

# WINTER CARNIVAL IN A WESTERN TOWN

*Identity, Change, and the Good of the Community*

LISA GABBERT

# Winter Carnival in a Western Town

Identity, Change, and the Good of the Community

Lisa Gabbert

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Ritual, Festival, and Celebration

A series edited by  
Jack Santino

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## Sculpting Relationships

### *Aesthetics, Citizenship, and Belonging in Winter Carnival Art*

*I think in any town with six months of winter you can go a little nuts. . . . That's the whole idea of the carnival is something to do in the middle of winter, to keep you from going stir crazy.*

Karen Morris, sculptor

SNOW SCULPTURES WERE A PRIMARY ATTRACTION of Winter Carnival and constituted the area's most visible and developed form of public art. Two separate kinds of snow-sculpting events took place: the local competition and the Idaho State Snow-Sculpting Championship, both of which were formal competitions where sculptures were judged and winners were chosen. The local event was the older of the two. It began with the revival of Winter Carnival in 1965. The Idaho championship was a more formally regulated event that led to integration into higher levels; winners could go on to participate in national and international competitions. It was added to the program in 1987.

If the organization and production of Winter Carnival questioned and complicated local notions of community by generating positive feelings as well as conflict, then the local and state sculpting competitions constructed community in other ways. Each event articulated notions of citizenship and belonging but at different scales, in different ways, and for different audiences. The local competition occurred outside of the official framework of the festival. It was framed as both local and amateur, and was oriented toward local people as the audience. The sculptures in the local competition relied on imagination and fantasy, connecting the local community

to national and mythological spheres, but the sculptures' primary context of use lay in their making (Malinowski 1923). In other words, the most important aspect of these sculptures was not the final product but the process of constructing them. The Idaho State Snow-Sculpting Championship was framed as professional and geared toward outside audiences. It followed national regulations and was embedded entirely within the festival structure, situating McCall as a cosmopolitan part of a wider realm. Differences in the organization, structure, and production of each event led to aesthetic and stylistic differences, different audiences, and different frames of reference.

## Part I: The Local Snow-Sculpting Competition

### Classifying Local Sculptures

People began constructing snow sculptures for Winter Carnival in 1965. It is likely that more than fifteen hundred snow sculptures were built between 1965 and 2009.<sup>1</sup> Pictures of some of them appeared annually in the newspaper; others could be found in the historical files at the public library. The chamber once had a small archive of photographs stored in a shoebox, and pictures of snow sculptures were preserved in private albums as well. The sculptures when viewed collectively over time present an array of images that offer a variety of angles, viewpoints, and perspectives on the construction of communal identity. Residents created a collective imaginary of their village that certainly exhibited variation, yet at the same time constituted a remarkably consistent set of images found not only in the snow-sculpture competition but also many other festive events. These images constructed overt ties to national and popular culture and mythological realms, and made extensive references to children, playfulness, the imagination, leisure, and sport.

To better understand the ways local sculptures represented identity, it is useful to describe some general classifications into which many snow sculptures fell. It is important to note that Winter Carnival usually had a theme. The theme influenced the kind of sculptures people built in the local competition because pieces were judged partially on whether they articulated it. One of the earliest carnival themes, for example, was "Winter Wonderland." Another popular one used frequently in the 1970s and 1980s

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1 The number of sculptures varies from year to year but ranges from as few as twenty-five to about fifty. Thirty to forty sculptures seemed to be most common number constructed. This estimate is based on an average of thirty-five sculptures per year.



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 7. Sculpture by Shore Lodge, 1965.

was “Fantasies in Ice.” More recent themes included “Childhood Fantasies” (2001), “Wonders of the World” (2007), “Wild, Wild West” (2008), and, returning to an earlier theme, “Fantasies in Ice” (2009).

Mythological monsters and beasts drawn from both legendary oral tradition and the mass media constituted one prominent category. An early example was a painted, red Pegasus that was constructed in 1965 (gallery fig. R). That same year the Shore Lodge sculpted King Neptune on a dais surrounded by mermaids (fig. 7), a creation that remained vivid in the memory of many residents. Bigfoot pieces were also sculpted. One year a sculpture of Godzilla emerged from the lakeshore to attack a city skyline (fig. 8) and there was a sculpture of King Kong, constructed in 1994. The most popular legendary beast was Sharlie, the local lake monster, said to inhabit Payette Lake. Most residents knew who or what Sharlie was, and many had a friend or family member who claimed to have sighted something mysterious, albeit frequently under dubious circumstances (see chapter five). Sharlie sculptures appeared frequently enough to become a discernable *type*, a recognizable



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 8. Godzilla, 1995.

form with variation.<sup>2</sup> The earliest Sharlie sculpture was the high school's 1965 creation (fig. 9), which was painted green and won a prize, and Sharlie has been sculpted nearly every year since. These sculptures articulated a common idea of what Sharlie looked like. Sharlie was serpentine or dragonlike and often had humps, fins, or spikes along the back (gallery fig. A). A number of sculptures were also Sharlie-like in appearance, such as dragons and dinosaurs. Although they were not literally Sharlie sculptures, their appearance was similar enough that they evoked the local monster in many people's minds. No matter what the theme, Sharlie was made to fit.

