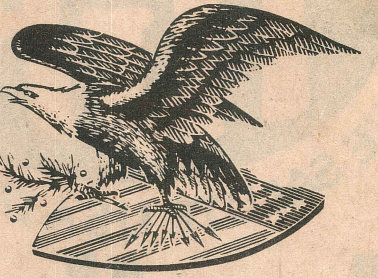


MADRID

AREA

BICENTENNIAL

1776-1976



"Remembrances of Days Gone By"

Midsummer Day, Swedish Holiday; Origin of Great June 24 Festival

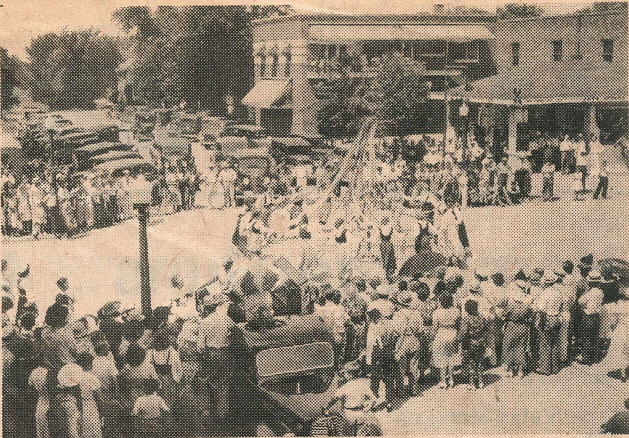
Editor's Note: The following information was taken from a 1937 issue of the Register-News.

From 1937-1940 the Swedish Mid-Summer's Day Pageant was an annual celebration in the community of Madrid. This particular festival came down from heathen times, and next to Christmas was the greatest festival of the year in Scandinavia.

On this day, the sun is at its height of grandeur, and the night is the shortest in the year. In Sweden, Midsummer Day was greatly anticipated, especially by the young people.

Great preparations are made in town and country alike and in the country especially, the houses undergo a special cleaning and the rooms are ornately decorated with tree branches and flowers. In Stockholm, a "Leaf Market" is established where boughs, flowers and maypoles decorate the area. Everything is decorated, including the boats docked in the harbor.

It is truly a spectacular sight seeing the completely decorated houses, trains, all dressed in the same fashion, and even the horses are ornamented with branches of leaves on its head. Little children carry small bunches of flowers and sometimes a small Maypole, while the older children enjoy an all-day picnic and return in the evening for the traditional dancing.



The traditional Maypole dance was an important part of each celebration. This picture shows the winding of the pole as performed by citizens in Swedish costumes. It was done in what is now the intersection of Main and Water Streets.

The center of attraction is the May pole, similar in nature to what is found in many English villages in the month of May to celebrate the return of spring; but the Swedish word mai does not refer to the month, it means a green leaf.

The decoration of the May pole was always a popular attraction, and it always occurred in the early morning. The young girls always awoke early on the special day and hurried into the woods to gather flowers and boughs of silver birch to bind wreaths and garlands for the pole. Birch is the popular summer Swedish wood, just as sombre fir is the common winter wood.

The raising of the May pole is an important event in the day's proceedings, and amidst shouting and music it is put into proper position. The people form themselves in a large ring around the pole and to the sound of a violin or accordion. Everyone, from a young child three years old, to the old grandmother enjoys dancing in the traditional ring. This dancing continues through the night and into the wee hours of the morning.

There are a number of superstitions and customs connected with the festival. On the hills in the neighborhood of towns in North Sweden people light fires during this season. These are but a reminiscence of the "pyre" built on concentrated hills by the old heathen priests, and burnt on Midsummer eve in honor of the sun-god, the mild and beautiful Balder. Nowadays, these fires are used for preparing the enormous amounts of coffee used during the festivities. Each family has its own fire and they put the coffee on the blaze when the sun is setting.

Sometimes people gather different kinds of flowers to make up a bouquet, called a Midsummer quest. Whoever does it, usually a young girl, must go alone. If she should encounter anyone, she must only answer by signs, and cannot speak under any circumstances until she reaches home again. She places the bouquet under the pillow and legend tells it, that in her dream that night she will see her future lover.

This quest has many wonderful qualities. It is hung

up in the cattlehouse, and if allowed to remain there, protects the animals for an entire year against the troll or witches.

In some places, a medicine is made from it, which will cure all diseases.

