

News of the arts

Warm spirits at carnival time

Despite the cold weather, Canadians do not hibernate in winter, when carnivals, the scene of festivities and outdoor events, are a common occurrence from one end of the country to the other. They give Canadians an opportunity to relax and enjoy themselves. Sometimes they feature a return to the old days, allowing people to spend a few days living as their grandparents did. Some of the larger winter carnivals attract large numbers of visitors each year, which creates an atmosphere of brotherhood and understanding. Whether they be large or small, well-known or obscure, and whether they are held in the polar climate of the North or the milder weather of British Columbia, carnivals provide a welcome break in a winter which is just a little long.

The Voyageur Festival and the Trappers' Festival in Manitoba, Ontario's Muskoka Carnival, the Quebec City Carnival and the Chicoutimi Carnival in Quebec, and Nova Scotia's Dartmouth Carnival are six which take place this month and are only a few of the many carnivals that are held in towns, villages and even neighbourhoods and schools.

Manitoba

The Voyageur Festival in St. Boniface is one of western Canada's biggest carnivals. The event is held in honour of the hunters, trappers, traders and adventurers who, in the early years of the colonization of the West, learned to survive by living as the Indians did. Among the main activities are international minor hockey games, the Canadian National Sled Dog Classic (dog-sled racing) and ice-sculpture and beard-growing competitions. The principal attraction is a snowshoe race with hundreds of participants in colourful costumes. And to take away the chill, nothing can compare with a bowl of pea soup and a piece of delicious *tourtière* available at the trading posts, along with French-Canadian music and folk dancing. The festival is highlighted by fireworks and a torchlight parade.

At the Trappers' Festival, which is held in The Pas, another Manitoba town, candidates for the title of King of the Trappers must be expert in the art of setting traps and must be able to travel long distances on snowshoes carrying heavy loads on their backs. The hardest competitors take part in a sled race on a

168-kilometre track of frozen snow.

During the five days of carnival, the people of the town wear picturesque winter clothing made of deerskin decorated with pearls. Along with the numerous visitors, they attend the squaw-wrestling, goose-calling, violin-playing and jig-dancing contests, and the most exciting

event of all, the hunt for the mythical ice-worm. After all these activities, the pancake breakfast is a welcome event. The festival finishes with the crowning of the Fur Queen of the North.

Muskoka

The carnival in the Muskoka region brings

a note of excitement to Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Huntsville, towns located 160 kilometres or so north of Toronto. The numerous outdoor competitions include a bed race in which five-person teams must push a bed over a distance of eight kilometres, broomball, hockey, bowling and, for the hardest of the hardy,

the "polar bear" swim.

Quebec

Who has not heard of the Quebec Carnival and Bonhomme Carnaval, the world's only talking snowman? The ice palace in Quebec City is the centre of attraction. The main activities include the "pee wee"

hockey tournament (for 11- and 12-year-olds), canoe races through the ice floes of the St. Lawrence and two street parades. This year a series of three coins was issued bearing the effigy of Bonhomme Carnaval and having the same face value as a Canadian dollar. The "carnival dollar" was guaranteed by the City of Quebec and could be used as legal tender in all business transactions made in Quebec City up to February 17.

Merrymaking goes on day and night in the snow-covered streets of old Quebec City. Arm in arm, friends and strangers sing and dance around the ice monuments made for the carnival. The carnival song is heard everywhere. And to get warmed up, a little shot of "caribou"* helps a lot.

Chicoutimi

Still in Quebec, the carnival organized by Chicoutimi this year harked back in time to the founding by Mr. and Mrs. Alexis Simard of Grande-Baie, a small municipality a few kilometres downstream from Chicoutimi. Throughout the carnival a couple from Grande-Baie played the part of the founders of the village. As in other years, the inhabitants dressed in period costumes and mingled with visitors attending the numerous events, among them the auction sale and the "nag race", in which old horses compete against one another.

In the restaurants, waiters and waitresses in old-time costumes served the type of food that was eaten 100 years ago. Cracklings, pork and beans and other slowly simmered dishes were available. Fireworks and bonfires on the bank of the Saguenay added a note of gaiety and colour to the celebrations. A little "caribou" is also welcome at the Chicoutimi Carnival.

Dartmouth

Dartmouth's carnival, the oldest east of Quebec City, begins with a beauty contest and the crowning of the queen. Among its activities are the junior hockey tournament, archery contests, swimming competitions, ice-sculpture, a firearms exhibition, square dancing and folk dancing.

The 1978 winter carnival period is over now, leaving only happy memories, but Canadians are already looking forward to next year's carnivals.

*"Caribou" recipe: Combine equal parts of good quality sherry and 94-proof alcohol with a dash of liqueur.

