The 1941 Cobden Peach Queen and her court

Creating Community in a Midwestern Village

Fifty Years of the Cobden Peach Festival

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In 1987 the residents of Cobden, Illinois, celebrated the fiftieth annual Cobden Peach Festival. Organized in 1938 as a response to the Great Depression, the Cobden Peach Festival persists today as a vehicle for community self-definition and affirmation. The festival serves the overt function of raising money for civic improvements, but it also is an important event in the structuring of what sociologist Robert Bellah has called "a community of memory." Because the festival identifies and legitimates local elites, it reflects the significant changes that have occurred in the

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social order of Cobden and its rural hinterland in the past half century.[1]

The Peach Festival was conceived as the first major project of the Cobden Lions Club, which was organized in spring of 1938. A relatively modest affair, the first festival occupied a Saturday evening in August with games and races, sandwich and soft drink booths, judging of prize peaches, coronation of a Peach Queen, and a dance in the school gymnasium.[2]

The Cobden Peach Festival is typical of summer festivals put on by citizen volunteers in small towns throughout the country.[3] Ubiquitous but poorly documented, fairs and festivals have long been part of the repertoire of town boosters. One of the few historical analyses of such fairs was conducted by Lois W. Banner, whose study focused on California. Banner found several festivals by the 1890s and concluded that they were intended to attract settlers. The California fairs celebrated a particular aspect of the town that would make it attractive to newcomers: water carnivals in San Diego and Santa Cruz, for example, and rose festivals in Santa Rosa, San Mateo, and Tulare. Not only did the fairs promote the town to outsiders, but—as Banner observes—"all classes came together to perform a ritual of community solidarity." She concludes: "Although most festivals were organized by representatives of the community's elite and thus reinforced the hierarchical nature of American society, they gave momentary credence to the utopian hope that anyone could attain high status and public acclaim." Most of the California festivals included queens, who symbolized "enduring community values and future utopian expectations."[4]

Festivals also fulfilled the role of "homecoming." Carol Edison, in her study of two Utah homecomings, writes that those celebrations provided "an opportunity for all residents of a community, both past and present, to join together and renew their ties with family and friends . . . [and to] display and reinforce group-held values and identity." Food was a central aspect of the celebrations; in fact, she wrote, the "specific menu of special foods . . . reaffirms the origins and affiliations of the community for future generations."[5]

The Cobden Peach Festival was part of that national tradition. The persistence and proliferation of those gatherings indicate their importance in community life. Through their ritual performance, local festivals contribute to a sense of personal and social identity. In her study of an

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[1] Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Stephen M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 152–55; W. Lloyd Warner, *The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans*, Yankee City Series, Vol. 5 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 103–225.

[2] *Cobden Review*, April 29, July 22, July 29, Aug. 5, Aug. 12, 1938; author's interviews of participants.

[3] For descriptions of other festivals, homecomings, and wurstmarts in southern Illinois, see John M. Coggeshall, "Ethnic Persistence with Modification: The German-Americans of Southwestern Illinois," Anthropology Diss. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale 1984, pp. 345–46. The *Southern Illinoisan* listed fifty-nine festivals in "The Directory of Southern Illinois," published Sept. 30, 1984. See also Theodore C. Humphrey and Lin T. Humphrey, eds., *"We Gather Together": Food and Festival in American Life* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1988); Frank E. Manning, ed., *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Cultural Performance* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1983); and Edmund deS. Brunner, Gwendolyn S. Hughes, and Marjorie Patten, *American Agricultural Villages* (New York: Doran, 1927), pp. 192–98.

[4] Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Knopf, 1983), pp. 253–54; Arnold Rubin, "Anthropology and the Study of Art in Contemporary Society: The Pasadena Tournament of Roses," in *The Visual Arts, Plastic and Graphic*, ed. Justine M. Cordwell (The Hague: Mouton Pub., 1979), pp. 669–716.

[5] Edison, "Roast Beef and Pit-Barbecued Lamb: The Role of Food at Two Utah Homecoming Celebrations," in Humphrey and Humphrey, eds., pp. 137, 143; Brunner and Irving Lorge, *Rural Trends in Depression Years: A Survey of Village-centered Agricultural Communities, 1930–1936* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), p. 283.

Typically, festivals provide an opportunity for people of all ages to come together. Above is an intently watched game of skill.

