

Notes from the Journal of the Town Society on bundling
Speed the hanging of Chicko-Puffe

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"To lie or sleep together on or in the same bed without undressing: once a practice of lovers or of engaged couples... in parts of New England and Pennsylvania." So saith A Standard Dictionary of The English Language. To occupy the same bed without undressing;... said of a man and woman especially during courtship. A custom prevailing in the less sophisticated portions of New England, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania". (So saith A Standard Dictionary of Webster's New International Dictionary). "A parlous custom practiced by Connecticut Yankees amongst whom courtships commence where ours usually finish". So saith Dedrick Knickerbocker ^{noted} chronicler of A History of New York. ~~Later~~, in an expansive mood, Mynheer Knickerbocker elaborates ^{further} ~~some what upon the~~ above.

"To this sagacious custom," he writes, "therefore do I chiefly attribute the unparalleled increase of the Yanokie or Yankee tribe; for it is a certain fact, well authenticated by court records and parish registers, that wherever the practice prevailed, there was an amazing number of sturdy brats annually born into the state without license of law or benefit of clergy. Neither did the irregularity of their birth operate in the least to their disparagement. On the contrary there grew up a long-sided, raw boned, hardy race of whoreson whalers, woodcutters, fishermen and peddlars; and strapping corn fed wenches, who by their united efforts tended marvelously toward populating those notable tracts of country called Nantucket, Piscataway, and Cape Cod."

~~The~~ good grey scholars among us will will immediately recognize the above as applying to an all but forgotten American custom known as bundling, a quaint courtship ~~practice~~ ^{custom practice} that prevailed rather widely in our native land some two hundred years ago. For the curious ~~informatio~~ researcher sniffing after facts, accurate information about bundling is diffuse and difficult to uncover. Social historians agree that bundling was widely practiced among certain strata of American colonial society yet one can ~~readily appreciate~~ ^{appreciate why} that a certain reticence

among its practitioners might well have prevented them from recording its details for posterity's sake. Then too, Kinsey was not ~~due~~ on the scene for another two and a half centuries and the colonial husbandman was much too busy eking out a precarious living to bother to record certain boudoir activities ~~which were~~ considered to be commonplace at the time. What information we do have comes largely in bits and pieces from a miscellany of sources - Letters, Diaries, personal journals, travellers reports, a few printed broadsides, a few random sermons against the practice, and surprisingly, its defense by one of two "progressive" clergymen - of which more later. A discursive monograph published in 1871 by Henry Reed Stiles entitled Bundling, Its Origin and Progress in America remains to this day a principle source of information on the subject. Stiles however relies heavily on hearsay and anecdote leading this writer to believe that much fruitful ^{field} ~~investigative~~ work ~~in the field~~ remains to be done ~~on the subject~~ if the interests of science and enlightened empiricism are to be adequately served.

From these diverse sources then there emerges the design of a novel courship custom that flourished in considerable areas of New England and Pennsylvania between 1750 and 1800. William Graham Sumner, the famous Yale anthropologist flatly states that poverty accounted for the custom although, he adds, "there was always in it an element of fun and frolic." Actually it is not difficult to comprehend how certain hard facts of the colonial's life nurtured the custom. A subsistence ~~farmer~~ ^{dwelt} farmer he ~~lived~~ for the most part in a crude one room house with perhaps a simple loft overhead. In this one room his entire family lived, ate, and slept - frequently two, three or more to a bed - and in this same room, at the proper time, an accepted suitor paid court to his marriagable daughter. Where else, in dead of winter with a wolf wind

howling at the doorway, ~~and snow drifted deep along the roads,~~ could a young couple go for that small measure of privacy so requisite to the gentle art but to bed - and, quite naturally, with as few qualms as one might suffer carving the Sunday turkey, to bed they accordingly went. To these practical considerations add the husbandman's universal penchant for frugality and one can readily appreciate the rare combination of charm and pragmatism in the following passage by Stiles:

"When on a Sabbath night, the faithful swain arrived, having perhaps walked ten or more weary miles to enjoy the company of his favorite lass, in the few brief hours which would elapse before the morning light should call him again to his homeward walk and his week of toil was it not the dictate of humanity, as well as economy, which prompted the old folks to allow the approved ~~suiter~~ and accepted suitor of their daughter to pursue his wooing under the downy coverlid of a good feather bed ... rather than to have them sit up and burn out uselessly firewood and candles, to say nothing of the risk of catching their death A' cold".

