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PREVIEW

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THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
SOUTHWESTERN SUN CARNIVAL

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THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
SOUTHWESTERN SUN CARNIVAL

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

PRECURSORS OF THE SUN CARNIVAL

There are, undoubtedly, many fiestas in El Paso's history, but the first official account of one dates back to 1901 when the pageant "Sunshine in January" was held.¹ To

¹El Paso Times, January 18, 1901.

the citizens of that day this parade and pageant, held on January 17, was just as glittering and just as extravagant as the sparkle and brilliance of today's Sun Carnival. From a newspaper file dated January 18, 1901, we find this comment:

DELIGHTFUL MID-WINTER WEATHER. PARADE OF
CIVIC, MILITARY AND INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS

After the marshall and his escort came the McGinty Band, followed by the fire department. The chemical engine was drawn by a spirited pair of blacks, which were handsomely decorated with blue rosettes. ²

²Ibid.

The outlying districts must have been represented, for the same article refers to a Cloudcroft float, complete with golden crescent, Summer girl, and Summer boys under a pine tree. The parade also included a trace of Indians and the wild West.

As the parade rolled before the Queen (Miss Claire Kelly), she "clapped her dainty hands in an ecstasy of delight." When the third float passed by, realism, excitement and thrills were introduced by the appearance of three typical prairie schooners which were attacked by a body of sixty mounted "Indians." The scene was so realistic that young ladies screamed and made frantic efforts to escape.³ This

³Ibid.

hair-raising scene occurred before the old Orndorff Hotel where the Cortez Hotel now stands.⁴

⁴El Paso Herald, January 20, 1901.

"Sunshine in January" lasted only one year; at least there are no further references in the newspapers to such a celebration until 1908. In November of that year, however, El Paso was busy preparing for the Os-Aple carnival which was being held in conjunction with El Paso's first Great International Fair and Exposition.⁵ As is obvious, the name was

⁵Ibid., September 29, 1908.

derived from El Paso spelled backwards. This celebration was a gala and elaborate affair. From 1908 to 1912 it became the

annual fall festival and was replete with parade, baseball games, military reception and finally prizes for outstanding floats, with a silver cup for the sweepstake winner.⁶

⁶Interview with Mrs. Camille Kibler Craig, June 12, 1955.

On one occasion during the 1911 celebration, four State governors were in attendance: O. B. Colquitt, of Texas, W. C. Mills, of New Mexico, Richard Sloan, of Arizona, and Abram Gonzales of Chihuahua, Mexico.⁷ It was in that year also that

⁷El Paso Herald, October 10, 1911.

Mr. G. F. Coles, who was in charge of the Os-Aple celebration, announced that he expected fifty automobiles in the four mile parade.⁸

⁸Ibid., October 16, 1911.

The celebration of 1911 was perhaps the most spectacular of the five Os-Aple jubilees held between 1908 and 1913. It is certain that the parade reached its zenith during this carnival. The newspaper accounts of that year, as well as the memories of our citizens, dwell on the contingent from El Paso's Chinatown. Mrs. C. E. Kelly, wife of the mayor of that year,

THE OS-APLE FALL FESTIVAL

1911.



Miss Camille Kibler
as
"Cleopatra"



Miss Sarah Bridgers
as
"Camille"

Courtesy of
Mrs. Camille Kibler Craig

recounts that this division won the prize,⁹ and the El Paso

⁹Interview with Mrs. C. E. Kelly, June 15, 1955.

Times for October 22, 1911, substantiates her recollection. The Chinese contingent was led by Mar Chu, "mayor" of El Paso's Chinatown. He rode a large bay horse, and wore a red sash, indicative of his authority. He was followed by an immense Chinese dragon, brought here from Chinatown, San Francisco. The dragon was 175 feet long and was supported by thirty-five "celestials" hidden beneath it. The dragon's head was ornamented with three golden horns, and the eyes were green and white jade. The body was covered with green and gray scales, while the lower part was striped with green, red, and yellow scales. The tail was ornamented with peacock feathers. In addition to this spectacular entrant, the parade included both Mexican and American Infantry.¹⁰

¹⁰El Paso Times, October 22, 1911.