Ontario, Canada, homecoming celebration, Carol Farber observed that the festivals provide "the context and the process of creating links between people in the community, as well as between the community and the wider national and cultural environment. . . . The small town summer festival is [a] key dramatic performance . . . in which official town myths and ideology are presented and represented in [various activities]."[6]

The festivals are not singular events; rather, they acquire much of their significance through annual repetition, through which many aspects of the community's history are recreated. They are important constituents of a "community of memory":

> Communities have a history—in an important sense they are constituted by their past—and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a "community of memory," one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget that past, a community is involved in retelling the story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community. These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a community of memory.[7]

Many festivals had their origins in the Great Depression as a creative response to severe economic conditions.[8] When the Cobden Lions Club organized in 1938, business was just beginning to revive. The village, with a population that had fluctuated around 1,000 since 1890, is located in the Shawnee hills in extreme southern Illinois. Since the Illinois Central built a railroad through the mid-section of the county in the 1850s, the area has been widely known for its horticulture and its

[6] Farber, "High, Healthy, and Happy: Ontario Mythology on Parade," in Manning, ed., p. 34.
[7] Bellah et al., p. 153.
[8] Brunner et al., pp. 281–83; Edison, p. 143.

orchards. The mild climate and fertile hills provided a good environment for peaches and other fruits, and the railroad provided ready access to northern, particularly Chicago, markets. During the 1920s "peach fever" struck the farmers due to strong urban demand, and the number of trees planted doubled during the decade. By the mid-1930s, however, the fruit market—along with agriculture in general—declined, and the number of farms with peach orchards fell sharply. The townships that composed the Cobden market region were seriously affected.[9]

Cobden area farmers had a long history of organizing to protect agricultural interests, including a cooperative market that persisted into the 1970s. There were businessmen's clubs and a chamber of commerce in the early decades of the century, but none of those organizations persisted. They periodically held community festivals—including a Fourth of July celebration sponsored by the Commercial Club in 1906 and a summer fair sponsored by the American Legion in 1920. Business also sponsored an elaborate float in the form of a cornucopia (the high school symbol) as an entry in area parades. Cobden leaders attempted to organize a civic improvement association in the early 1930s; despite failing, in 1935 the village board with business support undertook a WPA-funded waterworks project. That was followed in 1939 by a village sewer system.[10]

The Lions Club grew directly out of the village's failure to consolidate a businessmen's club, and was by nature somewhat more inclusive than the more narrowly defined commercial organizations. The people who formed the Lions Club had supported the waterworks and sewer projects; they were leaders in the community. Of the original thirty-one members, twenty-one were listed in a business and professional directory. Those included a bank officer, a grocer, a general merchant, a hardware and implement dealer, a fruit broker, a manufacturer of fruit crates, a lumber company manager, the funeral director, owners of plumbing and furnace shops, the cooperative shipping association manager, several oil agents, an auto dealer, a dentist, an insurance agent, and a

[9] United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Population* for 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 as cited in Jane Helen Adams, "The Transformation of Rural Social Life in Union County, Illinois, in the Twentieth Century," Anthropology Diss. University of Illinois at Urbana 1987, pp. 60, 124, 129, 372; L. M. Smith, "Trends in the Illinois Apple and Peach Industry," *Transactions of the Illinois State Horticultural Society*, 72 (1939), 431–37, and C. E. Walkington, "Experience in Producing Peaches," ibid., 74 (1940), 380–82; History Committee of the Cobden Development Program, *History of Cobden* (n.p., 1956), pp. 36–37, 40, 43–51; *Union County, Illinois* (Lawrenceville, Ill.: Suttle Print Shop, 1929), pp. 1–11; "Important Basket Industry 60 Years in Little Egypt," *Illinois Conservation*, Summer, 1946, p. 34; Illinois Central Rail Road, "Illinois Fruit Industry, The Egyptian Basin and Its Contents" (Chicago: Illinois Central Rail Road, 1867), pp. 1–8; William Henry Perrin, *History of Alexander, Union and Pulaski Counties* (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1883), pp. 341, 344; C. S. Walters, *The Illinois Veneer Container Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station, 1949); H. W. Day, "Fruit and Vegetable Marketing," *I.A.A. Annual Report, 1935*, pp. 55–59; H. W. Day, "Fruit and Vegetable Marketing," ibid., *1937*, pp. 41–46; L. L. Colvis, "Fruit and Vegetable Marketing," ibid., *1945*, pp. 61–64.

