see in the beer tents are members of the UW-L faculty—with a few brave exceptions. But, then, this too is a reflection of community organization since University faculty are generally not very community involved.

Looking at Oktoberfest as a whole, there is much less intimacy than the Syttende Mai celebration. One quickly feels a stranger in one's own tavern and in the crowds. There are no volunteer fire department water fights and no fire trucks giving children rides. Audiences do not generally know the participants, with, of course, exceptions for politicians and celebrities. So, what do the parades tell us?

To the anthropologist familiar with Mayan and other Latin American festivals, there is an immediate sense of *deja vu* upon lifting the surface of parade events and looking underneath (see Cancian 1965 for an analysis of Mayan festivals). The various events and the floats in the parades are organized by voluntary associations that look remarkably like Mayan *cofradias* (co-brotherhoods). However, they are not structured by age or sex, as are the Mayan associations, but they are made up of volunteers who have various different hierarchical levels of community and personal commitment to the events. At the core of most events are formal civic associations such as Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, Knights of Columbus or clubs attached to community service organizations such as high school booster clubs and hospital associations. Attached to the small formal core is a network of hundreds of friends, kinsmen and associates who donate time, money, material and energy for the floats and other events. One float may depend ultimately on the part time work effort of between twenty to one hundred persons (and there are often fifty or more floats). The manpower commitment is enormous.

As is true with cargo systems, there is a form of upward mobility in these festivals. One way to move ahead within the community's voluntary associations in either La Crosse or Westby is to

become highly involved in the festivals. Ultimately, success in several years of involvement in Oktoberfest may lead to being appointed to the board of trustees governing Oktoberfest, which consists of some of the most prestigious individuals in the city.

Americans love a parade and this is certainly true of the secular festivals in the Middle Midwest. Upon making a list of the floats and their symbolic statements about what is important, one quickly reaches the conclusion that not much has been left out. The following is a presentation of lists of floats and other participants in the 1980 Syttende Mai festival and Oktoberfest. Both lists are purposefully selective representations of the two parades since exhaustive lists would be too long. The interpretations are sometimes structuralist à la Levi Strauss.

*Syttendai Mai (Norwegian Independence Day). Westby, Wisconsin, May 17, 1980.*

The parade began at 1:30 on an overcast day. At the head of the parade was the Westby High School marching band preceded by a white ancient firetruck and color guard. The following is a partial listing of what happened.

*Westby American Legion.* Military values, commitment to country and community.

*A truck carrying the Westby Norsemen band:* Youth, fun, modern times.

*Chevrolet convertible carrying Queen and Royal Court:* Allegiance to hierarchy, virginity, youth, loyalty.

*Viola the clown (local personage):* Humor, self-mockery, self-indulgence, slyness.

*Cashton High School Band:* 17 girls in running togs symbolizing youth, the new fad of long distance running, health and virtue.

*Coon Valley Honor Guard:* Tradition, militarism, honor, commitment to country and community.

*Oktoberfest Float:* Consists of Alpine or Bavarian style houses with former fest masters standing in front. In the back of the float and also up front are middle aged women and children in German style clothing. Float represents German tradition, the importance of family, the traditional division of labor, and the political hierarchy of the city of La Crosse and of Oktoberfest.

*Tractor advertising gift shop:* Modern commercial agriculture, rural values, small town main street.

*1930 Model A Ford (advertising Terry Auto Sales):* Represents durability, early industrial America, democracy, equality.

*Pickup truck pulling float of Cub Scouts:* Consists of tent representing camping in and out of doors, the great American wilderness; several boys are reading their Scout manuals representing knowledge and youth; they wear paramilitary outfits representing hierarchy, military and masculinity, but at the same time also represent democracy and equality.

*Ancient fire truck from Viroqua:* It is carried on the back of a new diesel tractor trailer; represents community commitments typical of volunteer fire departments, early industrial America, power and age.

*Cashton's Veterans of Foreign Wars:* Represents military values, commitment to country and community, hierarchy.