By 1912 outlying towns joined enthusiastically in the celebration, and the event took on a distinct international flavor when Juarez was represented by a contingent of school boys, bands, floats, and lodge members. This jubilee celebrated the admission of New Mexico and Arizona into the Union as states.¹¹

¹¹El Paso Herald, October 8, 1912.

The first reference to the "nobility" other than that of King Os-Aple is related in the following article: "Annual pilgrimage of the Old Warrior to the land of Saxet (Texas) will end this evening when princess Wanda (Miss Wanda Race) will greet the visiting monarch of the ancient tribe."¹² But

¹²Ibid., October 22, 1912.

no further reference is made to a royal court.

The elaborate preparations for the 1912 celebration proved discouraging because in that year El Paso suffered one of her traditional cloudbursts which was followed by a week of rain. Mrs. C. E. Kelly recounts that El Paso's unpaved streets were running rivers. Visitors arriving by train took one glimpse at the mud, dampened banners and angry clouds. The great majority reboarded their pullmans and returned to their homes.¹³

¹³Interview with Mrs. C. E. Kelly, June 15, 1955.

It is rather ironical that on November 12, 1912, the directors of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce decided that the Os-Aple celebration should become an annual affair.¹⁴ Then,

¹⁴El Paso Herald, November 12, 1912.

in June, 1913, the committee met to discuss the advisability of holding a Fall Festival that year.¹⁵ But, the ardor of our

¹⁵Ibid., June 17, 1913.

civic fathers was undoubtedly dampened by the memory of the preceding celebration. This, together with the Mexican Revolution, and unsettled European situation, probably contributed to the downfall of King Os-Aple. Be that as it may, from 1912 to 1935, we hear no more about carnivals or jubilees in El Paso. The town, however, was undergoing changes. Electric street cars had taken the place of mule cars, automobiles had replaced the horse and buggy, and paved streets supplanted cobble stones and dirt.¹⁶ El Paso was rapidly becoming a

¹⁶Interview with Mrs. Maurice Schwartz, June 21, 1955.

thriving city.

CHAPTER II

ORIGIN OF THE SUN CARNIVAL

In 1935, at the suggestion of Dr. Brice Schuller, a New Year's Day football game was played under the auspices of the Kiwanis Club.¹ An All-Star High School team selected from

¹El Paso Herald, December 10, 1935.

El Paso met the Ranger, Texas, High School squad.² Several

²Sun Carnival Program, 1951.

weeks preceding the game a contest was held for a name for this event, and Dr. C. M. Hendricks submitted the winning title, The Sun Bowl Game. Dr. Hendricks* then proposed that the Sun Bowl Game be an annual affair staged between college teams and suggested that other features such as the crowning of a queen be added.³ The Kiwanis as well as other civic clubs

³El Paso Herald-Post, December 10, 1953.

adopted the suggestion, and thus was born the Sun Carnival.⁴

⁴El Paso Times, July 20, 1935.

*See Appendix A.

Mrs. Laura Schwartz, grandmother of Queen Sandra Schwartz, recalls attending a picnic of one of the service clubs in which propaganda for the event to be held on January first each year was sandwiched in with the festivities. A speaker from Texas College of Mines presented statistics on the appearance of Old Man Sol. He stated that during the past twenty years only once had the sun failed to shine in El Paso on New Year's Day.⁵

⁵Interview with Mrs. Laura Schwartz, July 1, 1955.

When the plan was in its infancy, Dr. C. M. Hendricks went to California and interviewed members of the Rose Bowl Association. The California organization was very cooperative, and gave Dr. Hendricks aid and advice. The books of the association were opened to him, and pitfalls and mistakes pointed out for him to profit by.⁶

⁶Interview with Mrs. Laurita Westrup O'Neil, June 29, 1955.

So vitally interested was Dr. Hendricks in his plan, that in October of 1935 he barnstormed the surrounding districts, accompanied by a float constructed by the Southwestern Sun Carnival Association as a medium to focus attention on its forthcoming event.⁷

⁷Interview with Mrs. Laurita Westrup O'Neil, June 29, 1955.