Pieces that drew from children's literature and children's popular culture constituted a second prominent sculpture category (fig. 10). Children were foregrounded throughout Winter Carnival. They were used to signify the event as family friendly and to signify locality. Children are associated in certain forms of folk art (such as yard art) with playfulness and the imagination (Thomas 2003), and so children's themes fit together nicely with the sculptures evoking myth and legend. The Krahn's, for example, a local snow-sculpting team with whom I worked extensively, purposefully constructed playful sculptures that appealed to children, and their pieces often referenced

2 The notion of type is drawn from international folktale scholarship. See Stith Thompson's revision of Antti Aarne's classification system, *The Types of the Folktale* (1961).



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 9. The first sculpture of Sharlie was made in 1965 by area high school students and painted green.

children's popular culture. Hence, in the local competition there were many sculptures that tapped into literature associated with children or youth. Scenes from *Alice in Wonderland*, for example, were popular in the 1970s; one undated photograph showed a sculpture of Alice standing in front of the Cheshire cat, who was lying on a mushroom smoking a hookah. The Grand Prize winner for 1998 was a scene from *Where's Waldo* (gallery fig. B), and the 2000 winner was a rendition of *Where the Wild Things Are*, featuring Max riding a monster in the wild rumpus, both of which were made by the same team. Dr. Seuss books, such as *Horton Hears a Who* (gallery fig. D), were sources of inspiration as well as scenes from *The Wizard of Oz*. Characters from the comic strip "Peanuts," particularly Snoopy, as well as *Sesame Street* figures and Warner Brothers cartoon characters such as Bugs Bunny and Yosemite Sam all were popular. Disney's influence was apparent in sculptures of Mickey Mouse and in scenes from *Peter Pan*, *Fantasia*, *Donald Duck*, and *Bambi*. Aladdin, Jack and Jill, Mother Goose, Humpty Dumpty, Rip van Winkle, and the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe appeared as well, illustrating the influence of children's nursery rhymes (fig. 11). Other children's pop-culture figures included Darth Vader, Darth Maul, and Batman, and characters from Harry Potter, such as Hedwig and the Sorting Hat, among many others.

Few fairies or princesses were constructed, but ice castles were common. The construction of ice castles or palaces has been popular in North



Fig. 10. Mr. Magoo, ca. 1973.



Fig. 11. The old woman in the shoe sculpture by Shore Lodge, 1969.

Photos courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

American winter carnivals since the nineteenth century. The idea of building ice castles was apparently borrowed from eighteenth-century Russia, and they were constructed in Québec for entertainment in the 1860s, for winter carnivals in the 1880s in Montreal, and in St. Paul, Minnesota, more recently (Abbott 1988, 184; M. Harris 2003). Ice castles also call to mind the traditional fairy tales of Russia and parts of Scandinavia, and so too suggest fantasy and the imagination. Today people pay large sums of money to sleep in the grandiose *Hôtel de Glace*, an ice hotel built annually outside of Québec. In the initial years of the revived McCall Winter Carnival, chamber organizers built the city sculpture that functioned as the ice stage for activities and was often in the shape of an ice castle (fig. 12). This ice castle/stage was sometimes located in Art Roberts Park directly overlooking Payette Lake. All stages had snow steps leading up to a snow platform, which was used for performances and nonsporting competitions. A Snow Queen contest (no longer held) originally took place there as well as musical performances and emceed events. Due to insurance and fire regulations, the Winter Carnival stage was no longer made of snow and ice during my research period but had become a regular performance platform.

Sculptures also commonly drew on romanticized western themes and images that mythologized frontier settlement. In his examination of the development of *Turtle Days*, a community festival in Indiana, John Gutowski aptly illustrates “how a local community expresses its participation in a national



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 12. Ice castles frequently served as the stage for opening ceremonies, ca. 1988.

culture through its folklore and how its own local collective representations depend upon nationally constituted symbolic values” (1998, 63). National culture exemplified in western settlement was also important in McCall’s sculptures. Myths of the West as a Garden of Eden and an empty landscape where settlers could hammer out an authentic democratic society are more ideology than reality (e.g., Kolodny 1984), but such images resonated in the minds of some people. For many local people, settlement history was not the distant past but their family’s story. People’s parents and grandparents homesteaded in Idaho, and they identified strongly with nationalistic images of the frontier West because these were also local and personal. At the same time, mythologizing frontier history as a way of promoting tourism is common to resort areas throughout the West. Highly stylized and commodified Old West themes are found in gambling casinos in Reno (Barber 2003) and in the marketing of Jackson Hole (Culver 2003) and Steamboat Springs (Coleman 2004).