[10] Adams, "Farmer Organization and Class Formation," *Canadian Journal of Anthropology*, 5 (1986), 35–42; Adams, "The Class Bases of Nineteenth-Century Agrarian Movements: A Case from Southern Illinois," paper given at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Phoenix, Ariz., Nov., 1988 (copy in author's possession); Adams, "1870s Agrarian Activism in Union County, Illinois: Mediator Between Two Eras," paper given at American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., Nov., 1989 (copy in author's possession); Roy V. Scott, *The Agrarian Movement in Illinois, 1880–1896*, Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, Vol. 52 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962); History Committee of the Cobden Development Program, pp. 24, 36, 40, 52–53; *Cobden Review*, Nov. 27, 1936, April 17 and May 2, 1957; *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, Aug. 14, 1941, April 22, 1945, March 24, 1949, July 9, 1964.

restaurant owner. There were also representatives of the large orchards. Many of the original members were at least second-generation residents of Cobden, and many were related through marriage or descent.[11]

The Peach Festival can be seen as an attempt to create a more inclusive community. In the words of Richard Bellah: "A community attempts to be an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life and the different callings of all."[12] The Cobden community was divided along a number of lines. The fruit and vegetable industry gave rise to a distinctly class-stratified agricultural economy. Horticulture and orchards required large amounts of labor, both year-round and seasonal. Large landowners generally managed a number of farms, which were operated by tenants and/or resident day laborers. At peak periods, growers drew on migrant labor or local labor from smaller independent farm families. Forming a relatively exclusive social circle were the larger growers associated with (and frequently related to) village business people, government representatives, brokers for Chicago and other produce houses, and other professional people. That circle—which did not include most small farmers, tenants, and working people—was loosely defined through a long history of creating civic and business organizations, ranging from hunt clubs, to shipping associations, to women's clubs. Membership in that circle could be achieved through professional or business success or through marriage, but its core tended to be strongly tied to old family status. Transient members of the community—including the fruit brokers and migrant laborers who arrived with the fruit harvest—and many smaller farmers, tenants, and laborers, were not considered part of the same community as the loosely defined elite, despite sharing a common geographic space. Nor did many independent farmers associate themselves with townspeople. They saw the town as decadent, a place where sinful behavior proliferated and where a farmer was likely to be fleeced.

Some ethnic, religious, and political tensions lay just below the surface. In the latter half of the nineteenth century a number of German Catholics settled in the fertile valleys around Cobden and began intensive fruit and vegetable growing. The county was settled by Protestants, largely from the Upland South, and despite an absence of overt anti-German activity in the twentieth century (such as occurred elsewhere in the area around World War I), some strains existed along religious lines. Cobden had a strong temperance tradition, yet numbers of leading people drank in private, leading to invidious divisions. In the 1930s, the wounds of the Civil War remained alive among some leading families and also colored some community associations. The old Republican and Democratic party splits were complicated by divergent and sometimes strongly held views on the value of New Deal programs. Other sources of conflict were embedded in the fiercely competitive nature of business activity, a competition that was exacerbated by the price wars underwritten by the oil companies and large dairy and poultry companies for whom local mer-

[11] A directory of 1938 businesses is reprinted in Adams, *Cobden Peach Festival, 1938–1987* (Cobden: Union County Historical Society, 1987), pp. 30–31. See also *Cobden Review*, June 24, 1938; Billie Snead Webb, *Randleman, Rendleman, Rintelman Reunion, 1981* (Corvallis, Ore.: Private printing, 1983), p. 407; George Parks, *Reaching for Riches: Rich Family Genealogy* (Anna, Ill.: Privately printed [1980]), p. 70; George Washington Smith, *A History of Southern Illinois: A Narrative Account of Its Historical Progress, Its People, and Its Principal Interests* (Chicago: Lewis Pub. Co., 1912), II, 1122, 1192–93; History Committee of the Cobden Development Program, pp. 27, 30, 32; author's personal communications; Mary DuBois Venerable, "My Years," TS (1974), pp. 5–7, 11, copy in author's possession.

