

Original bridal bouquets were not bouquets at all. The ancient Greeks used crowns made of laurel. The Romans continued the use of laurel, chosen because of its association with Aphrodite (the goddess of love), but they draped laurel wreaths around their necks.

The earliest flowers used in bridal bouquets appear to be orange blossoms. The association originated in China, where the blossoms were a symbol of fruitfulness, and migrated west.

The use of orange blossoms for bridal ceremonies spread throughout the Middle East and was brought into Medieval Europe by the crusaders. At that time orange blossoms were only available to the wealthy. Less affluent medieval brides wore crowns made up of laced wild flowers including fragrant myrtle. Medieval bridal bouquets were made up of herbs such as garlic, rosemary, dill and spices that were believed to ward off evil spirits. The herbs and spices were cut up and sprinkled on the food eaten to celebrate the wedding.

Elizabethan brides continued the herbal tradition carrying twigs of rosemary that at the time signified happiness. Their Scottish counterparts used ivy (wedded love), thistle (austerity) and heather (good luck), indicating a rather more practical approach to marriage.

Orange blossoms were still used in bridal bouquets and the custom grew in popularity as they became less expensive. Their use spread until it was common among 19th century American brides. The daughter-in-law of President John Quincy Adams used orange blossoms to adorn both her veil and wedding dress for her 1828 wedding.

What all the early bridal adornments had in common, besides the availability of fresh floral materials, was that they were



Some, called shower bouquets, were long trailing affairs that incorporated ivy and other vines with masses of ribbons that might reach the hem of the bride's dress or even the floor. Another dramatic style bouquet in the post-Victorian era was inspired by floral tributes to the actress Sarah Bernhardt.

"The Bernhardt" included both a sheaf bouquet, carried in the crook of the bride's arm, and a sleeve bouquet tied to the bride's arm with satin ribbons.

The style of bridal bouquets changed with the advent of the first world war. They became rounder and smaller than their luxurious Edwardian sisters. The use of smaller bouquets continued after the war although larger shower or sheaf bouquets were not completely abandoned.

During the second world war, with little time to plan most weddings and a clothing shortage, many brides wore suits rather than wedding dresses. Flower shortages led to corsages replacing many bouquets. Bridal corsages were worn on the wrist or left shoulder (close to the heart). One bridal bouquet epitomized wartime shortages. "The Ballerina Bouquet" was composed mostly of tulle with some baby's breath and a few flowers, perhaps two or three roses.

Affluent wartime brides whose weddings took place in the daytime often carried bouquets composed of colored chrysanthemums. For formal evening weddings the bridal bouquet of choice was one composed of huge white chrysanthemums.

Large bridal bouquets made a comeback in the 1950s encouraged by high society brides such as Jacqueline Bouvier, who carried a large spray of pink orchids and creamy gardenias at her wedding to Jack Kennedy in 1953.

This was just about the time that St. Simons Island floral designer Edward Armstrong was beginning his floral education, starting at the age of four, in the Lyons garden of his great-grandmother, Maybel Pughsley. Armstrong followed her through the gardens watching her not

symbols of cultural norms related to the wedding ceremony and the meaning of marriage.

The apogee of cultural symbolism and its effect on bridal bouquets was reached in the Victorian era. Victorian bridal bouquets were generally small and round in shape and were commonly referred to as posies. Bridal flowers carried messages based on a language of flowers that originated in Turkey in the 17th century and was an English fad by the end of the 19th century. A bouquet made up of red roses (love), freesia (trust) and fern (sincerity) carried the message from the groom that, "I sincerely love and trust you." Altering a single flower could change the emotional tenor of the message. Substituting a coral for a red rose changed the groom's message to the bride to, "I love and desire you" (as coral roses symbolized passion). Other bridal bouquets spelled out the groom's name using the first letter of each flower. The name Bill, for instance, could be made up of baby's breath, irises, lemon leaves and lilies.

Some Victorian bridal bouquets added a single marigold as the flower, which was thought to put brides "in the mood for love." Sprigs of ivy or myrtle were also included in bridal bouquets and were saved and planted in the bride's garden so she could give her daughter a sprig for her wedding bouquet. Princess Diana had such a sprig in her wedding bouquet. Queen Victoria herself is said to have started the custom of all white wedding bouquets; hers was composed of snowdrops, Prince Albert's favorite flower.

Styles changed drastically after the death of Queen Victoria and the ascension of her son Edward to the throne. Imitating fashion, bridal bouquets in the Edwardian period were more elegant and sumptuous.

At left, "Marsh Bridal Bouquet"

A traditionally shaped bouquet inspired by the Marshes of Glynn. The bouquet is composed of palmetto leaf, tillandsia (Spanish moss), marsh flowers, marsh grass and a beach shell.