Traditions Of Renaissance Weddings

For centuries, marriages have been around. But as early as 2350 BC, they were not what they are today. Today, marriages are a symbol of two people coming together and uniting as one. But long ago, they were meant to unite families and create alliances. Feelings, love, and affection were not a factor in choosing spouses, but rather wealth and status. People wouldn't marry beneath them, such as peasants married peasants and royalty married royalty. Marrying someone in a higher status than you would bring you and your family to a higher status, creating wealth and prosperity.

From 1300 to 1600, best known as the Renaissance era, marriages and courting had rules. During the Italian Renaissance, courting outside of class was forbidden. If a girl was from a noble family, she married someone of the same status and wealth and was usually married by the age of 15. Most marriages of a noble family were arranged by the father, and if his daughter did not marry his choice, she would risk losing resources. Just as Capulet threatened Juliet that he would throw her out onto the streets when she said she would not marry Paris. That is why most girls had no choice but to marry whoever their father had chosen as they could not survive on the streets. Non-noble marriages were much different. Most women married not as young, usually in their twenties. Unlike noble families, wealth and status were not a factor between non-nobles so men and women could court each other.

In Westminster during the Renaissance era, the council had decreed that no man could give away a female member of their family without the blessing of a priest. The same council later decreed that marriage should be a public ceremony for people to see. And it wasn't until the sixteenth century that a priest was required to perform the ceremony. But in Italy, before 1563, the only requirement to get married was the mutual consent of a man and woman.

Dowries were a very important part of marriages. Despite being wealthy or not, brides were almost always expected to give dowries to the groom's family. A bride from a wealthy family may have given gems, jewels, or even property. A bride from a merchant family may have given gold coins, clothing, household goods, or livestock. Dowries are what attracted grooms and were the greatest financial obligations for families with daughters. Families that hoped to increase their status paid large sums to get their daughters into a beneficial marriage. In Florence, there was a public fund supported by annual taxes on residents that provided dowries for orphaned girls. Many wealthy people also provided dowries for poor girls as acts of charity. Grooms also gave gifts to the bride, and those that were wealthy would give gems and luxurious clothes for the bride to wear during wedding festivities. Grooms had to pay a deposit at the betrothal, and if he tried to back out, it would cost him four times the price he had originally paid.

Some custom garments included belts or girdles. Roman brides wore belts around their waists to represent their chastity, and they also represented fertility and marriage, as the touch of a particular relic of the Virgin Mary's belt was said to aid women in childbirth.

As the wedding date would approach, there would be a ring ceremony that took place at the bride's home. Male and female relatives from both families looked on as the bride received a ring from her husband to be. A celebration would follow, along with a festive meal and more

gifts. This was more of a custom to wealthy families.

Throughout the world, marriages are celebrated in different ways, with different traditions and celebrations. During the Renaissance era, wealthy people had lavish weddings that could last for days. They would have parades, performances, spectacles, games, meals, and processions. New trade from faraway places to Europe brought new ideas and concepts. Most weddings took place at the bride's house. Noble or royal weddings would take place in castles or their extravagant mansions. Other weddings would take place inside or outside the church. Many weddings were also not allowed to take place at certain times of the year, such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

No matter the status of the bride or the groom, whether peasants or nobility, feasts were held to celebrate a wedding. Some common meals included quail, goose, venison, roasted boar, fish, roasted peacock, mutton, cheeses, fresh fruit, oysters, stewed cabbage, tarts, and custards. Only people of nobility could afford exotic foods such as dates and pistachio nuts. Wine could be found at almost any feast as it was believed to nourish the body, restore health, aid digestion, open arteries, cure melancholy, and help in procreation. Brides and grooms would drink from a chalice made from special metals to sip wine.

There are many wedding traditions and customs used today that came from origins of the past. No matter how long ago, weddings have been a crucial part of life celebrated by all types of people. Renaissance weddings will forever have their own traditions and customs found in no other era.