The float was designed by Gerald Perry, formerly of the Chamber of Commerce, and adapted to fit the truck by Mr. Roy B. Raymer. Mr. P. W. Niegel supervised the construction. Mr. Niegel had fashioned the last three Sweepstake winners at the Rose Bowl Festival in Portland, Oregon, and was well qualified to produce an effective example of a float for the coming parade.⁸

⁸El Paso Times, October 20, 1935.

The elaborate float was covered with 225 pounds of cotton, dyed in the blue and yellow carnival colors. Fifty-four women spent one entire day tying the cotton on fine copper wire.⁹ This float made its initial appearance in the

⁹Ibid., October 21, 1935.

Roswell parade inaugurating the Eastern New Mexico Fair. Later it was shown in Alamogordo, Artesia, Carlsbad, Marfa, Deming and other towns.¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid., November 1, 1935.

The financing of the Sun Carnival presented a problem. At first there was a membership drive to raise not less than \$12,500 to help support the Sun Carnival. Memberships were

sold to individuals for ten dollars, and to firms for twenty-five dollars.¹¹ Today, the average cost runs from \$85,000 to

¹¹El Paso Times, August 15, 1935.

\$90,000. The money is derived from the sale of program advertisements, receipts from tickets for the various functions, and membership in the Sons of the Sun organized in 1948.

During the past seven or eight years commercial firms have sponsored some of the floats, but the Chamber of Commerce always provides the queen's float in order to remove Her Majesty from association with a commercial enterprise. All of the out-of-town princesses are guests of the Carnival Committee, which also undertakes the housing of school bands from outlying districts.¹²

¹²Interview with Mr. Allan G. Falby, July 25, 1955.

The celebration, which started with only a football game on New Year's Day, has grown to tremendous proportions. Today there are at least nine attractions, starting with the opening of the Carnival week by the Symphony Orchestra.¹³ Sports,

¹³Interview with Mrs. Laurita Westrup O'Neil, June 29, 1955.

pageantry, fun, pleasure, and hard work are all thrown in.

The festivities gain momentum during the week, and are culminated by the Coronation and Ball, followed by the Parade and annual Football Game on New Year's Day.

Early in 1935 the Southwestern Sun Carnival Association was established by the Service Clubs of El Paso.* The original sponsors were the following clubs: The Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, Optimists, and 20-30.¹⁴ In 1950 were added

¹⁴El Paso Times, July 20, 1935.

the Five Points Lions Club and the Junior Chamber of Commerce. These formed a non-profit corporation which was purely charitable and educational in its purpose.¹⁵ The association

¹⁵Interview with Mr. Chris P. Fox, June 24, 1955.

listed as its objectives the following points:

1. To instill and perpetuate the Southwestern Sun Carnival in which the people of West Texas, New Mexico, Southern Arizona, and Old Mexico could co-operate and participate, thus bringing about and cementing a better social relationship among the citizens of this section.
2. To inaugurate and produce a parade, educational in character, in which all cities, towns, colleges, schools, industries, and mercantile establishments in this section could be represented to be held in conjunction with the Sun Carnival.

*See Appendix B.

3. To promote the Sun Bowl football game as a means of obtaining national publicity as well as developing high class gridiron entertainment in the Southwestern area.

The Sun Carnival Association also explained the need for such a celebration.

1. It has long been felt by many citizens that we are living in a more or less forgotten spot; in spite of the fact that we have a varied and beautiful scenery, the oldest historical background in the United States, the most equable climate, affording the greatest opportunity for year round sports.
2. Because of distances to other centers of population it is difficult to journey to and enjoy great events or exhibitions. The Sun Carnival supplies the entertainment of a spectacular nature, reviving the carefree spirit of the Old West, and attracting pleasure loving people from all over the country. 16

¹⁶Sun Carnival Program, 1937.

With the election of officers* and the selection of committees, the organization of the Southwestern Sun Carnival Association was completed.¹⁷

¹⁷El Paso Times, August 4, 1935.

It is particularly interesting to note that leadership of the Sun Carnival changes yearly. For eighteen consecutive years, the seven Service Clubs have furnished new presidents,

*See Appendix C.

new board members, and new directors for the various functions of the Carnival.¹⁸ The permanent organization is now under

¹⁸Sun Carnival Program, 1953.

the direction of Mr. Allan G. Falby.

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