This intersection of local settlement history, the national imagination, and an already-existing tourist theme played out in the sculptures in the

form of cowboys with hats and rifles as well as sculptures of horses and bucking broncos. There were also log cabins, wagon trains, and sculptures of local explorers and fur trappers such as François Payette. A number of sculptures depicted technology during the Age of Expansion. Trains were the most popular. One sculpture was titled “Casey Jones,” a reference to the Illinois Central Railroad engineer who was immortalized in a popular ballad as a folk hero after he was killed trying to save his passengers from a collision in 1900. Other sculptures showed trains loaded with lumber or emerging from mountain tunnels, celebrating both the logging and mining histories of the area. “The Little Engine That Could” piece melded trains and children’s culture and was sculpted in 1996. Cars were common. The winning sculpture in 2005, for example, showed a Model T stuck in the snow, illustrating the difficulties of living in remote areas in the past.

Native Americans were a popular sculpting subject that also tied into the general category of romantic western images (fig. 13). Chief Joseph passed near the region as he made his way toward Canada in an attempt to save his band of Nez Perce, and the Mountain Shoshone occupied the interior portion of Valley County. Few Native peoples live in the area today; most were forcibly removed to the Lemhi and Fort Hall Reservations during the wars of the 1870s (Reddy 1995), although recollections by Anglo residents of Nez Perce coming to the area to fish exist in the oral history files in the library. Native Americans remain prominent in national, local, and tourist imaginations of the West, and so they appeared in conventional forms in the sculptures. There were totem poles, for example, as well as busts of Native American figures, often in full headdresses. There was a teepee village and a sculpture of an Indian-head coin that dated from the 1970s. One undated photograph showed a sculpture of the encounter between Pocahontas and Captain Smith, illustrating links between Native Americans and exploration. While Lewis and Clark, with their guide Sacagawea, figure more prominently in regional history, the two sets of explorers with their female guides indexed each other. Native American motifs were often associated with animals such as bear and buffalo in the sculptures; rabbits, fish, and eagles were very common.

Occupational sculptures, particularly those depicting forestry and logging, constituted another prominent category. These were interesting because references to traditional regional extractive economies such as ranching, mining, forestry, and logging were not visible in other Winter Carnival events. Winter Carnival largely referenced leisure, recreation, and sport,

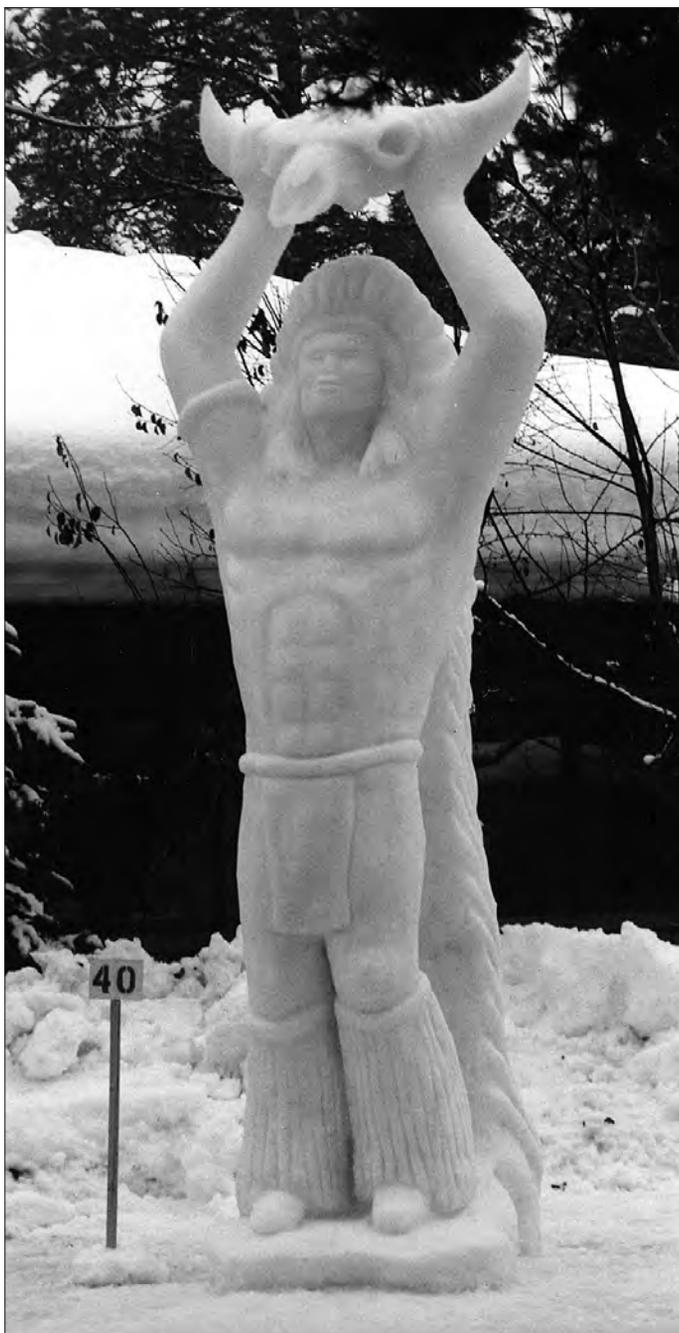


Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 13. Sculpture of Native American in headdress, 1997.