At this point the writer can visualize certain members ^{attention} of almost bursting with an obvious query. If bundling was indeed accepted as a means to a desirable end, marriage - How the deuce did a girl's family ward off the eternally undesirable alternative - Premature and unwanted pregnancy? How indeed! Solutions to that ~~universally delicate~~ ^{delicate} social problem, the way of a man with a maid remained then as now, highly personal and tentative. Parents ^{secretly} were not unaware of the risks, judged nevertheless that advantages to be gained ~~here~~ outweighed the known hazards. To this end, having done their utmost to bring a young couple together, the girl's parents paradoxically outdid themselves in contriving a variety of mechanical devices to keep the youngsters apart.

For example, to lie in bed less than partially clothed was patently against the rules of the game. One method had the girl lying under the coverlid while the boy reclined without. When the couple ~~both~~ lay between the sheets doting parents customarily placed ^{either} the famous bundling board or a well stuffed bolster the full length of the bed between them, ~~presumably~~ as a deterrent to overeager advances by either party. How often young Joshua managed to prevail over this latter day Jericho remains a matter of heated speculation but the subject understandably furnished material for countless jokes as ancient as the custom itself. In addition to or in place of board and bolster, there existed a variety of special garments and sacks into which couples could be tied, sewn or stitched individually or in pairs all familiar accoutrements in bundling communities. And yet, imaginative as these contrivances seem today they were according to social historians, of secondary importance in preventing "obstetrical irregularities. Extant mores played the major role.

~~According to~~ James G. Leyburn, a contemporary authority on frontier folkways, ^{suggests} there was in the custom as originally practiced, a pristine innocence almost incomprehensible to modern sophisticates who aggressively pursue "their own thing" in our ~~pragmatic~~ Playboy culture where in sexual matters few attitudes, holds, or liaisons are barred. Consider if you will that the custom had the tacit^s (if unpublicized) approval of a majority within the community and one begins to comprehend why little thought of immorality entered here. For morals by almost any definition include those patterns of human behaviour approved by a society's long standing traditions. Young people were well aware that their parents had practiced the same custom before them. Parents were equally aware the custom had been brought over by ~~earlier~~ immigrant ancestors from the old world where variations of the custom had long been practiced in Holland, Germany, Scotland and Wales.

Then too, in most settled communities religious habits and training tended to prevail. Social pressures supporting premarital chastity were strong persistent and largely respected by young people. Open promiscuity was not tolerated and only after the local swain became the damsel's accepted suitor did the intimacies of bundling commence. New Englanders typically went a step further in reducing the hazards. They pressed for short engagements and early marriages; a ~~tactic~~^{strategy} welcomed by most young men who were keen to begin married life. In farm homes then as now a woman was considerably more of a necessity than an adornment. Should virtue somehow splinter on the shoals of passion the child was almost certain to be born in rather than out of wedlock; all in all a not untidy arrangement of a delicate yet necessary stage in family development.

Idyllic as the above description sounds it was inevitable that bundling should suffer a decline after reaching a peak about the time of our American Revolution. Urban sophisticates had invariably sneered at the custom ~~as~~^{labeling it} one of the grosser crudities ~~typical~~ of rural life. As older rural settlements grew and prospered, communications between town and country increased and country folk became increasingly aware of the stigma attached to bundling by their ~~country~~^{city} cousins. Goaded by certain pretensions common to us all, the more socially ambitious countryman began to speak out against the time honored custom. While ~~he was~~ not quite ready for silver service he ~~had~~^{however} exchanged his wooden mug for a tankard of respectable pewter and the humble bundling board had no place in his dream of a periwigged merchant suitor for his daughter. His house too, had grown larger, fuel and tallow relatively cheaper and the natural exigencies that once provoked his own, now dimly remembered bundling experience, much less pressing.

