

Party time

Metropolis or hamlet, there's always a festival somewhere in Bavaria

By Ginger Henry-Künzel

Munich, West Germany—Everybody has heard of Munich's Oktoberfest, the world's largest party. But how many know about bringing the cows home from the Alps or dancing in the streets in the days before Lent?

Those and other events with their accompanying festivities are deeply rooted in Bavarian culture and tradition.

No matter when you plan to be in Bavaria, you'll probably find a festival or pageant going on in Munich or one of the nearby villages.

The weeks between New Year's Day and the beginning of Lent constitute *Fasching* (carnival), a tradition dating back to the middle ages.

Blast before fast

This is the season to get all that hot blood out of one's system before setting down to the serious business of fasting. In Munich, nightly costume balls with such varied themes as the Lingerie Ball, the Non-Smokers and Smokers who don't Smoke Ball and Carnival in Venice give party-goers the chance to appear incognito, thus enabling them to act in ways which normally are socially unacceptable.

The amount of imagination and money spent on costumes creates a spectacle. On the weekend before Ash Wednesday, Fasching achieves its full tempo when the Munich pedestrian zone is turned into a huge street party.

During Lent, Munich residents may agree to give up some bad habits, but their ancestors were clever enough to ensure that the pain of sacrifice would be lightened by a good strong beer.

Several hundred years ago, an order of monks discovered an old religious rite *liquidum non fatiganturum* (liquid doesn't break a fast) and started brewing their beer thicker and stronger to provide nourishment while fasting. Today, each of Munich's breweries markets its own brand of strong beer during Lent, accompanied by festivals in the brewery beer halls.

May Pole hostage

On May 1 the May Pole is raised, a 90- to 130-foot-tall tree which is skinned of its bark and decorated with carvings depicting village crafts. It must be replaced every 5-6 years. In the nights before May 1, young men from neighboring villages attempt to steal the pole. A stolen May Pole results in a ransom of kegs of beer, not to mention the wounded village pride.

When May Day arrives, the pole is raised into place by the men of the village, using sheer muscle power, a fascinating sight to watch. The townspeople and visitors celebrate the accomplishment with music, beer and Bavarian food specialties.

The Oberammergau Passion Play, performed every 10 years, is being performed this year as the alpine village of 5,000 residents once again make good its 1634 vow to present the play in appreciation of being saved from the plague. The play, which lasts from 9 a.m. until 5:30 p.m., will be a three-hour lunch break, with a performance through Sept. 28.

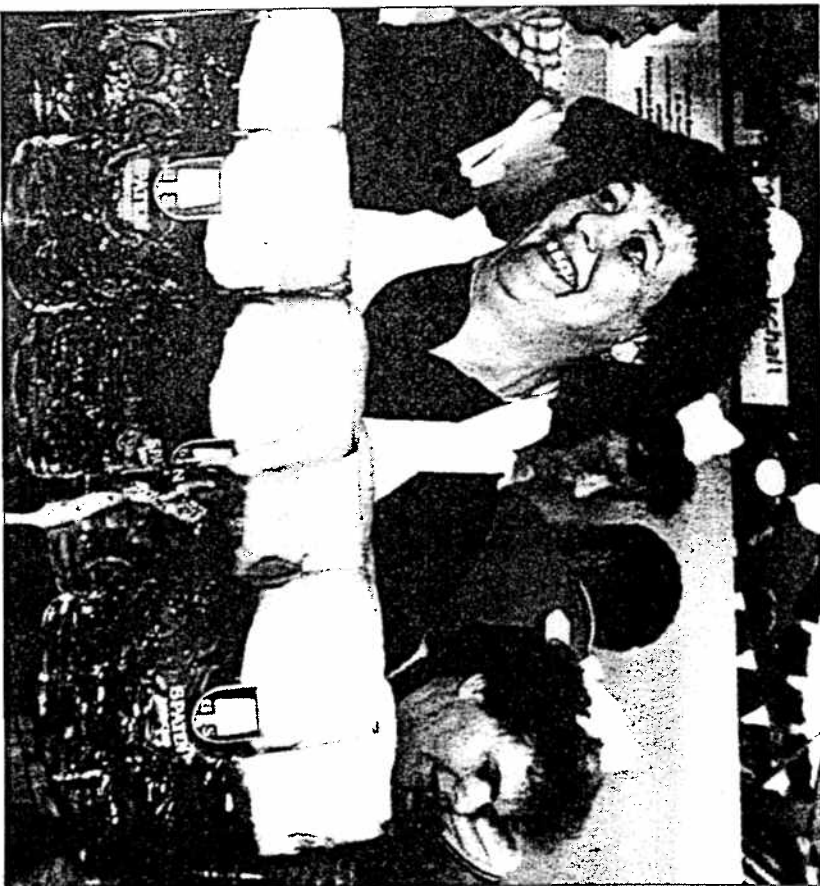
The Auer Dult, an open-air market held three times annually at Marienplatz in Munich, originated in the 14th Century. It provided out-of-town peddlers an opportunity to sell their wares for a limited period of time.