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 14. Sculpture of the mill burner, ca.1978.

rather than labor; images of the working past (and present) were largely erased except in the local snow-sculpture competition, where they appeared in romanticized, nostalgic form. A lumber mill operated continuously on the lake until 1977, and for most of the twentieth century, it employed many townspeople. The mill eventually was sold and then burned, and the mill burner was constructed as a sculpture (fig. 14). Festival organizer Bob Scoles created one of the most popular Winter Carnival sculptures of all time in 1968, when he and his team from the drugstore built a fifteen-foot sculpture of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox (fig. 15). Since then there have been many sculptures of loggers as well as the mill itself. The Forest Service has also been a major employer in the region. It has used McCall as a headquarters since 1909, and it established an elite smoke-jumping base (smoke jumpers fight wilderness fires by parachuting out of airplanes) in McCall in 1943 (P. Preston 1999). To local children, smoke jumpers were close to superheroes; they save trees and practically fly. Firefighters and smoke jumpers were both depicted in snow sculptures; Shore Lodge/Whitetail resort built a recent one of a smoke jumper in 2005. The influence of the Forest Service's popular icon, Smokey Bear, which created an association among bears, forestry, and logging, should not be overlooked. Bears often substituted for people in logging scenes; they were depicted sawing down trees, sitting atop fallen logs, or napping during a lunch break.

Mining also played a smaller historical economic role, so mining and miners were also depicted in the sculptures, although less frequently. Both miners and loggers have reputations as heavy drinkers, and in the early twentieth



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 15. Sculpture of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox, 1968.

century, the county was a site for moonshining (see chapter four). Hence, one occasionally saw sculptures of drunken loggers in the past, though nowadays much less frequently. Overall, if work was depicted in the sculptures, it was manual labor. There were very few—if any—depictions of contemporary occupations associated with tourism such as real-estate agents, hotel workers, or restaurateurs, illustrating concretely the ways tourist events such as Winter Carnival render labor by local people invisible at the symbolic level.

One class of sculpture that linked both occupations and western frontiers in a more modern context was space. An early sculpture depicting the moon landing was constructed in 1970, and space is associated with mythologies of exploration, but McCall also had a personal connection to NASA, further illustrating the melding of local and national associations. In 1985 a local schoolteacher named Barbara Morgan was chosen as Christa McAuliffe's backup candidate as part of NASA's Teacher in Space Project. Morgan left McCall as a local hero to train with the Challenger crew, and someone made a replica of the shuttle for the 1986 Winter Carnival to honor her. The Challenger exploded on January 28, 1986, exactly at the beginning of Winter Carnival. The explosion was both a national and intensely local trauma for the people of McCall, and residents transformed the existing Challenger sculpture into a spontaneous shrine for the crew as a response (Santino 2004b) (fig. 16, fig. 17). Morgan became next in

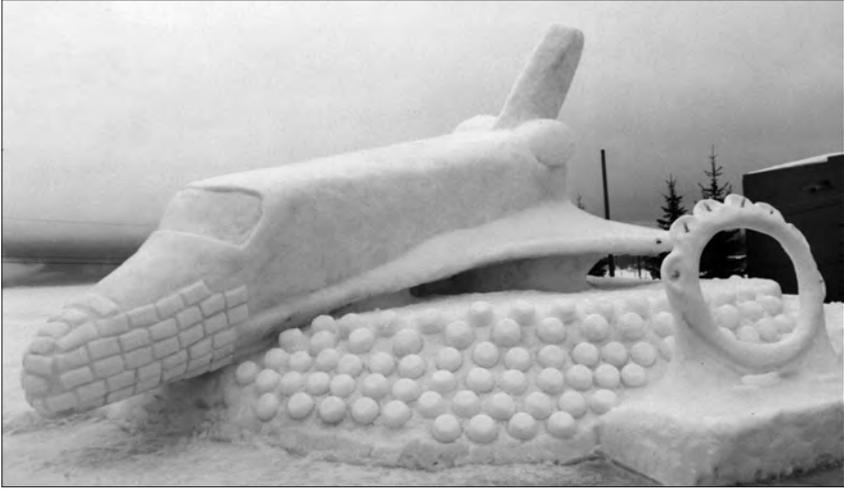


Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 16. Sculpture of the Challenger space shuttle, 1986.



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 17. Sculpture of Challenger space shuttle transformed into memorial after 1986 disaster.

line to ride a space shuttle as an educator/civilian. She dedicated her life to NASA and was finally given the opportunity to go into space in 2007. This history, Morgan's dedication to the space program, and her twenty-one-year wait to ride the shuttle continuously made headline news in the area. Hence, there were sculptures of space shuttles, explorations of the moon, and even a tribute to Morgan, linking local histories and peoples to national agendas.