[12] Bellah et al., p. 72.

chants acted as jobbers. In short, Cobden residents had numerous issues to divide and separate them. The Peach Festival provided one vehicle for transcending those divisions through work on a project that benefited the entire community.[13]

Civic organizations had long provided an arena in which diverse, and potentially competitive or hostile, individuals could come together in a common activity and pursue a larger common interest.[14] On the overt level, the Lions Club boosted Cobden, which benefited everyone within its sphere of influence. The Lions organized the festival primarily as a fundraising affair, to help create a badly needed volunteer fire department.

In addition to that explicit purpose, the Lions Club, by bringing Cobden residents into association with each other, created a cooperative group that could pursue a larger self-interest. Through membership and mobilization of labor to mount the festival, the Lions created a closer-knit community among community leaders and contributed to breaking down barriers between village and farm. At the same time, members created an event in which many people who had not considered themselves a part of Cobden—farmers, laborers, transient brokers, and so forth—could participate as equals with townspeople. The queen contest provided a concrete recognition of equality between some farm families and leading townspeople. The first queen, Dolores Flamm, was the daughter of a major German Catholic grower. Finally, the Lions created a symbol through which Cobden could be defined to the larger public—the peach. Prize peaches, as judged by a representative of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, were either auctioned off—a bit of drama for the benefit of produce buyers—or sent to such key government officials as the President or governor. The Peach Queen also represented Cobden in the Mardi Gras parade in Cairo in 1940, the Egyptian Club of Chicago in 1941, the State Fair in 1951, and on an elaborate float at the dedication of a bridge across the Mississippi River at Cape Girardeau in 1957.[15]

Despite considerable changes through time, the Cobden Peach Festival has retained a core of characteristics. Those consistent features include sponsorship by the Lions Club, an August date (established in 1943 as the third Saturday of the month), participation by wives of Lions Club members and other volunteers in specific tasks, games of chance and skill operated by club members, and a queen contest. Additions to the basic format

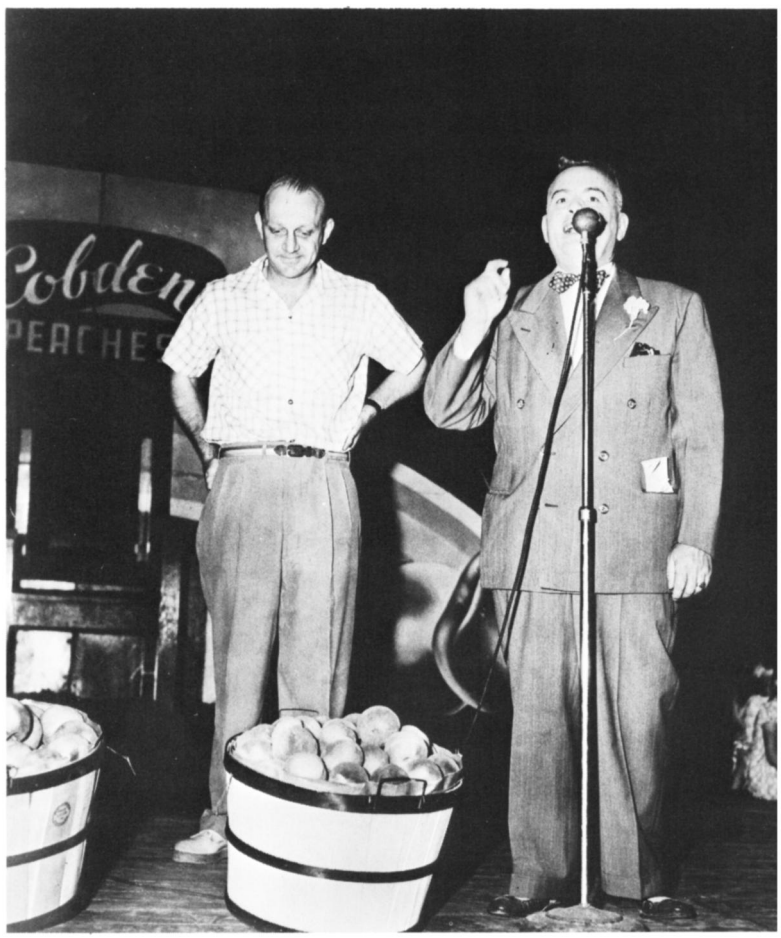
[13] Adams, "Transformation of Rural Social Life," pp. 207–12, 228–30; Judith O'Boyle, "An Analysis of the Needs and Problems of Female Migrant Farmworkers in Cobden, Illinois," M.A. Thesis Southern Illinois University at Carbondale 1978; *Cobden Review*, Aug. 22, 1947, Oct. 3, 1957, April 30, 1958, June 6 and July 18, 1968, July 15, 1971; *Union County Farm Extension Annual Report, 1937*, p. 20, ibid., *1941*, pp. 5, 9–12, ibid., *1943*, pp. 10–11, ibid., *1945*, pp. 5–6, ibid., *1946*, p. 5, copies in Union County Extension Service Files, Anna. See also Cobden Community Development Project, *Cobden's Community Cooperation Project No. 2: Analyzing Our Organizations*, p. 2, copy in Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale; Adams, "The Class Bases of Nineteenth-Century Agrarian Movements"; Adams, "1870s Agrarian Activism"; Lewis A. Atherton, "The Midwestern Country Town—Myth and Reality," *Agricultural History*, 26 (1952), 73–80; author's interviews.

