



Madison County Genealogical Society



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P.O. Box 1031, Norfolk, NE 68702-1031
mcgs@telebeep.com

www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nemcgs/ www.nesgs.org/~mcgs

A Wicca Wedding Ceremony

A homemade video of a Wicca wedding and Handfasting ceremony was presented.

We were invited to a wedding, the daughter of friends. The invitation was of handmade paper with flowers and leaves embedded in the paper, hand lettered, and inviting us to a wedding to be held at a Nature Center, bring your own chair, business casual attire. That seemed a bit unusual but realizing the bride is a theater major and into doing her own thing, we didn't think too much about it.

The wedding dress was sewn by the bride's mother and made her look a little like a fairy or an angel, very pretty, but non-traditional. We helped to set up and decorate the hall for the reception. The tables were covered in plain paper and crayons were placed on every table for folks to doodle and draw with. There were lots of candles, glitter and homemade flower centerpieces. Very attractive and a bit unusual. The caterer came in to set up; Chinese buffet from Hy-Vee. The wedding cake was cupcakes on a tiered plate. Everything was very beautiful if dramatic and a little out of the ordinary.

The wedding ceremony was held in the park at 4:00 (actually didn't start until 4:25) on a Sunday afternoon. There were four silk butterflies on wires stuck into the grass at the north, south, east and west points of a circle. **Continued on next page**

Then a girl, each dressed in non-traditional dresses, all different, stood at each point. The girl performing the ceremony set up a small altar in the center of the circle and placed a chalice, water, and a ribbon upon it. The bride and groom and the best man and maid of honor all took their places.

The bride's father entered the circle and asked the groom a riddle, which he had to answer (with the best man's help.) "A man builds a house. Every window faces south. A bear walks by. What color is the bear?" (Answer: white, North Pole is the only location where every direction is south.) Having passed that test the ceremony proceeded.

Each girl around the circle had a script she read from as the "Spirits of Earth and North", "Spirits of Air and East" "Spirits of Fire and South" and the "Spirits of Water and West." As each girl prepares to read her part she lights a stick of incense, holds it while reading and then sticks it into the grass. As the girls are reading, the bride picks up a basket and proceeds to make a circle connecting the girls by dropping flower petals. The parents and family of the bridal couple are asked for their approval of the marriage. The bridal couple are asked to drink from the chalice to purify themselves and then vows are recited. The bridal couple then leave the circle to distribute gifts to everyone in attendance. (The gift was a small package with 3 different kinds of herb seeds and a Cherokee Wedding Prayer in a piece of netting, all of the children got pinwheels). After a further reading by the officiate, she picks up the ribbon and proceeds to tie their hands together, "in the tradition of Celtic handfasting." Each "spirit" then asks for a blessing from that "spirit". A blessing is asked from the "Lord and Lady" and then the girls all "thank the creatures and spirits", the ribbon is untied and the wedding is over.

The entire ceremony lasted less than twenty minutes and was very interesting. If you weren't listening carefully you might well have missed part of it. Later we asked questions and then I did some research to find out just exactly what this was all about.

Wicca Tradition Basics

There are as many kinds and variations of Wicca as there are Protestant religions. Wicca is pagan. Most do not believe in God, or Jesus. The Gardnerian branch named for its founder Gerald Gardner is very much witchcraft, with spells, covens, and ranks attained through study and training. Other major kinds include Alexandrian, Reclaiming, Dianic, Eclectic and British Traditional. Eclectic is a term for Wiccans who follow no tradition and are very informal and open. Dianic is female-oriented. Reclaiming focuses on one's inner spirit and personal power, study and ritual. Wicca as practiced by this particular group of young people is actually more about living in harmony with the earth and nature. They try to live "green". Very into conservation, and not "conspicuous consumption."

Handfasting is the marriage rite used by many neo-Pagans and Wiccans. Some Christians also use parts of the handfasting ceremony if they are Celtic even if they're not pagan per se. The term comes from the custom of shaking hands over a contract. "Handfasting" refers to the hands being bound together as "tying the knot" or "the ties that bind". Other variations include "jumping the broom" found in many African and Black-American ceremonies and cutting locks of each others hair and putting them in a silver box to symbolize a future relationship as intimate as the mixing of their hairs.

In modern Pagan traditions, it may be used in the informal betrothal sense, or as a legal wedding. It traditionally refers to a trial marriage as in a year and a day, and can be renewed "so long as love shall last" or for a commitment to be together throughout this life time. This particular couple did a 3 month handfasting, then a one year and a day handfasting, and now made it legal.

Most couples married in a Wicca or handfasting ceremony wishing to make it legal must find someone with a valid license issued by the government to perform marriages. Most Christian and Jewish clergy are not willing to perform a Pagan ritual, but ministers from congregations affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association will. In this particular case, the "minister" registered with the *Universal Life Church* which has minimal requirements for ordination and thus was "legal" to marry this couple.

This type of ceremony is also used by same-sex couples for a commitment ceremony and can be modified in as many ways as you are creative.

We're not promoting this "religion" but it is out there and people need to be educated. Wicca, in fact, is recognized by the U.S. Government as a valid religion, as far as its military and prisons go.

In fact neither of the couples' parents or grandparents are Wiccan. Grandparents of the couple attended the wedding and basically did not realize that it was a pagan wedding. They were only too happy that the kids were no longer "just living together."