

Tradition

Barefoot-in-the-park ceremonies give way to time-honored customs

The word for weddings today is "traditional." The barefoot-in-the-park ceremonies of the 1960s and '70s have disappeared as completely as flower children and love beads. Elegant clothes, age-old ritual and a spirit of nostalgia are the rule.

But does this swing back mean that all innovation is out of style? Does the bride of today really have a wedding that is distinguishable from the one her mother had? Barbara Tober, editor in chief of *Bride's* magazine, says no.

"Today's weddings seek out the best and most beautiful traditions of the past in contrast to a few years ago when anything old was automatically suspect. But, at the same time, they're modern in that they express new ideals."

Fewer "rules" of etiquette plus a climate that favors personal expression have led couples to add their own creative touch. "But today's individuality is very different from the 'do your own thing' brand of the last decade," Tober said.

Couples don't throw out the whole ceremony and start from scratch; they change or add little things. For example, they have their own special music played, have a little girl instead of a boy as a ring bearer, or pass out printed ceremony programs.

Modern weddings also break with the past over the ideal of equality. Today's bride may be dressed in a demure turn-of-the-century style, but that isn't necessarily indicative of her approach to marriage. For example, because many couples decided that ritual phrases such as "love, honor and obey" and "man and wife" just didn't fit anymore, these phrases have largely disappeared.

The "giving away" (a part of some ceremonies in which the celebrant asks, "Who gives this woman in marriage?") has also changed with the times. Today a couple might rewrite the question to read, "Who blesses this marriage?" with both the bride's and groom's parents answering, "We do."

The same kind of thinking has likewise revised the idea of who pays for a wedding. Traditionally, the bride's parents shouldered the whole bill.

"But for the first time," Tober said, "there's a definite trend toward the sharing of expenses by the groom's family." This is partly economic — for some families everyone must chip in for there to be a wedding at all.

But it's also a sign of the times. A bride's parents are no longer considered to be "marrying off" their daughter. Rather, the wedding is seen as a joining of two people and two families.

Equality means a new role in the wedding for today's groom. In the past, a groom often felt like a spectator at his bride's "big day." Modern couples simply take for granted that it's his day too.

Grooms have new responsibilities: They help pick the wedding site, choose china patterns, address invitations and write thank-you notes. And they bask in a larger share of the limelight. Some men wear engagement rings, appear with the fiancées in newspaper announcements and have showers thrown in their honor.