[14] Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825–70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978) focuses on the role of civic organizations to crosscut potential elite conflicts. Other mechanisms volunteered in author's interviews included ideology of equality, men's practical jokes, church and lodge membership, and widely flung ties of kinship.

[15] *Cobden Review*, Aug. 19, 1938, Oct. 25, 1940, June 27, 1957; *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, July 24, 1941, Aug. 16, 1951.

appear to correlate closely with changing meanings given to the festival.

Volunteer labor is central. Early in the year the Lions Club sets up committees to attend to the many tasks required for putting on the event. Committees seem to have been established by a process of trial and error, but once established they have tended to function smoothly due to consistent membership. The Lions Club has invested some of the festival proceeds in materials for booths and displays, but, because so many members operate businesses (such as lumber yards and hardware stores), they have been able to obtain materials below full retail costs. Club members, with assistance from family members and other volunteers, build the booths and haul them out of storage each year and assemble them. The booths have become



Peach judging was a highlight of the festival. Winners were announced by the District Lions Director.

more elaborate through time, developing from open stands made of loosely assembled planks, to screened and roofed enclosures with electrical outlets capable of energizing coolers, stoves, and other appliances as well as lights.

During the early years, many of the products used by the festival were available through Lions members. Grocers donated, or contributed at reduced costs, many food items that were processed by Lions and their families into sandwiches or other snacks. Over the years, commercial distributors came to supply some of these products. Area women bring homemade slaw and potato salads and, since the 1950s, have staffed a booth selling homemade peach cobbler and cake. The Women's Club, an institution dating back to 1908, organizes the solicitation of cobblers and labor for the booth.[16]

Mobilizing and organizing volunteer labor, with the understanding that proceeds are to be returned to the community for civic improvements, draws people into close association with one another, validates the claims of community leaders, and contributes to the continued viability of a village that has been persistently under siege by larger social forces.

The queen contest is another major focus of festival activity and attention. Initially, candidates volunteered and were elected on the basis of votes sold at ten cents each by the Lions Club. Voting raised money for the club; it also implicitly limited the contest to those who had substantial financial backing. During the 1940s the contest was so popular that as many as twenty-five girls entered, leading to a series of run-off elections that conveniently increased the drama and the income.[17]

The coronation, supervised by a prominent woman, was and remains an elaborate ceremony that begins around 10 P.M. or when the food booths are nearly sold out. Very young children served as pages or flower girls, with more than a dozen youngsters sometimes participating. Although theoretically any child could take part and no child was explicitly excluded, an unwritten code defined the social group from which participants could be drawn. An elaborate stage was erected on the school grounds, and the pageant was emceed by a local businessman or, more frequently, a prominent individual from the region. The district director of the Lions Club crowned the new queen. The first queens were given a paper crown, an indication of the extreme poverty associated with the Depression, but a local jeweler soon made a more permanent headpiece, and his wife designed and sewed a flowing robe that was passed from queen to queen. The queen and top runners-up were given prizes that varied from items provided by local merchants to war or savings bonds.[18]