Fig. 18. Many sculptures commemorate winter sports and the area's Olympic champions.



Fig. 19. A sculpture that functioned as a miniature golf course, 2005.

Photos courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce (left) and by author (right).

Sports and recreation constituted another salient category, highlighting the town's resort identity. Winter sports were most commonly featured. The area has a long history of skiing and has produced Olympic skiers (see chapter four). There were tributes to these Olympians, sculptures of the Olympic rings (fig. 18), and many, often humorous pieces depicting skiers generally. There were skiers falling down hills, skis strapped to the back of a VW bug, and ski jumps representing the area's history of competitive sports. One early sculpture depicted a skier behind a NASA space shuttle. Another showed someone skiing the great potato (a popular 1970s state slogan referred to Idaho as "the great potato"). Other winter activities that were depicted included sledding, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing, and sculptures were also constructed as interactive slides. Summer recreation activities were also represented, though perhaps less frequently. Boating and water-skiing sculptures were popular. Teams also constructed full-scale miniature snow-and-ice golf courses where one could actually golf (fig. 19).

Themes of patriotism, nationalism, and loyalty to the state comprised the final category. The patriotic content of some pieces was overt. The Statue of Liberty is a relatively straightforward figure that was sculpted several times; an early example is a statue that the Shore Lodge constructed in 1967. Other sculptures must be read in conjunction with the organization



Photo by author

Fig. 20. Eagle sculpted by the Forest Service, 2001.

creating them. In 2001, for example, the Forest Service built a giant eagle, an amazing engineering feat (fig. 20). Eagles are common in western states and a popular Winter Carnival subject, but the fact that a federal agency sculpted it and that eagles are the national bird gave the sculpture a more nationalistic slant. Some sculptures exhibited state pride: the shape of the state of Idaho was made, and once artists sculpted a full replica of the state capital, complete with the state flag (fig. 21). Others signified allegiance to the local high school and the University of Idaho by sculpting the shared mascot, a vandal.

To sum up, the sculptures on the one hand reflected local concerns. They commemorated local heroes, recalled local history, represented local occupations, and depicted local life and legendry. On the other hand, such sculptures were juxtaposed to images from a broader realm of mythology, popular culture, children's literature, and nationalist fantasy. The resulting *assemblage* (Santino 1992a)—an array of constituent elements in which the whole is more meaningful than the sum of its parts—was one where local history and identity were inserted into broader realms of signification. That these broader realms largely were affiliated with fantasy and make-believe suggests that these are productive arenas: through play people imagined themselves, their history, and their identity as part of something that extended well beyond the local.



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 21. Replica of the Idaho State Capitol building, 1988.

### A Gift to the Community

Examining categories of snow sculptures is a starting point for analysis, but it does not provide a full picture of the way they fit into Winter Carnival or community life. If the content of local sculptures situated local identity within broader realms, making the sculptures worked out notions of citizenship and belonging at a very local level. To see the way this played out, it is necessary to examine the processes of creation. How and when were the sculptures made? Who made them and why? What choices and problems did they face? What made a good sculpture? Who was the audience? Such questions focus on processes of production and use, rather than final products (M. Jones 1989; Glassie 1999b; Vlach and Bronner 1992).

The original idea of building snow sculptures as part of Winter Carnival is attributed to local community leaders Warren Brown and Bob Scoles who drew upon already-established Winter Carnival traditions to bolster their project. A prominent pioneering family, the Browns originally hailed from New Hampshire where fraternities began practicing snow sculpting as part of Dartmouth College's Winter Carnival (F. Harris 1920). The Browns



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 22. Snow family in front of private home, ca. 1969.

apparently had seen snow sculptures in Sun Valley, and Scoles said that he had written to Dartmouth and Montreal to obtain information about building them, but had never gotten a reply back. Local people had to figure out how to do it on their own, and over time they developed their own sculpting methods.

The first 1965 sculptures were built both by local businesspeople in front of their stores and families in their front yards, illustrating that Winter Carnival was partly a family event at its roots (fig. 22). The chamber awarded prizes, a practice that continues today. Memories of early Winter Carnival sculptures are dear to many people, and these initial attempts were a source of pride as people experimented with techniques such as painting the snow and using various kinds of internal supports. Bob Scoles built sculptures for nearly thirty years, and he had an entire photo album dedicated to the pieces he helped create. He showed me a picture of the ice castle that was to be used as the 1965 Winter Carnival stage, saying, “This is the first sculpture that the chamber of commerce did that first year. We worked hours, five businessmen. . . . We worked for three days getting this one tower up—and we finally learned how to do it. It took us quite a while; it was pathetic [laughs].”<sup>3</sup> Very few sculptures were made in front of private homes when

3 Bob Scoles, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 9 March 2001.

I did my research. Most were constructed in front of local businesses, and they functioned as an advertisement for the establishment since the object attracted visitors to the spot.

