

“Chivaree”

By Lex Shuler

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I was looking through the local newspaper this morning and turning through the pages, came upon weddings and engagements page. There were a couple of pictures of newlywed couples looking all too young and unprepared for married life. Their faces were beaming with enthusiasm and expectation. One thing that they will miss is participating in the old fashioned Chivaree to start them off on their journey.

A Chivaree started with the gathering of friends and neighbors at the location of the grand event. Word of the Chivaree was usually transmitted by word of mouth and would include a good portion of the entire area inhabitants. People would show up with small gifts that could be useful to the newlywed's household or a good laugh when they unwrapped them (like dish towels folded to resemble baby clothes.) All the necessary items like kitchen towels, doilies, napkins, decorative items and other things both store bought and hand crafted were wrapped and placed on a table in the house. Other items necessary to the Chivaree were barrels, clubs, shotguns, fire crackers, cowbells or anything that could be used to make noise. On warm summer evenings the guests would be dressed in shirt sleeves and dresses, and kids would immediately start games of hide and seek. If it was cooler or in winter, there was usually a bonfire where people could gather to visit and enjoy themselves.

The noisy part would start sometime after all the guests were there and there would be blasts and banging and yelling with everyone doing their best to make all the noise they possibly could. The noise would continue until the bride and groom finally made an appearance on the porch, and greeted the crowd. Everyone would cheer. The bride and groom would take their place in the living room and all the guests would file through the house and pass by them where they were offered cigars or candy. Of course congratulations were offered in exchange. Sometimes the bride and groom would be transported to the local courthouse and the overwhelming crowd would insist that the groom push the bride around the square in a wheelbarrow. Other semi-humiliating tasks could be used, but nothing threatening or harmful.

In my younger days while attending local chivarees, I have seen fist fights, shoving and cussing erupt in the group of young men that were obviously in the throws of hormone floods. There were times when long term relationships started and strengthened while attending a Chivaree. The kids always had a good time and would be tuckered out and fast asleep on porches, and swings or anywhere else they could find a place to nap. The young boys would usually opt for cigars instead of candy so they could try the more adult pastime out behind the barn. I remember one of my classmates, red haired and freckled, turn the color of split pea soup after a few puffs on his newly acquired cigar.

All in all, the Chivaree was good, wholesome, old fashioned fun and one of those things that was done before reality shows and video games, one that I miss. The newlyweds of today will never benefit from having their own Chivaree to start things off right and proper.