Beginning in the 1950s, the Peach Festival underwent significant changes. The region's fruit and vegetable economies were on the decline, young people were leaving for jobs in urban areas, and the region was becoming a "depressed area." Local businesses were feeling the pinch, and the queen contest was losing popular-

[16] The account of the structure and organization of the festival was compiled from the following sources: *Cobden Review*, 1938–1940, 1944–1945, 1947, 1950, 1956–1959; *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, 1941–1943, 1948, 1949, 1951–1955, 1960–1987; interviews of founders and subsequent organizers of the festival; and personal observation. See also Clara Bell Miller, "'Through the Looking Glass': Cobden Women's Club, 1908–1976," pp. 1–5, copy in author's possession.

[17] *Cobden Review*, Aug. 18, 1939; Aug. 9, 1940; July 24, July 31, Aug. 7, Aug. 12, 1941; July 30, Aug. 6, Aug. 13, 1942; July 29, 1943; July 21, Aug. 4, Aug. 17, Aug. 24, 1944; July 27, Aug. 3, Aug. 17, 1945; July 25, Aug. 8, Aug. 15, Aug. 22, Aug. 29, 1947; Aug. 11, Aug. 25, 1949.

[18] Ibid., Aug. 19, 1938; *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, Aug. 28, 1952; Adams, *Cobden Peach Festival*, pp. 6, 8, 9.

When the peach crop was short in 1955, a resourceful vocational agriculture teacher created a fruit and vegetable display, thus launching an annual tradition for the Peach Festival. Above, George N. Boyd shows off his 1956 produce.

ity. In 1951 the Lions announced that a new plan for selecting the queen would help local businesses. Merchants and other businesses gave tickets with purchases or money paid on accounts, with the tickets being used as votes for candidates for queen. Only seven girls sought the prize that year.[19] In 1952 voting was abandoned

[19]*Anna Gazette-Democrat*, July 26, Aug. 16, 1951. For background on the economic conditions of the region, see Adams, "Transformation of Rural Social Life"; Oliver Wendell Beimfohr, *The Industrial Potential of Southern Illinois*, Southern Illinois Series No. 1 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1954); Melvin Brooks, *The Social Problems of Migrant Farm Laborers* (Carbondale: Department of Sociology, Southern Illinois University, 1960); Cobden Community Development Committee, *Gathering the Facts About Our Population*, Developing Our Community series (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University [1956]), p. 14; Charles Colby, *Pilot Study of Southern Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957); Dwight M. Dunbar, "Technological Change in Southern Illinois Agriculture," M.A. Thesis Southern Illinois University at Carbondale 1965; Executive Committee on Southern Illinois, *Southern Illinois: Resources and Potentials of the Sixteen Southernmost Counties* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949); H. W. Day, "Fruit and Vegetable Marketing," *I.A.A. Annual Report, 1940*, pp. 52–56; William McD. Herr, *Factors Affecting the Economic Potential of Producing Tomatoes, Cucumbers, and Green Peppers in Union County, Illinois*, Agricultural Industries Publication No. 1 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1959); Melvin Levin, "The Depressed Area: A Study of Southern Illinois," M.A. Thesis University of Chicago 1965; Allen B. Paul and William T. Manley, "The Marketing System for Food, Fabulous and Dynamic," in United States Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook of Agriculture, Contours of Change* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1970), pp. 94–102. See also W. F. Lomasney, "Illinois Fruit Marketing Committee Panel," *Transactions of the Illinois State Horticultural Society . . . 1952*, pp. 132–35; Ross A. Kelly, "What Illinois Fruit Growers Should Be Considering in Marketing," ibid., *1964*, pp. 83–89; Robert M. Edwards, "Expanding Our Fruit Market Outlets," ibid., *1962*, pp. 57–59; and Richard T. Meister, "Needed, A More Aggressive Policy," ibid., *1978*, pp. 12–17.

altogether, and National Beauty Queen judging standards were used to select the winner.[20]

While the queen pageant was falling on difficult times, the Peach Festival was growing and changing. Fruit and vegetable growers, as they had done when threatened in the past, organized to try to stem the erosion of their industry. Emphasis shifted from a single focus on peaches to a variety of fruits and vegetables produced in the area. Peach judging ended in 1955; in its place was added a colorful produce display, a tradition that has been maintained to the present.[21]

