Buckwheat Festival

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Town Tradition

Informant:

John Merriam, also called Papa John, is my dad. He grew up in Cuzzart, West Virginia, and has lived in Utah for the past 30 years. He met my mom in Salt Lake City and they have been married 28 years. He is the middle child and only son of 5 children in his family. He grew up on a farm and learned very quickly how to work hard. John loves to garden, be outside, and spend time with his wife, children and grandchildren. He is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Context:

I interviewed John around the kitchen table at his home after playing an epic game of Five Crowns. I had told him to be thinking of how to tell me this story because I told him, along with other members of my family, that I would need to interview them about a piece of folklore. There were other family members that were listening to the interview, and they were doing something that caused a little bit of noise disturbance in the background. The feeling of the interview was very casual because my dad likes to tell these kinds of stories a lot, especially when we are together as a family.

Going to the Buckwheat Festival was something John did while growing up because he was involved in 4H for many years when he was a young man. This is a tradition that is usually done with your family and one that John’s Family looked forward to each year because of how involved their family was with the animals, royalty, and in supporting their community. This tradition still happens today, but it has been many years since John has attended because he has never been able to go back to West Virginia the last weekend in September since he has moved to Utah.

Text:

Having grown up in Preston County, West Virginia, the Buckwheat Festival was a uh festival that was help the last weekend in September the last Saturday of September every year to celebrate the harvest and to uh display some of the animals that the 4Hers and FFA members would had had raised during the year. There was also a carnival there there was a –
buckwheat is a crop that is grown extensively in Preston County and makes very nice flour or buckwheat flour. One of the traditions at the Buckwheat Festival, it’s in Kingwood, West Virginia is the Kingwood fire department as a fundraiser, would serve buckwheat pancakes, thus the Buckwheat Festival, and there was a – as a, young, teenager, I would eh raise animals eh like dairy replacement heifers, sheep uh and other animals that I would then display at the I’d take to the Buckwheat Festival and for three days we would display these animals and people would, walk around and ask you interesting questions about your animals and so forth, so that was fun and then there was a and they would al- we would also show them and at the eh at the end of the the end of the Buckwheat Festival there was an auction where they would sell the the meat animals off so I sold a sheep off and I forget how much I got but anyway the businesses would come and bid on these animals and it was a lot of it was advertising it was very fun. In conjunction with the Buckwheat Festival they also had a a royalty where they selected royalty from the local high schools and there was Queen Ceres and a King Buckwheat. My sister your [my] aunt Susan was the Queen Ceres one year she was selected as Queen Ceres and I remember what they did was they had early on they had the competition earlier on in the summer and and they, they part of the competition was the contestants would get up and they’d ask a question and they’d have to extemporaneously answer the question and Susan was asked ‘who would you like to be – if you could be anybody in the world you wanna, you could be, er if you could be anybody who would you be?’ eh and she says ‘I’d like to be Princess Diana because someday she’s gunna be queen!’ and she just hit the ball out of the park, unfortunately I was runner up to King Buckwheat twice and was never meant for me to become King Buckwheat which is okay I, really I’ve gotten past that now [he said trying to be serious and not laugh] so that’s in a nutshell the Buckwheat Festival and they
also have they’d have parades every day they’d have a parade one of the, uh parades on Saturday it – all the fire departments volunteer fire departments in Preston County and some uh neighboring counties would come and they’d have great big fire, truck uh parade which was fun and the another – on the Friday they’d have uh, bands from all over the state would come and you know er all over the county and some of the state would come it was fun so lots of tradition rich in tradition and uh, great memories! [said in more of a deeper, interviewing voice]

Texture:

John told me this tradition like he was reminiscing and giving me a little bit of his childhood. Johns body movement was very minimal when he was talking. Occasionally, he would talk with his hands, which is something he normally does when he is talking or telling a story. John has a natural interviewing voice that is deeper than his normal talking voice that he used at the beginning of his interview, but then transitioned into a more natural speaking voice. It was fun to hear about this tradition and how my dad had good memories when he looked back on it.

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