Nowadays, in addition to old-fashioned hawkers selling everything from suspenders to oils and balms guaranteed to cure everything from aching feet to nagging wyes, the Auer Dult has almost 300 wooden booths offering antiques, old prints, postcards and books in addition to woodenware, kitchen utensils, clothing and other assorted items.

Largest pottery market

It is also Europe's largest pottery market. Game booths, rides and food stalls generate a carnival atmosphere. (The third Auer Dult this year will be Oct. 20-28.)

On Corpus Christi Day (June 14), the priest and altar boys lead a procession through Bavarian villages, carrying icons from the church. Along the parade route, white and yellow church banners are hung from the houses. The



Oktoberfest, Sept. 22-Oct. 7, Munich's best-known festival, features prodigious consumption of beer.

price stops to offer a blessing at each of the decorated altars which have been set up along the way.

On the Taffelsee, a lake southwest of Munich, the procession takes place in boats, offering an impressive sight.

Stadium for jousting

For those who want to travel back in time to the Middle Ages, there's a jousting tournament and festival at a 17th Century castle in Kallenberg, just west of Munich. One can wander through a marketplace where costumed artisans demonstrate crafts using tools and techniques common to the middle ages. Professional stuntmen reenact a jousting tournament in the world's only stadium built expressly for that purpose.

Throughout the summer, almost every village celebrates at least one town festival. These consist of a

beer tent with live Bavarian music, in addition to carnival booths and rides and provide a good opportunity to see traditional Bavarian costumes, or "tracht."

When Ludwig, Crown Prince of Bavaria, was married in October of 1810, a horse race was held in honor of the young couple. The fest proved so popular that it was held every year thereafter and developed into what we know today as Oktoberfest. On opening day, the gaily-decorated, horse-drawn beer wagons of all the Munich breweries march onto the Oktoberfest grounds. Fourteen beer tents, seating a total of 100,000 guests, serve over 1.3 million gallons of beer in the 16 days of the festival, Sept. 22-Oct. 7.

In early autumn, it is time to bring the cows back down to the valley from the alpine meadows where they have been kept all

summer. In Berchtesgaden, the cows are loaded onto rafts and ferried across the Königssee. Upon arrival at the opposite shore, they are decorated with elaborate crowns of flowers in appreciation of the safe homecoming.

The day to honor St. Leonhard, the patron saint of the livestock, is Nov. 6. The most famous of the Leonhardi celebrations takes place in Bad Fölz, south of Munich. Some of the horse-drawn wagons used in this parade date back to the 18th century.

The carts, with their hand-painted motives, are decorated for the occasion with garlands of spruce boughs, colorful ribbons and fresh flowers. They carry the young girls of the village in traditional dress.

The city fathers and the priest in his gold brocade robe sit astride horses as the procession moves down the steep and narrow street

to the Leonhardi Chapel. There a mass is held and the Leonhardi blessing is given. Afterwards, celebrations can be found in the many pubs and guesthouses throughout Bad Fölz.

In December, Christkindl (Christchild) markets can be found throughout Bavaria. The most well-known of these takes place in Nuremberg and has a tradition dating back to the beginning of the 17th century.

One section of the Munich market is devoted to booths selling creches and creche figures, many of which are hand-carved. In the line of refreshments, hot sausages, lebkuchen, a steaming cup of red wine and roasted chestnuts or almonds will be sure to warm the visitor on the cold December days.

Many of the markets close each evening on a merry note with choral groups performing Christmas music.

The Bavarian year ends with a bang as the skies light up at midnight with fireworks. In the mountains surrounding Berchtesgaden, 800 men start on themselves around the mountainsides and greet the new year with a rally of cannon and rifle fire. Before the shooting stops at about 12:30, more than one ton of powder has been fired, lighting the snow-covered mountains with showers of sparks.

Lead shape tells future

Another New Year's Eve custom is *bleigessen* or pouring of lead. A small lead ball is placed on a spoon and held over a candle until the lead has melted. It is then poured quickly into a bowl of cold water, the lead forming an unusual shape as it lands in the water.

Does it resemble a broom? Then you will be surrounded by beautiful women. Or maybe it's a carousal, signifying that a rich son-in-law will come your way. A turtle on the other hand, means you have secret enemies. The time is unfavorable for an affair if a cross is discernible. A cake is a sign that you should watch your weight.

The lead pouring kit includes a list with more than 300 objects and their significance.

As soon as everyone has recovered from the New Year's celebrations, it is time to start re-dyeing the costumes for Fasching again. The party season never ends!

To obtain more information about these and other festivals and in Bavaria, contact the German National Tourist Office, 747 Third Ave., 35th floor, New York, N.Y. 10017. ●