In 1955, nearby Southern Illinois University instituted a number of community development projects in the region, many of which enlisted the cooperation of Cobden leaders. Organizers from the university assisted in the creation of a community development council, composed of representatives from all the civic and religious organizations in the immediate area. Under the project's stimulus, area horticulturalists organized a cooperative packing facility. Other programs included summer softball, community beautification, and, in 1958, planning for a community medical clinic. Fundraising became an even more central objective of the Peach Festival.[22]

At the urging of SIU organizers, in 1956 the Lions Club agreed to open the planning of the Peach Festival to other organizations and, with the added number of volunteers, expanded the program to two days. Although the Lions Club maintained a leading role in the festival, the Women's Club and the Junior Women's Club became lasting partners; other organizations, including the Jaycees and a women's sorority, were recruited.[23]

Under the enthusiastic leadership of a man who was never a Lion, a minstrel show was organized. Although some Lions grumbled because sales fell off precipitously during the variety show, the minstrel drew considerable amounts of money. Local young people dressed up in blackface, performed musical and dance numbers, and exchanged corny jokes taken from publications that provided recipes for those shows. The civil rights movement heightened sensitivity to such productions and made people aware that, in the words of one resident, the show was not "in good taste." The minstrel show's last performance was in 1965.[24]

When the festival was expanded in 1956, pony rides and a merry-go-round were added for the children, and in 1960 festival planners contracted with a carnival to provide rides.[25]

The changing social structure of Cobden was most clearly evident in the queen contest. In 1960 contest organizers urged organizations and businesses to sponsor the queen. That represented a shift from the prior significance of the queen contest: from acknowledging leading families to promoting individual businesses. In 1961 the contest was opened to all of Union County, and in addition to five Cobden area girls, one Anna girl entered. The Lions had decided that year to abandon National Beauty Pageant standards and

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[20] *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, Aug. 14, Aug. 28, 1952; *Cobden Review*, Jan. 12, 1956. Concerning changing beauty queen standards, see Frank Deford, *There She Is: The Life and Times of Miss America* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 16.

[21] *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, Aug. 11, 1955.

[22] Ibid., July 30, 1959, Aug. 18, 1960, Aug. 18, 1966; Adams, *Cobden Peach Festival*, pp. 25–26; *Cobden Review*, Jan. 12, Feb. 9, Feb. 16, March 22, May 3, May 17, 1956, and May 16, June 29, July 11, July 18, July 25, 1957, and March 30, May 1, June 5, 1958, and Feb. 12, 1959. See also Community Development Reports, Morris Library.

[23] *Cobden Review*, April 24, July 12, July 19, July 26, Aug. 2, Aug. 9, 1956.

[24] Oral recollections of participants, including Charles Thomas, Allie Jane Davis, Liz Thompson, and others.

[25] *Cobden Review*, Aug. 7, 1958; records of the Lions Club for 1958 and 1962 in author's possession; *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, Aug. 18, 1960.

return to vote sales. Participation fell off sharply over the next three years, with only two girls entering the contest each year. Judging was reinstituted in 1965, and businesses were aggressively solicited to enter candidates. Nine Cobden businesses and one from Anna complied. Not until 1973 was the contest successfully opened to the entire county, despite more-or-less energetic attempts by the organizers to recruit candidates from outside the Cobden area. That decade can be seen as one in which the leadership elements of the village tried to tap a broader base of support and to create a more inclusive definition of the Peach Festival and, thereby, the community.[26]

Fundraising for civic activities, particularly the medical clinic, the fire department, and the school, continued to be paramount, and certain expensive activities like paid entertainment were dropped. After the initial flush of enthusiasm generated by community development projects, most work reverted to the Lions, although the Women's Club continued to have major responsibility for the Peaches 'N Cream stand. Women still volunteered for administering the queen pageant, and high school students helped out in exchange for contributions to school projects. As with the Lions, the Women's Club donated their portion of the earnings to worthy civic and educational activities.[27]

By 1970 the village population had begun to rebound. War on Poverty and Great Society programs were pumping federal dollars into rural areas, which provided social services and upgraded the infrastructure. Southern Illinois University had, by the mid-1960s, become a major university and employer, and a number of industries had been attracted to the region under the stimulus of government incentives. New high-speed roads, while bypassing Cobden and assuring that it would not regain its commercial importance, provided access to these new job opportunities. More young people from the Cobden area were able to stay than in previous decades, and the village and surrounding scenic countryside were attracting "exurbanites" who, for the most part, commuted to Carbondale or other larger towns.[28]