*Antique car belonging to Rod and Gun Club of Westby:* Tradition, the great out of doors, nature, masculine sports.

*Zor Temple Oriental Band:* Masculinity, the exotic nature of the ancient Orient as understood in the mid-19th century.

*Mother of the Year float from Galesville:* Representing May Days Festival; white gazebo representing summer, vitality, and youth, good old summertime. Two elderly and one middle aged women sit in front, representing age and its acceptance, motherhood, commitment to family and traditional rural values, opposition of age and youth; float as a whole represents the embodiment of youth and age in each other.

*Coon Valey 4—H float:* Family on a float representing the American farm family, rural values and lifestyle.

*Car full of Westby senior citizens:* Represents acceptance of the aged.

*Rolls Royce followed by 1931 Packard:* Tradition, wealth, hierarchy, order.

*Viroqua's high school marching band:* Represent youth of the community, vitality.

*Snowflake Ski Club float:* Representing outdoor sports, skiing and the winters of the cold midwest.

*Miss Jackson County float:* Sign on side of relatively nonsymbolic float reads "Pray for America," a reference to the hostages in Iran.

*Float of Westby's mayor and city council members:* Represents political organization of the town.

*La Crescent Apple Fest float:* Old fashioned summer gazebo symbolizing tradition and the good old summer time; outside sit two young women in flowing gowns representing youth and virginity. Opposite them, a five foot apple opens into slices

and closes representing the organic in nature, in opposition to the young virgins; the red apple and the white ethereal gazebo stand in structural opposition, nature vs. culture.

*Westby float:* A small (ten foot) boat constructed to look like a Viking ship represents Norwegian tradition, power, masculinity, warfare, the Old World of oceans and long distance trade. In the boat sits a young woman dressed in traditional Norwegian folk dress representing maidenhood, youth, virginity (in structural opposition to the boat). The carved head of the boat (which looks like a serpent) wears a large pair of feminine sun glasses in humorous opposition to the boat and the girl. There is also a small sign on the side of the boat proclaiming "uff da."

*Ancient CENEX truck:* Hauled on the back of a tractor trailer; CENEX is a rural co-operative. The truck represents industrial farming, tradition, the philosophy of co-operatives which is highly developed in the Upper Midwest.

*Westby float:* A young virginal girl in a long pink gown sits inside a green geometric structure; small sign on the side says "uff da."

*La Cross Jesters' fire truck:* Engine represents tradition and masculinity; the clowns represent ambiguity, liminality, self-deprecation, slyness.

*Pony trap driven by a man and his children:* Dressed in western gear representing the Old West, youth and age, rural values, the family farm, the out of doors.

*Antique John Deer tractor:* Represents industrial farming, family farming, industrial America and tradition.

*Black River Falls float:* Six girls standing around a bronze lion. Represents Lion's Club, voluntary associations, femininity and nature.

*1955 sports car, T.F. M.G.:* Represents youth, spriteliness, sport.

*1958 Edsel:* Traditional middle class success.

*Viroqua Middle School band:* Represents the community's young people.

*Girl honor guard dressed in red, white and blue:* Patriotism, youth, femininity.

*1938 Chevrolet:* Middle class success, small town values.

*Two shaggy trolls:* Represent whimsy, tradition, and the dark side of Norwegian personality.

*Small tractor pulling the "Harmonettes":* Singing middle aged ladies representing good old days, times gone by, pleasures of middle age.

*Chaseburg float:* Two young girls on back of a pair of snowmobiles, represent local winter sports, youth.

*Float of air craft carrier:* Represents militarism, the high seas, World War II.

*Several high school bands.*

*Three crippled men in self propelled wheel chairs:* Represent self-reliance, community support for disabled.

*Float from Vernon Electric Co-op:* Girl dressed in Norwegian costume. Representing femininity, traditional Norwegian values, the importance of the co-operative movement.

*Children on Shetland ponies:* Bar W Riders, represent rural West, traditional country values.

*Oxen and wagon:* Family on wagon representing pioneer spirit, family farm, the frontier and traditional family.

