

Toss that History Around

Where *did* that *garter* come from?

Meghan Lawlor | Meghan Lawlor Collections

If you ever really look at the things involved in a wedding, you will notice that there are many traditions. One tradition still holding strong through the ages is the tossing of the garter. During the reception, the groom removes the garter from his new wife's thigh (usually with a silly dance and his teeth) and tosses to the eligible bachelors at the reception.

The meaning behind it is to start another union with the single lady who catches the bouquet.

Tossing of the garter is nothing new; in fact, it is a very old, surviving tradition. In the beginning, the garter was used to hold up the bride's stockings—soon morphing into the symbol of fertility. It also signified consummation of the new marriage, a symbol that was highly sought after during the fourteenth century.

After a marriage, friends and family of the couple would accompany them to the marriage bed. This custom began as a privilege with a purpose. The entourage saw to it that the newlyweds made it to the marriage bed safely. The gang took the garter from the bride as a confirmation that she and the groom had consummated their marriage.

In the beginning, the crowd would leave after retrieving the garter, but it soon turned into a "ring toss" type of game. The garter became the ring and the groom's nose was the peg. The object was to land the garter on the groom's nose. Whoever did it successfully was said to be the next to be married.

As the practice of escorting the newlyweds to bed progressed, so did the garter tossing game.

At this time guests would try to grab the garter before others, thinking it was a sign of good luck. Many were too eager to get under the bride's dress. To avoid the mob fighting for this coveted prize, the groom would remove the garter and throw it to the crowd, so his new wife would not be trampled or injured. The man who made that lucky catch would wear it on his hat, until he found the girl he would chose to give it to.

Later in the nineteenth century, the guests would rush to the bridal bed after the ceremony. The first to reach the bride got the privilege of removing the garter, after which he would place the garter on the knee of his love to protect against unfaithfulness.

The tossing of the garter is still in practice today. The bride wears the garter on her right leg and her new husband removes it to much fanfare and hilarity. There are two ways to wear a garter, a single band or a band with a tosser. The significance of the tossing of the garter has lead many brides to wear two, one band to toss and one to hold as a keepsake.

There are many different styles of garters and garters can be customized in any color, size, and shape. Still, no matter what the bride's garter looks like, it still is said to bring luck (and marriage) to whoever can catch it. Good luck gentlemen!