Only a few rules guided the local snow-sculpting competition. The first was that all entrants must officially register with the chamber of commerce if they wanted to be judged. The second rule was that only lathe, wire, rebar, and PVC pipe could be used as internal supports; cardboard, plywood, and sheet lumber were not allowed. The third rule was that all sculptures had to be finished by 8:00 a.m. on Friday of the first weekend of Winter Carnival, which was when judging began. The winners were announced that evening as an important part of the opening ceremonies.

Teams of three or four people constructed most of the sculptures, but there was no numerical requirement; teams could have any number of members. They could also start whenever they liked, so some teams began as early as two weeks before Winter Carnival; others started only a few days prior to the judging. The judges, who had the power to select winners and whose identities were largely secret (Stoeltje 1996), spent Friday morning traveling around to view each sculpture. There were numerous prize categories. The Grand Prize was the highest award: in 2009 the cash prize was \$950. First-through-fifth prizes carried varying cash amounts. Small cash prizes were awarded for a number of additional categories. These included student built, first-timers, home built, child appeal, most photogenic, best maintained, best college-student built, and two honorable mentions. Some awards, such as first-timers, home built, and best maintained, were designed to encourage greater participation in the competition.

Given that the organizational structure allowed teams to spend several weeks making their sculpture if they chose, it was clear that the time people spent on their pieces before Winter Carnival began was important. These preparations and rehearsals constituted an unofficial time frame for the enactment of festive behavior (Bauman and Ritch 1994), what Peter Tokofsky (2000) identifies as local's time. The beginning of this time period was unmarked; it began whenever people decided to start their sculptures, so it was not the same time for everyone. But people did feel Winter Carnival coming on when evidence of snow building, such as collecting snow and constructing platforms, became evident throughout town. During this period—before Winter Carnival officially began on Friday evening of the last weekend in January according to the chamber of commerce schedule—people who had decided to build sculptures socialized with their neighbors,



Reprinted with permission of Folklore Forum

Fig. 23. Some of the members of the 2001 Krahn snow sculpting team. Front (left to right): Lisa Gabbert, Dan Krahn, Nancy Krahn, Ron Hines. Back: Karen Morris, Marilyn Krahn, Pauline Hines, Sue Anderson. Missing: Mark Bennett, Marlee Wilcomb, Gaylord Krahn.

worked hard on their projects, and talked about who was building, who was not, and what techniques they were using.

I first learned how important this period was when I joined the Krahn snow-sculpting team, a large, prominent group in 2001. We got along well, and I have talked with them about sculpting many times since, returning to become part of their team again in 2008. A loose network of relatives, friends, employees, and storeowners of a local business called Krahn's Home Furnishings, the Krahns had participated in snow sculpting every year since 1979 and were considered by many residents to be excellent snow sculptors. They were easily recognized by their red jackets, which had their team name embroidered across the back, and they were famous for making very large sculptures in the parking lot next to their store (fig. 23). At the time of my research, Marilyn and Gaylord Krahn owned the store. Their son, Dan, and his wife, Nancy, moved to McCall to manage it in 1978 after they were married. Nancy explained that they began making sculptures for their first Winter Carnival in McCall:

Gabbert: How did you start making sculptures?

N. Krahn: The first year we came up here, it was like, OK. Everybody builds sculptures, so it's Winter Carnival time, so you guys need to build a sculpture, and we were like "OK."<sup>4</sup>

The Krahns were also prominent citizens. Dan Krahn was involved in the Rotary Club and sat on the hospital auxiliary board; Nancy volunteered at the high school and was heavily involved in local sports when I first met her. Store owner Marilyn Krahn, was a lovely woman also known as "Bammer," who donated time and money to local organizations and causes and knew everybody in town.

I met the Krahns by asking if I could volunteer to help them. Bammer laughed at my request and said they would take any help they could get. The Krahns intended to build a Sharlie sculpture that year (gallery fig. E). The festival theme for 2001 was "Childhood Memories," and for the Krahns, Sharlie was an icon of childhood. Sharlie was appropriate for the Krahns to make because they focused on family-oriented sculptures. They frequently replicated large commercial and popular images to accomplish this goal; they had, for example, constructed "Peanuts" and Disney characters in the past. They had never made a Sharlie sculpture, so it seemed time. The title of the sculpture was "McCall's Oldest Resident."

Bammer introduced me to the other 2001 team members. In addition to Dan and Nancy, they included Mark Bennett and Karen Morris, both of whom were store employees.<sup>5</sup> Sculptor and artist Marlee Wilcomb was a friend, and Ron and Pauline Hines were former customers. Sue Anderson and Gaylord Krahn watched the store. After ensuring I was dressed properly (in waterproof clothing with industrial rubber gloves taped over the coat), Bammer put me to work cleaning and collecting snow.