*Sons of Norway:* Sitting on wagon pulled by horses, represents voluntary associations, Old Norway, pioneer spirit, community spirit.

*Several horses and carts:* Represent several local commercial operations: The Bookery, Farmer's Union, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Bob and Pat's Bar, Quick Tri-States; the importance of entrepreneurship, small business, country values.

*Polka band on truck:* Gemeutlichkeit; let the good times roll.

*Oktoberfest, La Crosse, Saturday Oct. 5, 1980*

The following is a small selection of floats out of a two and a half hour parade. Many of those not described were in the Westby parade the preceding May. It was a beautiful October day with the leaves in gorgeous colors. On both sides of the parade route were large crowds of students and townspeople, many of them drinking beer, more than a few already well lubricated by late morning. The crowds were in strong contrast to the more subdued crowds in Westby where people had stood in family groups.

*Horse drawn farm wagon:* Man and boy in western garb; representing farming, western traditions, father and son relationships, commercial agriculture.

*1948 Buick convertible:* Middle class success. (Note: one rarely sees expensive older cars at these festivals, almost all are middle class, lower to middle priced vehicles symbolizing the middle class nature of the festivals.)

*4x4 Chevy truck:* Advertising Skipper Buds, a local boat dealer; truck pulls a boat with young women

inside wearing German peasant costumes. Boat represents the Mississippi River, fishing, adventure, commerce, masculinity; the girls represent just the opposite: purity, home orientation, non-commercialism (kirsch, kinder, kuchen), opposition of river to town.

*Marching band:* Female honor guards; military dress with western design; represents the importance of women; opposition to men; militarism and the old West (constant theme).

*Famous Old Style motorized beer can:* Large beer can encloses small motor scooter and rider advertising Heileman's beer. Represents commercial success, Heileman's Old Style, lovely, lively La Crosse, humor and technology.

*House of Heileman's float:* Bavarian style house on one end of the float, "hausfrau" in peasant dress sitting near the house. Opposite the house, on the other end of the float is the standard of the House of Heilemans. The house and the woman represent tradition, folk, community, the home; the standard represents commerce as well as Heileman's corporate benevolence to the town.

*Holsum Bread float:* Large green maple leaf on one end of the float standing on an orange stage; a woman and a man stand on opposite sides dressed in German lederhosen. The maple leaf represents Oktoberfest, genuetlichkeit, the colors of fall and nature. The man and woman represent Old La Crosse, domesticity, German traditions, traditional male/female relationships. The float as a whole suggests the opposition of man and nature and of the domestic to the commercial.

*Ford Ranchero pickup:* Pickup is loaded with young people and pulls a float of men playing various different ethnic polka tunes, representing the ethnic pluralism of the region.

*Set of Clydesdales pulling "Old Style Lager" wagon:* Man and woman in German dress sit together; the man is driving but the woman is touching the reins. Represents blend of German heritage and the North American commercial tradition. Although the man is driving, the fact that a woman is sitting beside him on a beer wagon symbolizes the current trend to equalize male and female relationships.

*Winona float:* Self propelled 20' steamboat with queen and court sitting on and around the deck and on top of the roof. Represents Old America of the Mississippi River, Mark Twain's world, commerce and the river. Also symbolizes the opposition between the world of men and the world of women, the domestic versus the commercial.



*Old 1918 flatbed Ford truck:* Band on the back of the truck is singing contemporary country music. Represents contemporary youth, the countryside, commerce, *gemuettikheit*, American technology and the open road.

*Parents Without Partners float:* Float has sign on top proclaiming "Oktoberfest Welcomes a New Decade for Sex Equality." A young man and woman sit in a pair of giant scales in equal balance.

*Warren's Cranberry Festival float:* Four young women dressed in red sit on the back of a cranberry picking machine. Represents male commercial farm economy complemented by females representing femininity and domesticity.

