

# Ask the Archivist: Do You Know the Way to Floralia?

*A question for Melissa Mead, the John M. and Barbara Keil University Archivist and Rochester Collections Librarian.*

**I remember celebrations of Floralia from my days as a graduate student in English in the 1970s. Do the archives contain pictures and other information about this event? Russell Peck was a prime mover for this when I was a student—did he start this tradition?—Sara Varhus '73 (MA), '80 (PhD)**

Perhaps no encomium is more suited to Russell Peck, the John Hall Deane Professor Emeritus of Rhetoric and English Literature, than “prime mover”—for many reasons, not least among them his involvement in the spring festival Floralia.

When I asked him about his role in the event, he joked, “I invented it, and then it was canceled.”

“Come Mother of Flowers, that we may honour thee with merry games . . .” The week-long festival of the goddess Flora is described in Ovid’s *Fasti* as bridging the end of April and the beginning of May.

The first Floralia was planned for May 6, 1970. It was to coincide with Dandelion Day and intended to augment the events traditionally hosted by the fraternities—the pushcart derby, a tug-of-war, the Ugly Man on Campus contest, food, and beer—with games, music, and theater performances, described by Professor Peck in the May 5 issue of the *Campus Times* as a “day of great festivity . . . a carefree time as well as a great array of cultural events.”

That issue of the *Campus Times* was full of the carefree Floralia and Dandelion Day event schedules but also filled with more serious articles. On April 30, President Richard Nixon had announced that the Vietnam War would be expanded into Cambodia, and students around the country began to protest. On May 4, four students at Kent State were killed by National Guardsmen. At Rochester, students occupied what is now Wallis Hall.

Both Dandelion Day and Floralia were canceled. President W. Allen Wallis issued a statement urging that the day be used instead “for further intensive study, analysis, and discussion of the crisis.”

The organizers of Floralia issued a statement of their own: “The Floralia was conceived as a gesture of good will by the students and faculty to each other. . . . But the times usurp our right to celebrate. In view of the depressing and outrageous events of the past few days we feel mourning, protest, and rededication to peace are the only acceptable postures. The Floralia is thus regretfully postponed until further notice.”

Dandelion Day returned in 1971, but it was not until 1972 that the planning for Floralia came to fruition. The day’s program shows that



**FESTIVAL FOUNDING:** Designed to augment Dandelion Day, the short-lived Floralia (including a public market, above) was founded by English professor Russell Peck (above).

there was music (including Linda Tobin Kettering '73 and her Jug Band; folksingers David Youngerman '72, Ken Finkel '73, Donna Williams '75, and Mimi Franco '74); dance (The Tropical Fruit Company and Folk Dance Club); theater (Robert Berky '70 and the UR Children’s Theatre Troupe performed the “Bremontown Musicians”); a painting display (Barbara Katz Mandel '72); and bread (baked by Liz Eisenhower).

Reporting in the *Campus Times*, Darcy Brower Rudnick '74 described how the “chess club challenged the whole university” to 10-minute chess games. The YellowJackets and Women’s Ensemble sang “Do You Know the Way to San Jose” on the steps of the library, and a Public Market provided “anything from radishes to rye bread.”

Student groups, including the Women’s Caucus and the Gay Liberation Front, hosted information booths on the Eastman Quadran-

gle. The International Students’ Union “offered free wine for a right answer to an international question, [e.g.,] ‘What is the capital of Guatemala?’” A jousting contest—in which competitors stood on a board resting on two hay bales and tried to dislodge each other by swinging stuffed laundry bags—drew many entrants, while the fencing and judo clubs demonstrated more effective dueling methods.

In 1973, Floralia does not appear as a named event alongside Dandelion Day, but the spirit clearly continued, as the events included a wide variety of music, dancing, medieval one-act plays, and a hotly contested croquet rematch between the Departments of English and History.

## Need History?

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