The shift from a commercial and manufacturing center to a bedroom community was indicated in the membership of the Lions Club itself. Several key members, by the 1980s, worked outside of Cobden. The Lions continued to be a major vehicle for integrating newcomers into the community through participation in civic improvement projects.[29]

Tourism has been introduced as a form of economic development. In the 1980s, the state funded campaigns to promote local attractions. The Peach Festival has not been immune to that development,

[26] *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, July 28, 1960, Aug. 18, June 15, 1961, Aug. 16, 1962, Aug. 15, 1963, Aug. 27, 1964, July 22, Aug. 5, Aug. 12, 1965, Peach Festival Supplement, Aug. 16, 1973.

[27] *Cobden Review*, July 16, 1957, July 24, Aug. 7, 1958; oral recollections of participants.

[28] Illinois Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Measurements Division, *Sources of Personal Income, Union County, Illinois, 1969–1984* (compiled by Roger Beck from tape at Rural Development Center, Southern Illinois University); Kenneth M. Johnson, *The Impact of Population Change on Business Activity in Rural America* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985); Richard Kurin, *The Development and Decline of Southern Illinois Communities, 1960 to 1980* (Carbondale: Office of Regional Research and Service, Southern Illinois University, 1984); Southern Five Regional Planning and Development Commission, *Industrial Guide for the Counties of Alexander, Johnson, Massac, Pulaski, Union* (n.p., n.d.); Southern Illinois University, Office of Regional Research and Services, "SIU-C Earnings Summary for Employees Living in Southern Illinois (Including Student Wages) by County of Residence" (1984); J. C. van Es and Michael Bowling, "Age-Related Migration in Illinois Counties," *Illinois Business Review*, July, 1979, pp. 6–8; John M. Wardwell, "The Reversal of Nonmetropolitan Migration Loss," in *Rural Society in the U.S.: Issues for the 1980s*, ed. by Don A. Dillman and Daryl J. Hobbs (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), pp. 23–33.

[29] Author's communication with members.

and although the festival remains largely a local event, it is increasingly promoted in the regional newspaper based in Carbondale.[30]

In 1982 the Cobden American Legion Post introduced a parade on Saturday afternoon, which has become a regular part of the Peach Festival weekend. There is no formal organizational link between the parade and the festival, although there is some overlap in membership in the respective organizations. The 1987 festival celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with a large parade featuring antique cars carrying many former Peach Queens, as well as marching grade and high school bands, the Shriners, and the fire department. The Union County Historical Society and the privately owned Cobden Museum, which have set up displays of Cobden history and memorabilia since 1984, published a history of the festival, and resurrected a 1939 promotional film of Cobden. Those displays have provided an additional opportunity for people to reminisce and reinforce their shared traditions.[31]

The Peach Festival is an important carrier of Cobden's traditions, both explicitly and implicitly. By its annual replication of activities and by bringing people into association with one another through a routinized yet exceptional activity, the festival provides an arena for Cobden area residents to constitute themselves as a people with a history and a tradition. As such, it is a key component in making the village and its hinterland a community. The festival serves as a homecoming and a time of class reunions. It provides a context for retelling anecdotes about prior years, not only recalling them to memory but transmitting them to children and to new members of the community.

The Cobden Peach Festival can be seen, then, to have adapted to changing social conditions while retaining a key ritual function of structuring a "community of memory" for residents of the Cobden area. As the local class structure has been simplified and become more impersonal, and as economic and political processes have become more centralized, the purpose of the festival has changed. The celebration of local elites has virtually disappeared, while the importance of generating funds for needed community services has increased. Throughout its lengthy history, the Peach Festival has remained an event at which people could renew old friendships, celebrate homecomings, and reaffirm that Cobden is a community with a history and an identity.

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[30] *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, Aug. 5, 1982; "Directory of Southern Illinois"; *Southern Illinoisan*, Aug. 19, Aug. 21, Aug. 22, 1983.

[31] *Anna Gazette-Democrat*, Aug. 5, 1982; Adams, *Cobden Peach Festival*, p. 20.