

Dad spent some twenty-odd years as Co-Chair of the Queen's Coronation Pageant held every year at the St. Paul Auditorium. He also built the sets and decorated the Auditorium for the show. The main Chairperson was Claire Johnson, who was truly the Grand Dame of the Carnival. I remember her as a very nice lady who gave us Christmas gifts from New York. I was a little kid, what do you expect???

Celebs came from all over to do the show, which was a big deal, even outside of Minnesota! Claire was very knowledgeable and professional, not tolerating much nonsense. She chewed out one such big name who brought his ego along with him from LA. Boy, did he straighten right up! Dad didn't like him either.

But most, if not all Celebs wanted to make a good impression, especially since they were doing their TV shows LIVE from St Paul!

One such performer was Steve Allen who brought The Tonight Show with him (from NY at the time). He even brought along newcomer Carol Burnette, who was also performing in a local showing of Once Upon A Mattress, which she appeared in on Broadway. In the parade assembly area just before the Grand Day Parade began, Sheriff Hedman spotted Mr. Allen shivering in his convertible. He said to him "Cheer up! It's a beautiful, warm day!" The air temp was +1.

The carnival always included local talent in the pageants like Ice Skaters (one Queen from the South told Dad that she "sure did like that glidin' on the ice!"), The Indians Drum and Bugle Corps (national Competition Winners), even a drum majorette competition, and a local Ballet company called the Andahazy Ballet Borealis, run by the husband and wife team of Lorant (AKA Lorand) and Anna Adrianova, both of who were veterans of the world-reknown Ballet Ruse De Monte Carlo in Europe.

They created a completely new Ballet called The Snow Maiden just for the Pageant. Perhaps it was a bit too refined for a bunch of Northern Rubes, but after a couple of rude cat-calls, the audience settled in and actually enjoyed it, even giving it it's well-earned ovation. But one potential disaster was averted - Anna, the lead, was suffering from leg cramps, so every time she was offstage, Dad and Carnival Director would each take a leg and massage furiously to keep her going! Always above and beyond to put on a good show! Dad especially got a kick out of Lorant when, during rehearsals, he kept time for the dancers by pounding a big stick on the floor. Many of his dancers still recall that big stick fondly to this day.

Dad, being the floor director of the Auditorium for the parade, retained that title for the pageant as well. Everything ran smoothly under his direction.

For such a large-scale show mostly thrown together at the last minute, serious problems were rare. Except for one year (I don't recall which), the SOP was to send out press releases with the winners prior to the show, which were absolutely NOT to be announced until the show was over! Well one eager-beaver station announced it early, spoiling a wonderful night for some forty young women, who then had to go out and act nervous and excited, and let the emotions flow when the winner was officially crowned! Yep, they were all crying all right - too early! Some people got royally (pun not intended, but maybe it was? Who Knows?!?) reamed out and THAT mistake was never made again!! Children were used as official pages, and in 1961 or so, the jobs fell to John Geisler's son and Gordie's daughter. They seemed to have enjoyed it, talking about the experience for years after...

BTW - the Junior Royalty, chosen from area High Schools, were all named in the week prior to the Carnival's official start. They all rode on a float (usually White Castle) in the Grand Day Parade. The Queen's Coronation traditionally took place on the Tuesday after the Grand Day parade. Today it takes place before the official start of the Carnival so the Queen can Reign during the entire Festival.

All of that gold lame draping around the stage and balcony was put there by my Mom. She recalled trying to catch the eye of a certain Celeb singer (failed to), but later on couldn't recall who it was!!



