Josslyn Ryan Nov. 6, 2018

Hist 1120

Reading Log #7

The Charivari in Pre-Confederation Canada

Allan Greer and Susan Moodie write about the charivari and its role in society. Greer’s article focuses on the shift of marital to political charivari’s, while Moodie was a witness, unfamiliar with the practice, and portrays her disbelief on the topic in a conversation with another civilian.[[1]](#footnote-1) Through Greer and Moodie’s writings, we can understand that the charivari was practiced as a punitive event to control society regarding controversial marriages, and political reforms, which, in some cases, resulted in violent mob-like behaviours.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Charivari’s were an event that demonstrated society’s beliefs on topics such as marriage, and political standing, however, it was also a way for civilians to independently control the social aspect of their communities.[[3]](#footnote-3) Greer notes that the charivari’s “functioned as a complementary form of social control”, as these events were very organized and prepared with ironic motives to bring harmony to their communities, and for the most part, didn’t involve direct violence.[[4]](#footnote-4) Political charivaris were more clear and “blunt” about their intentions to overthrow political leaders and their government, especially in rural areas; for example, in Greer’s article, an entire community in Montreal was without a government because of the fearful charivaris.[[5]](#footnote-5) “The Charivari often deters old people from making disgraceful marriages…”; Mrs. “O” in Moodie’s writings is an example of how charivaris were widely accepted, and many people, including Mrs. “O”, were in agreeance with it.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Because of the political charivaris aggressive approach, there are more cases of violent behaviour than the traditional marriage charivaris.[[7]](#footnote-7) In *Roughing it in the Bush…*, Moodie is told of a bi-racial marriage charivari that resulted in the death of a man, however, this was a rare occurrence among the event, and unless attacked, most charivaris wouldn’t initiate the violence themselves.[[8]](#footnote-8) During the late 1930’s in Lower Canada, the political charivaris became more and more violent with mob mentality, as political leaders were not only being taunted, but their homes underwent attack threatening themselves and their families, for example, Dudley Flower’s personal experience mentioned in Greer’s article.[[9]](#footnote-9) These violent charivaris may have been influenced by the preceding rebellion and revolution because of the mentality that a society could become independent from ones government.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Greer and Moodie have included personal experiences as witnesses and victims of a charivari. Their writings have enlightened us with the roles that a charivari had in controlling a community’s society through “scandalous” marriages and undesirable governments, as well as how this event eventually led to violent mob-mentality in many cases.[[11]](#footnote-11)

1. Allan Greer, “From Folklore to Revolution: Charivaris and the Lower Canadian Rebellion of 1837”, *Social History* 15, no.1 (Jan. 1990): 25-43.; Susanna Moodie, “The Charivari,” *Roughing it in the Bush, or, Life in Canada.* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose; Montreal: Dawson, 1871), 233-258. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Greer, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ibid.,* 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Moodie, 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Greer, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Greer, 33; Moodie, 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Greer, 37-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Ibid.,* 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Greer, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)