Wedding Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore

An Honors Creative Project

(HONRS 499)

by

Jessica D. Greer

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Barbara Stedman

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

July 2001

Expected date of graduation

July 2001
Abstract

This project is a creative and useful website for those people who are planning weddings and who are interested in discovering the traditions, superstitions, and folklore surrounding common wedding practices.

Many bridal couples are not aware of the symbolism inherent in the wedding traditions they include in their celebration. This site enables those couples, and any others who might be interested, to unveil the mysteries behind the activities in which they participate. It is then that an informed decision can be made as to whether a time-honored tradition will be included in a wedding for the symbolism it evokes or for another reason, if any.
Acknowledgments

Thank you, Dr. Stedman, for your continued support in this endeavor. When I concocted the grand scheme of this project, you were intrigued and supportive. When I questioned the scope of my plans, you listened and provided guidance. When I missed a deadline, you remained calm. When I completed the task at hand, you rejoiced.

Thank you, family and friends, for your encouragement. When I left wedding books scattered everywhere, you allowed it. When I watched A Wedding Story daily, you sat and watched with me. When I had nightmares about weddings, you listened and advised me to take a break. When I uploaded the site and it worked, you celebrated with me.
The palette of possibilities for creative projects was endless; however, the choice was not difficult for me to make.

A girl may imagine a fairy-tale wedding during her youth and take for granted the elements she will include: the perfect dress, breath-taking flowers, the walk down the aisle with her father amidst rose petals, and a groom who treats her like his queen, waiting to take her as his bride. This is an attainable vision, but most likely, by the time she is to marry, the fairy-tale has been rewritten to include different views.

Some things change, but others remain the same. Most likely, the grown-up rendition of the fairy tale has traditions identical to those of the fairy tale of childhood visions, but why? Are brides-to-be compelled to incorporate traditions for tradition's sake? I would venture to say that is often true. Common wedding traditions have become so ingrained in our minds through time that bridal couples are often unaware of why they even include such traditions. Brides stand to the left of their grooms. Sometimes they walk on aisle runners. More often than not they have bridesmaids and a flower girl, while the groom has male attendants. Confetti or rice is thrown on the couple after the ceremony. Guests honk their horns and clink their champagne glasses in honor of the couple. The groom carries his bride over the threshold.

Why do bridal couples take these wedding activities at face value? A wedding should express the couple's love, but also their personal interests and attitudes toward life. Do the common wedding customs suit the couple's style? If not, why use them? Obviously, some traditions might be required by the venue of the ceremony. For example, a church may require the bride to stand left of the groom. Beyond any requirements and possibly a limited budget, the
couple has free rein over what is included, yet most continue to proceed with customs, superstitions, and folklore. I challenge them to look beyond the traditional.

In creating a wedding myself, I have questioned these customs. I, undoubtedly, will use some of the traditions, but it is important to me that I understand the symbolism and history behind the traditions before I decide whether or not to incorporate them into what is said to be one of the most important days of my life.

If I do not agree with the superstitions or choose a tradition to symbolize something other than what is typically associated with it, I have not trampled over the act of marriage. I am free to create a meaning of my own and share that with guests. I refuse to subject myself to creating a wedding that does not share the personalities of who my fiancé and I are as a couple. A wedding brings two lives together; the ceremony, as well as the reception, should reflect that. It would not be a true celebration if I decided to use traditions because other brides have used them. I am adamant about being informed on the subject. What I cannot understand is how other brides-to-be are not somewhat concerned. Or are they?

Of course, the first place to which I turned for enlightenment on wedding traditions was the Internet. If people were as inquisitive as I am about wedding traditions, surely there would be adequate information on the Internet. In my search, I found that wedding sources are abundant online; however, there are very few sites that are both appealing and informative. It was then that the idea for my creative project came about: to create a website that is inviting, innovative, and informative for those brides-to-be who are not able to do extensive research.

I found myself looking for other sources, primarily good old-fashioned books. Some were slow reads. Others were very helpful in understanding the progression of traditions through time. Most were somewhere in between the two.
The scope of the creative project began to increase as my research continued. I planned to incorporate into the project a larger sample of my skills by writing short articles relating to wedding planning and our society. I also decided to include another, much smaller, hobby of mine--photography--into the project, to personalize it even further.