Strange as it may seem, bundling now and then did winnow support from an occasional New England minister. One of these mavericks, the Rev. Samuel Peters stoutly opined that bundling had prevailed ~~in~~ for 160 years in New England with "ten times more chastity than sitting on a sofa... " ; that since bundling occurred only in the cold seasons of the year, "... the sofa in summer is indeed far more dangerous than the bed in winter". But alas, his was a lonely voice. Gentlemen of the cloth increasingly rallied against what they considered to be the devil's own mischief. An eyewitness describes the reaction of the Rev. Jason Haven's congregation when he preached an anti - bundling sermon before them in 1781. "The females blushed and hung their heads. The men too, hung down their heads and then looked out from under their fallen eyebrows to observe how others supported the attack..." (fallen eyebrows in this instance presumably following souls that had fallen shortly before). The great Jonathan Edwards in his final sermon at Northampton where the congregation apparently held mixed views on the subject aimed a thinly veiled Parthian shot at the custom:

"... It has been exceedingly grievous to me, when I have heard of vice, vanity and disorder among our youth. (a strangely familiar lament) I have from time to time earnestly warned you against frolicking and some other liberties commonly taken by young people in the land; and whatever some may say in justification of such liberties and customs, and may laugh at warnings against them, I now leave you my parting testimony against such ~~th~~ things." *A* *Sirhed Edwards*

Even more influential ~~in~~ ~~he~~ than clerical attacks in hastening bundling's decline was, according to Stiles, the appearance of a spate of anti bundling ballads in 1785. Published as broadsides and in ~~printed~~ popular almanacs they were widely circulated through out the

young nation. crudely composed, they contained pithy referēnces to the practice which were immediately recognizable to people who bundled. They touched off such a storm of banter and ridicule that in Stiles' own words, "Nogirl had courage to stand up against it and admit her lover to bed". But gentlemen, be yourselves judges in this matter. From the files of the American Antiquarian Society I offer you a sampling of ~~this~~ verse selected from an anonymous chez d8oeuvre, entitled A New

Bundling Song:

Some maidens say, if through the nation,
Bundling should quite go out of fashion,
Courtship would lose its sweets, and they
Could have no fun till wedding day.

It shan't be so, they rage and storm,
And country girls in clusters swarm
And fly and buzz like angry bees
And vow they'll bundle when they please.

Some mothers herein bear a sway,
And daughters joyfully obey
And young men highly pleased too
Good Lord! what can't the devil do

... And yet in truth I'm not afraid
for to describe a bundling maid
She'll sometimes say when she lies down,
She can't be cumbered with a gown,
And that the weather is so warm
To take it off can be no harm...

But she is modest, also chaste
While only bare from neck to waist
And he of boasted freedom sings
Of all above her apron strings.

And further freedoms feebly barred
I leave for others to relate
How long she'll keep her virgin state.

A bundling couple went to bed,
With all their clothes from foot to head,
That the defence might seem complete,
Each one was wrapped in a sheet -
But oh the bundling's such a witch
The man of her did catch the itch,
And so provoked was the wretch
That she of him a bastard catched.

(A) Bundling or
a taste for party

In all fairness we should note that one Israel Perkins, school-master of Connecticut, bucked the satirical tide with a single ballad in support of bundling. For the sake of balance then, herewith his valiant counter attack:

Though Adam's wife destroyed his life
In manner that was awful
Yet marriage now we all allow
To be both just and lawful

But women must be courted first
Because it is the fashion

And nowadays there are two ways
Which of the two is right
To lie between sheets sweet and clean
Or set up all the night

Let coats and gowns be laid aside
And breeches take their flight,
An honest man and woman can
lay quiet all the night.

Man don't pretend to trust a friend
To choose him sheep and cows
Much less a wife which all his life
He doth expect to house

The Sacred book says wives they took
It don't say how they courted
Whether that they in bed did lay,
Or by the fire sported.

Since bundling is not the thing
That judgments will procure
Go on young men and bundle then
But keep your bodies pure. *James*

~~Scarcely of imperishable quality verses~~ like these served their purpose. Scorched by ridicule, its aura of innocence gone, bundling as a socially sanctioned custom slowly faded from the American scene until by 1870 there remained but a few isolated pockets in rural Pennsylvania and New England - or so a passel of authorities would have us believe. Gentlemen, stay you from mourning yet a season. To all those who cherish the antient customs of our native land I bring good tidings. Undeterred by two centuries of scurrilous abuse, shrugging off ~~all pronouncements~~ ^{innumerable} obituaries, solemnly pronounced, this merry

art like John Barleycorn of old refuses to die. To the contrary it remains alive, well and flourishing - for all the writer knows but a few miles hence this very night.