Upon their arrival in America, the Swedes brought with them the customs and atmosphere of Sweden and blended with them a loyalty to their adopted land which has made the name Swedish-American synonymous to all that patriotism and a high quality of citizenship suggests. They came with no thought of exploitation and remained to build homes and contribute in the building of an empire.

Time passed . . . The Community grew . . . Slowly the old traditional customs faded as new neighbors were acquired and in their particular dialect they commenced to speak brokenly the language of their adopted land. The railroads came and the log huts changed to beautiful homes and their undrained prairie lands became fertile fields.

Mid-Summer's Day is observed throughout Europe but particularly in Sweden, "Land of the Midnight Sun" — where in mid-summer the sun does not set but shines the 24 hours through. For three evenings and two days the community of Madrid became "A Little Bit of Sweden." The event was held on June 22, 23, and 24 during the first two years, but became just a two-day event the last two years it was held.

These early festivals featured folk games and dances in Swedish costumes, antique displays from Sweden and other foreign lands, hobby and flower displays as well as fine entertainment and a gala pageant.

A highlight of these festive days was the selection of the Festival Queen and her court who reigned over the activities. Addresses were given by noted speakers and in 1938 a spectacular historical pageant was presented and it was viewed by many special persons, including the governor of Iowa. A professional director from California was hired to oversee the production of this play and many local residents took part in it.

Another big part of these early celebrations was the May pole dance done by the younger children of the town.

This pageant was held in what is now Edgewood Park and was well attended by young and old alike. All the people dressed in white Swedish costumes as the old time Swedish day was brought back to life here in Madrid. Reports on this historical pageant held back in 1938 showed a loss of \$600 was sustained and in regards to the wooden nickels, used at the first festivities, they were listed as a total flop.



This wooden certificate was issued by the Madrid Mid-Summer Day Association Inc. in commemoration of the first Swedish settlers at Swede Point in 1846. It was exchangeable at any store in town and was also redeemable at the City State Bank. Ruth Cederquist, the first Mid-Summer queen, was pictured on the wooden nickel.

The winding of the Maypole and the various Swedish activities held uptown were additional highlights of the celebration. At one fete, the Minnesota Viking Band came and performed at a folk dance held on Main Street following the crowning of the queen.



Ruth Cederquist, first Midsummer Day queen is shown with Walter Anderson, who played a major role in the planning and organizing the Swedish festival. The celebration in Madrid was discontinued in 1941 but it is still held in Sweden today.

Ruth Cedarquist Larson was chosen the first Mid-Summer's Queen back in 1937 and it was her picture that appeared on these flat pieces of wood that were redeemable at the Madrid businesses and the bank. They were 2 1/4 inches by 4 inches in size and were made by the Rogers Production Co. Walter Anderson was the president of the 1937 festival and records show that this was a gigantic task and took a lot of time to plan and carry out successfully.



This was part of the children's parade back in the 1937 Midsummer celebration. Almost every child in town took part in the event that was always led by the queen and the Madrid Band.

The first festival consisted of a coronation of the queen at the park and throughout the day from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. visitors were encouraged to stop and see the "Svensk Stuga" and view the priceless displays in downtown store windows. Then came a concert by the Madrid Band, the Maypole dance, Swedish folk games, and Swedish Folk Song recitals held in the park.

People who either served as officers or directors of the early pageant were C. W. Anderson, J. G. Lucas, C. H. Reckseen, Armand Perrier, Jr., Rev. C. O. Nelson, G. M. Grout, F. W. Alsin, Mrs. O. M. Scott, Mrs. B. Fridholm, Mrs. Paul Olson, Mrs. W. J. Evans, Glenn H. Lehman and Frank Shearman.