I found myself immersed in wedding-related books. I compiled the information I had gathered and found that I was able to find more information for many of the common wedding traditions than I originally thought I would find. Even though that was the case, I was unyielding in my search for even more information. There came a point when I had to end my research; otherwise, the project would turn into a life-long search for the symbolism, superstitions, and folklore of wedding traditions.

Computer notes in hand, it was time to focus on the creation of the website. I had minimally dabbled in site design with one website several years ago using Frontpage software. It was a group project and the responsibility of uploading the site to the Internet belonged to a fellow classmate. That said, I was in for an exciting adventure of accomplishing the completion of this creative project on my own for two reasons: I decided to use Dreamweaver software for my current project after it had been recommended by a fellow classmate who designs websites. In addition, I had no prior experience of uploading sites to the Internet and my web-designing support staff would not be with me at home as I finished the creative project.

Doing things the old-fashioned way, I took out a pad of paper and did a few quick sketches of the design that had been brewing in my head for months. The layout design was simple after a few minor adaptations. I had imagined a site that was organized in a manner similar to an actual wedding. That is, the site would open with an invitation, just as guests receive an invitation for a wedding. To enter the site, the guest would have to proceed to send an
RSVP. At that point, the guest would be directed to a wedding program, which would house the wedding traditions in a logical procession, just as a wedding program guides wedding guests through the ceremony.

I thought the challenge would be in finding perfect background, buttons, font, and color palette on the Internet. It definitely was. The search proved to be even far more tedious than I had expected. It led me to refine the scope of the project. I felt as though I needed to spend more time on the actual creation of the website. With the amount of time that was spent researching, I was determined to find the right look to complement the information. I could not compromise the design just to have a secondary element such as the articles I had intended to write. I decided to remove that element from the site. It was at this time that I also decided to locate public wedding pictures to display on the site, rather than include my own photography. These were difficult decisions to make, but I felt they were necessary in order to produce an interesting website.

After searching through many free graphics sites, I found the background design at www.designsbydonna. It became the benchmark for the classic, warm, and inviting ambiance I wanted to create. Frustrated that I could not find buttons or text blocks to complement the background, I began looking at sets of free images available online. These sets have matching borders, bars, and buttons. Finally deciding that that search was futile, I created the images myself so that they would complement the background I had chosen. I made a decision to coordinate the heading images with the invitation design I would create.

Photoshop, an image processing software by Adobe, enabled me to create the images, including the invitation and RSVP shown on the homepage. I chose to use an ecru shade for the invitation to continue the warmth of the site. Attempting to create an embossed design on the
invitation, I found a lace image, which I then used to design an inset rectangle in a sand color. I alternately placed smaller inset boxes of ecru and the lace on the background ecru color to create the invitation and RSVP and, hence, the heading images.

In the creation process, I realized that not all guests at my site will have all fonts. To ensure that the site design could be viewed the same way by all guests, I chose *Times New Roman* as the general font and *Lucida Handwriting* in the heading images to accent the website. Since the uncommon *Lucida Handwriting* font is contained in images, it is not imperative that the viewers have the font on their computers. To continue the soft, romantic perception of the site, I chose a charcoal font color.

After formatting the site, I was challenged by the task of uploading the site to the Internet. I had been informed of several sites that could host my page at no charge. I chose to use *America Online* because its homepage service did not advertise. Luckily, my website was not larger than the 2mb capacity; otherwise, the ambiance I had so diligently adhered to would have been compromised by banners advertising everything under the sun.

Uploading the site proved to be quite a challenge. Never having attempted the task before, I read through tutorial after tutorial. My first effort to upload the site was partially successful. Some images did not upload. After several recovery attempts, the site was up and running, at the following address: www.members.aol.com/paigegage (also viewable on the enclosed CD).

Looking back once the project was completed, I realized several things I would do differently had I known from the start what I know now. I would create the images so all guests could view the site without having to scroll left or right. I understand now that it is a matter of saving the images as a percentage of the total width of the page, whatever the screen size. I
would also find a way to remove the table borders from the site. I had been under the impression that those lines would be removed upon the uploading of the site, but that did not prove to be the case. I have not yet found the solution to that adaptation.
**Reflection**

Wedding traditions, superstitions, and folklore will undoubtedly exist throughout eternity. Their symbolism will be forgotten by most people, but there will always be those few inquisitive people who take time to unveil the history of the customs.