Know then that one Elmer L. Smith (credentials unknown) after several years of desultory investigation published in 1961 and informal monograph which ~~tends to confirm~~ that bundling is still practiced in this country among certain groups of Old Order Amish. Castigated and preached against by Amish churchmen, the beleaguered custom stubbornly persists as often as not with the silent approval of Amish Parents who well remember having indulged in their own time.

Smith claims to have interviewed over 100 Amish informants from 11 different states. He divides the resulting information into three different categories. One - Yes the Amish bundle; Two - No the Amish don't bundle; Three - maybe the Amish bundle. ~~Eloquent testimony to the difficulty in ~~re~~ arriving at a clear cut verdict.~~ In the no camp, Grace Steinmetz, an Amish writer, contends that bundling ceased among the Amish more than 100 years ago, perhaps 50 years before it completely died out in New England. Ed Kiester discussing bundling among Pennsylvania's plain people bluntly states, "None of these beliefs is true". For the maybes Friedrich Kees reflects, "It is possible that bundling may linger on in some Amish communities although everywhere the church fathers condemn the practice". Another communicant observes that "... some people insist that it is not dead but it is doubtful if any sizeable group still practice this method of courtship".

For the yes's J.A. Hostetler who was raised by Amish parents wrote in 1952 that bundling "... still remains the accepted form of courtship in a few settlements". In 1958 a young woman who had been a member

of an Amish family in Ohio until she was 18 years of age described the practice as a Saturday and Sunday night activity. "After they have visited with the family in the parlor, the boy and girl go upstairs to bed. A bedroom in an Amish home is considered as a sort of second parlor. They remain fully clothed but they have to pull the covers up to their chins to keep warm". When asked if she had ever engaged in bundling she replied, "That's an unfair question".

A second Ohio informant reminisced, " I was an only child and had a bedroom upstairs by myself. I never knew of any other way of dating except 'going to bed'.. The boys usually took off their shirt and shoes and girls slip into a dress that is not too good. A lot of girls had their regular dating dresses they used to wear at night with their dates". Said a male informant from Indiana, "The earliest bundling knowledge was 15 years ago when I was seven. My sister had a room next door and I heard the boys come up and didn't understand. I was told that it was dating. I went into her room once to find out just what it was but was sent out of the room right away". He added, "We didn't call it bundling, but it was referred to as 'Bett Schlupfa', meaning to slip into bed". A young woman also from Indiana elaborated upon this when she insisted, "...bundling that is referred to in many books ... is different than bed courtship. Bundling is usually referred to as using sleeping bags, which to my knowledge does not exist." According to Smith, these and similar statements by others suggest that many Amish are confused over what constitutes bundling. Actually the dictionary definitions do not specify the use of a bundling bag or a bed with a dividing board. Then too there is an ambiguous quality about all such investigations among the Amish, especially so when conducted by outsiders. When asked point blank if they practiced bundling they are likely to answer " It's against our church rules"; or, "We don't have

to resort to that to get our young folks married" - Both statements are undoubtedly true but they typically fail to answer the question. When all the evidence is in one can't but conclude as Smith does, that if a majority of the Amish do not bundle, a not inconsiderable number have, at one time or another, "courted in bed".

At this juncture, in lieu of a proper closing paragraph the writer finds himself anticipating a question. Why choose for a topic an obscure, long dormant custom, practiced to a limited degree by a stubborn people who cling tenaciously to the ways of their forefathers. For society at large bundling is dead. Is the nation better served by disenterring its corpse? One might have commented more profitably on say, St. John de Crevecoeur and the American Dream. Know then that we desired to entertain rather than to instruct - To divert you momentarily from the cares of this mechanized jangling world by focusing on one small facet of a simpler age, when men were neither wiser nor better than now, but when life was perhaps fuller, more varied and infinitely less frustrating. Of such a goal Crevecoeur himself would approve, yes all five tomes of him ~~are~~ currently repose in Vanderbilt Library. If we have succeeded - well and good. ^{If we have failed} Lay it to a surfeit of Christmas and a dry time. Gentlemen, may I respectfully call to your attention that tonight at least the weather without is precisely right - and so, happy bundling to all and to all a good night.