

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

## FEIERTAGE UND FESTE IM MAI SITTEN UND GEBRÄUCHE MAIBAUM

### May pole: der Maibaum, die Maibäume



Detail of Bavarian maypole with symbols of different trades.



Men in Upper Bavaria raise a maypole the traditional way—by hand.



A colorfully decorated maypole blows in the wind at this May Festival in the Eifel region.

#### Maypoles and Wreaths

If you travel to Germany in the month of May, you may notice poles decorated with colorful ribbons, wreaths or guild crests. They are what are known as maypoles, which can be either large poles located on the village square or, often, smaller ones located near private homes. They are almost always made from birch wood, but, for the taller ones, spruce is also used. In some regions, the villagers gather and sing and dance under the large maypole or weave the ribbons fastened at the top into a pattern.

The local associations are in charge of erecting and decorating maypoles. The small poles placed out near private homes are erected by young townsmen in honor of an unmarried girl living there. She can be the girlfriend, fiancé, or beloved of the young man, or she can be a girl whom he won only for the month of May at an “auction” held by the village bachelors’ club. In some regions, the maypoles must be guarded to prevent them from being stolen by the young men of the neighboring villages. Some bachelors’ clubs set rules for the couples which they must observe in the period between the auction and the May festival. If the rules are broken, a penalty must be paid.

The auctioning of the May brides takes place during Mardi Gras or the Easter season. The custom is widespread primarily in the Rhine region and has been practiced there since 1500. The bachelors can bid on any unmarried girl of the village whose name has been called out at the auction. The one who submits the highest bid for a girl becomes the May king. The auctioned girl becomes his queen. The two are promenaded through the village in a festive parade on May 1 or Pentecost.

In other regions, the May king and queen are selected by other means. In Bavaria, the young men climb the maypole, which has been polished and sometimes covered with soap, in what is called the “maypole scramble.” Whoever reaches the highest point is elected May king and may select his queen.