The collection of raw material is important in many traditional arts such as pottery and basketry (Burrison [1983] 1995; Glassie 1999a, 48), and snow sculpting in the local competition was no exception. Sculptures required massive amounts of material. One common way for teams to obtain snow was to order it from the city of McCall. City snowplows and back-hoes arrived upon request to dump piles of snow wherever a team wanted. The Krahns, however, considered themselves to be "snow snobs," so they

4 Nancy Krahn, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 19 February 2001.

5 Mark Bennett has since passed away.

avoided ordering city snow if at all possible because they felt it was too dirty. Snow brought by the city was filled with grass and dirt. The number-one rule of snow sculpting for the Krahn's was using clean snow since any foreign object, such as small rocks, dirt, grass, or other debris, melted that part of the sculpture faster. As Nancy pointed out, "It looks a lot better when you are done if there is no dirt in it."<sup>6</sup> The Krahn's had other ways to collect snow. Dan borrowed a backhoe by trading favors with its owner, so he occasionally brought in his own load of snow, illustrating that building a snow sculpture activated networks of reciprocity and obligation. Additionally the roof of the furniture store was flat and collected large amounts of snow, free of grime and dirt from the street. Part of Mark's job was to climb on a ladder to the rooftop and shovel snow onto the ground with a two-man shovel.

Team members then spent hours cleaning the snow they had collected by picking out tiny pebbles and rocks and bits of dirt, a process again similar to preparing raw clay for pottery (Burrison [1983] 1995, 80–81). The process rendered naturally dirty snow clean and made it unnaturally, glaringly white. The end result was that the sculpture also was extraordinarily white and clean. This additional step of cleaning the snow marked the Krahn's as a master team; not all teams were willing or able to do it. Learning the importance of clean snow was one of Marilyn Krahn's first lessons:

- Gabbert: What other kinds of things did you learn at first?  
 M. Krahn: How much water it takes, I think. That and any dirt or—that was in the days when people smoked quite a bit . . . and if their cigarette ashes got in your ice sculpture, that was very maddening because you had to dig it out. They didn't realize that it would stay there and it would magnify once it's frozen. So I think that's your first big lesson: don't let any dirt or a rock or pebbles or sand or grit get in your ice.<sup>7</sup>

Teams built forms once the initial pile of snow had been collected. Forms were pieces of plywood that were nailed together (fig. 24). The forms were filled with snow, and then water was added. The entire mess was then packed solid by climbing in and stomping down the mixture. "It's like making wine," Mark told me and grinned. The mixture froze during the night, creating a solid base upon which to build. "The goal," Nancy later explained,

6 Nancy Krahn interview.

7 Marilyn Krahn, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 8 February 2001.



Photo by author

Fig. 24. Plywood forms help teams build up the base for snow sculptures.

“is ice.” The plywood then was removed, and the frozen snow formed the base layer of the sculpture.

The base was then built up and refined using buckets of slush in what was sometimes called the “slush-on” method of sculpting. Slush was a mixture of snow and water and had the consistency of very wet clay (fig. 25). The slush was added to the sculpture and shaped. It was left to freeze into place, although how quickly this happened depended on the temperature. Snow sculptures were made almost entirely of frozen slush, which added bulk and shape to the basic form as well as creating the final details. The quality of the slush varied depending on the type of snow used. Heavy, wet, or old snow, such as the kind gathered from sidewalks, cars, and the parking lot, made lumpy, chunky, ice-filled slush because the snow did not melt evenly when the water was added. This poor-quality slush was used in places where bulk was needed, such as adding height or width to the basic form. Nancy explained that fresh, powdery snow made the best slush because it melted evenly, creating a product that spread smoothly without lumps of ice. This finer-quality slush was used for delicate details like scales and fins and was highly valued. Nancy often sent team members great distances to gather buckets of powder for slush. Once, when Mark was working, he called to Nancy, “Hey, Nancy, *great* slush!” “Thanks!” Nancy replied. “It’s your snow, you know,” meaning that Mark had collected good-quality powder snow.