In addition to these floats there were also several "statements" made in these and other parades, such as cars or floats with elderly persons and children with multiple handicaps. The fact that members of the community include the elderly and multiple handicapped implies a level of community acceptance of what was once kept behind locked doors. Probably one of the most important statements of the 1980 Oktoberfest parade was made by the Floodplain Fencibles, a group of men and women bagpipers. The Floodplain Fencibles are a local group of men and women interested primarily in bagpipe music and whose ethnic backgrounds are richly varied. In the Fall of the 1980 Oktoberfest parade, the Floodplain Fencibles (known today as the La Crosse District Pipe and Drums) made an important statement to the largely white population of the La Crosse region. At the front of the marchers, who were playing a beautiful Scot melody, marched a lone standard bearer, the adopted black son of one of the marchers who is a biology professor at UW-La Crosse.

Novel aspects of the La Crosse Oktoberfest and the Westby Syttende Mai celebrations are local statements within the larger and more dominant pluralistic themes. The Maple Leaf Parade proclaims primarily the economy of the La Crosse region: the dominant motifs are the Heileman Corporation and the Trane Air Conditioning Company, with Heileman's being the more powerful and domineering of the two, which reflects the company's actual participation in community events and decision making under the leadership of its current president, Russell Cleary. The Syttende Mai celebration, on the other hand, is a celebration of the Westby economy and the dominant motifs, outside Norwegian symbols, are dairy farming and

the growing of tobacco. These motifs in each set of parades are spiced with fragments of Norwegian and German symbolism but with no dominant theme—even when the organizers try to create a theme. It is this lack of a theme, this timeless themelessness, that recurs throughout the festivals and reminds one of American architecture in large cities where there also is no theme. Everything goes, all styles accepted. Such is the lack of a theme which reinforces the pluralistic statement of festivals in the Upper Midwest, and, one expects, elsewhere. Recently, as noted earlier, there have been attempts to bring the aged and disabled into the parades on special floats, and, from time to time, minority groups participate. However, ethnic and racial components are not strongly developed in the festivals and their parades in the Upper Midwest. But, to be fair, there are very few persons of racial minority groups in the region.

In many parades, there is an inversion or reversal of symbols. The inversions are a form of humorous mockery of popular parade components. In 1980, for example, following closely in the wake of the Floodplain Fencibles was a small group of men wearing curtains (instead of tartans), with bags over their heads, beating iron pipes together while snaking down the street. They were preceded by a boy carrying a banner on which was inscribed "The Barre Mills Bag Pipers." Just as humorous, a little later, appeared a group of men dressed in long dresses which came down to their ankles, carrying brooms burlesquing the ubiquitous girl drill teams with their scanty silver bathing suits and white painted rifles.

Finally, an examination of social organization reveals some interesting continuities of community social structure. The Syttende Mai celebration, while formerly incorporated, as most festivals are for insurance purposes, is organized on a somewhat informal basis by individuals. Formal voluntary associations play a lesser role than in La Crosse.

The La Crosse Oktoberfest is more formally organized with civic organizations playing structured roles. Oktoberfest officials are also leaders in the various voluntary associations. They have to have the time to attend festivals around the state (a responsibility which has caused its share of marital difficulties). While there is selectivity in terms of time and commitment, there is also some effort made to distribute the positions throughout the community. Membership is gained by successful community oriented activities within the

community's civic organizations. The Heileman Corporation has one of its executives working on a half time basis all year to insure the organizational continuity of the system. The list of "festmasters" turns over each year. Today, as Oktoberfest achieves greater recognition and size, there has been a corresponding evolution to the formalization of its social structure. Today it is coordinated by La Cross Festivals, Inc., and has corporate status with a fest grounds of several acres near the downtown.

Regional folk festivals of the Upper Midwest, and probably of most of modern North America, are relatively new and represent the emerging regional community, which we can only now vaguely discern. These festivals, which are pluralistic and highly similar in their lack of a theme, their ethnic pluralism, their broken and spliced symbols reflect us as we are at one point in time. As such, we and the festivals are subject to change, but both we and the festivals will remain folk, even if we are festing in space to the melodies of Richard Straus' *Thus Spake Zarathustra!*

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