



May Day Festivals in America, 1830 to the Present

Allison Thompson

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Starting in the early 1830s, American girls and women began to hold Old English May Day festivals, complete with maypole dances, the crowning of a May Queen, and romantic plays and pageants. These festivals accelerated in popularity after 1900 at colleges and universities across the country. An important part of the traditional college experience for many women, the celebrations played a surprisingly influential role in the Progressive reform movement. This is a thorough history that examines the creation and development of the traditional American May Day festival. It also provides an overview of May Day celebrations at 80 specific college and universities, eight of which continue to celebrate the festival annually.

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