Festivals 1937-1941

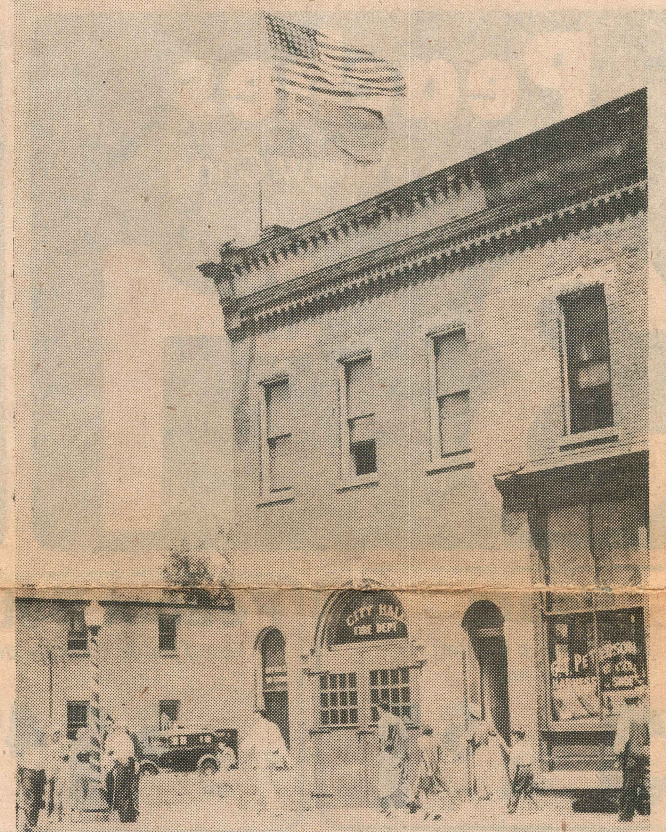
Four of these summer festivals were held and they were truly something to behold. All were well organized and they accurately tried to reproduce the founding and development of the second Swedish settlement west of the Mississippi.

Parades were held prior to each event and other cities were usually visited. Over 100 cars made a tour to Nevada and Des Moines promoting the event. At the original fete, the Swedish Old Settlers Society of Des Moines helped with the festivities sponsoring a picnic, touring Swedish homes, having the May pole dance and enjoying folk games. Approximately 100 cars made the tour route and all participants were clad in native Swedish costumes.

The contest, as previously mentioned was held around June 22-24. A highlight of the event was the selection of the pageant queen and her attendants,

Miss Columbia and Miss Madrid. A ballot appeared several weeks before in the newspaper and the people distributed their ballots at certain predetermined spots. The ballots were then counted and the name of the winner was kept secret until midnight on Midsummer's Day when the official crowning took place. There were always at least 12 girls vying for the title with the winner selected as the reigning queen. The runner-up was Miss Columbia and the remainder of the girls held the title of Miss Madrid. The girls had to be at least 16 years of age when the contest opened, May 19. They could have been single or married, but they had to be residents of Madrid or the community. The queen was then given a genuine costume, imported from Sweden to wear during her reign.

During the time of the pageant, the Swedish flag could be seen flying below the American flag at City Hall. The official Swedish colors were green and yellow.



The flag of Sweden is shown flying beneath the American flag at City Hall, then located where the Copper Dollar is today. From 1937-1941 a Midsummer festival was held in Madrid in honor of Mrs. Anna Dalander and the Swedish immigrants that settled at Swede Point in 1946.

A monumental pageant was held at each of the celebrations and it was during the first one that a professional director was hired to come from California and direct the program. He was French Sensabaugh, of the John B. Rogers Producing Co. The script was also written by this organization. The ceremony was performed in the style of ancient European coronations with the trumpet fanfare, drum roll, parting curtains, etc. C. J. Cedarquist officiated at the first Midsummer event and his daughter, Ruth Cedarquist was crowned queen.



Ray Langland, Elsie Anderson (milking the cow), Adolph Steinhaus, Esther Sundberg, Leo Langland, Dolly Steinhaus, Frank Martin, Etta Lundahl and Junior Benson are shown enacting one scene of the Midsummer Pageant that was held in 1937. Many, many citizens took part in the first pageant that was done under the guidance of a Hollywood director.

An interesting note about the 1938 pageant was that it was presented on two consecutive days and an admission charge of 50 cents and 25 cents was assessed.

Another fact worth mentioning was the prices of the supplies that were needed in the festival presentation. Folger's coffee cost 29 cents a lb.; milk was 10 cents a quart; cream, 15 cents a half pint; printing was figured at 25 cents an inch; print yard goods at 18 cents and labor for an electrician and carpenter was 40 cents an hour.

Other attractions included ball games, a Swedish smorgasbord dinner, concerts by Swedish singing groups and the Viking accordion band. Relics from the old country and priceless family heirlooms were on display in shop windows.

Other activities in following celebrations were basket dinners in the city park, an operetta by the Madrid High School music department, a colorful parade and the singing of the Swedish Nation hymn.