I have absorbed a great deal of information through the process of this creative project. The creatively designed website houses many intricate details of wedding traditions, but not all. The intricacies are unimaginable and I would advise wedding tradition-inquisitive people to use my site as a tool for delving into the more detailed sources.

I was in search of adding to my knowledge, developing my talents, and broadening my educational experience. I believe I have achieved these three goals with this creative project. The research for this project was extensive, which added to my knowledge. The creation of the website enabled me to develop my talents in web design and web publishing. Most important, however, was the broadening of my educational experience. Education encourages people to think in ways in which they have not thought before. My educational experience at Ball State prior to this project challenged me to look beyond the words I read. It encouraged me to ask "why?" rather than take things at face value, which so many people do. That, in turn, led to my endeavor to explain the symbolism behind the common wedding traditions so that guests to the website could make informed decisions in planning weddings. It is valuable that we understand the meanings behind our actions, in weddings as well as in life.

This project, *Wedding Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore*, has unveiled the meanings behind many wedding activities. I am able to see the history. I am able to sense the atmosphere of weddings from the past, as I hope other brides-to-be will sense.
We modern brides-to-be have many more choices than had past brides. Yet rules have not disappeared; a structure to the act of marriage still exists. We can carry flowers because we enjoy them, not to cover up stenches. We can have our best friends by our sides for guidance, rather than to protect us from the groom and his attendants. We can have flower petals strewn in our paths and walk on aisle runners because it adds to the atmosphere, not because we think there are evil spirits lurking in the ground.

We have come very far from ancient days when it comes to weddings, but it seems we have lost one important element in the process: being knowledgeable of what they represent.

Modern brides who have not been educated about the symbolism of traditions often include the traditions because they feel they make their ceremonies complete, as I was planning to do. I feel many brides-to-be have a checklist in their minds that reads: something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, white dress, veil, bridesmaids, flower girl, ring bearer, flowers, favors, bouquet toss, garter toss, cake, reception, and honeymoon. The list undoubtedly continues.

When the traditions with which we are most familiar began, they were for superstitious reasons. The primary reason for many wedding traditions, including dressing bridesmaids similar to the bride, scattering petals in the bride’s path, and carrying the bride over the threshold, was the fear of evil spirits lurking in the ground. Traditions were also begun for symbolic reasons, such as the ring symbolizing eternity and the something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, and a sixpence for good luck.

I believe many brides-to-be continue the traditions because they think they are fun and add to the excitement of the day. As long as a bride to be includes traditions for those reasons, I believe the continuation of the traditions is all right. Brides who follow customs because they
feel they need to concern me, however. I did not want to be included in that group. American brides-to-be are past the point where we have to include traditions for tradition's sake. We are able to create new traditions of our own or adapt customs to suit our desires.

As I plan my own wedding, I want to create an atmosphere that exemplifies the personalities of my fiancé and myself. Knowing the histories of the traditions I can include in our wedding celebration is helpful to me. For example, I now think the traditional garter toss at the reception is antiquated, and most likely, I will not include it in our planning. Even though it is humorous, I would rather spend the time it takes for that activity dancing and celebrating with our guests. I no longer feel obligated to have the garter toss, as I once did.

The information I gathered for this project has enabled me to be more creative with wedding planning. I now know that there are fewer requirements for weddings than I had thought. In fact, a wedding that does not include as many common customs as usual would probably be enjoyed by guests more. Innovation, I believe, is the way to plan a wedding. Our guests will be celebrating the joining of our lives. Why not make the celebration interesting?

I have noticed throughout the planning of this project that many more people are, in fact, getting more creative with their weddings. Destination weddings and weekend-long celebrations are becoming more common. (Destination weddings are weddings held in a place where neither the bride nor groom live, such as in a castle in Ireland. Wedding venues are also changing. Banquet halls are no longer the norm for receptions. I had assumed that bridal couples were opening up to these new ideas because the traditional church and traditional hall were becoming somewhat redundant, but I was not ready to alter any customs until I understood the origins of those so commonly used. Now that I have the knowledge that I was searching for, I am ready to
plan a fantastic wedding without any reservations. I hope that this project enables other brides-to-be to do the same.
Works Cited