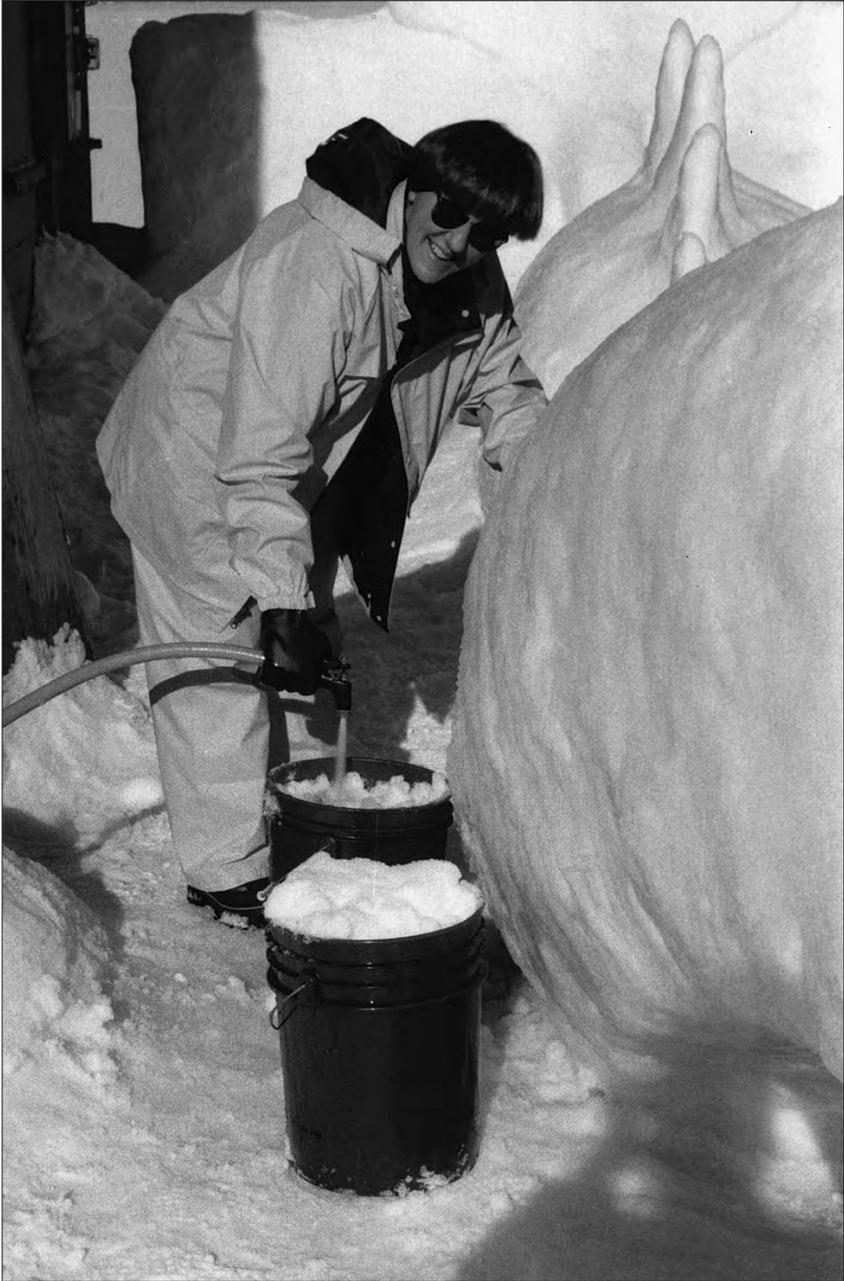


Photo reprinted with permission from *Iddaho Yesterdays* 49, no. 1 (2008)

Fig. 25. Nancy Krahn making slush.

A good portion of our work consisted of shoveling snow into buckets, filling them with water to make slush, and hauling the slushy buckets to some part of the sculpture for shaping. The garden hose, which provided water to make the slush, kept freezing up due to the subzero temperatures, and we spent a lot of time unfreezing it. Sometimes the Krahns used a small, portable butane torch to get the job done. In particularly bad cases, we unscrewed the hose from the spigot, hauled it downstairs to the basement, and ran it under hot water in the sink until it spat out the chunks of ice that blocked the flow of water.

Local sculptors strove for a realistic, rather than an abstract style, so good detail was important. The best sculptures were always very specific, and adding realistic details indicated a high level of skill. Most members of the Krahn team identified good detail along with clean snow as necessary aesthetic elements in making a good sculpture. Nancy offered an example of good detail: “[Do you remember when] they [another team] did ‘A Star is Born’? And they had this actress, and she was gorgeous. It was a beautiful sculpture. Eyelashes and everything. That’s the kind of thing—you can get that kind of detail. Fingernails. When you can see the nails on the thing ‘cause there’s that much detail, the lines with the knuckles.”<sup>8</sup>

To obtain these kinds of details, the Krahns used a variety of interesting tools and techniques (see M. Jones 1989). The most useful tool was a meat cleaver, which easily hacked through a mound of frozen slush to create a basic rough shape. Any item could be appropriated, but kitchen implements seemed particularly common. Plastic spatulas were used to create a smooth surface. Mark said that in the past, they had used the butane torch to carve parts of the sculpture, but they had abandoned the torch because it was too slow. “I always thought it was kind of interesting to carve ice with fire,” he mused.<sup>9</sup> Other useful tools included metal files, a log peeler, and all manner of knives. Small round Jell-O molds were used to add detail and decoration around the neck and for the eyes. Mark spent most of his time creating Sharlie’s tail as well as helping Karen and Marlee with the head. Other team members piled up slush to form spikes along the creature’s back (fig. 26), a task that sometimes entailed either standing on a ladder or actually climbing on top of the sculpture to reach the highest parts of the main hump. The final days of work on the sculpture were spent adding fish scales. After some debate

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8 Nancy Krahn interview.

9 Mark Bennett, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 21 February 2001.

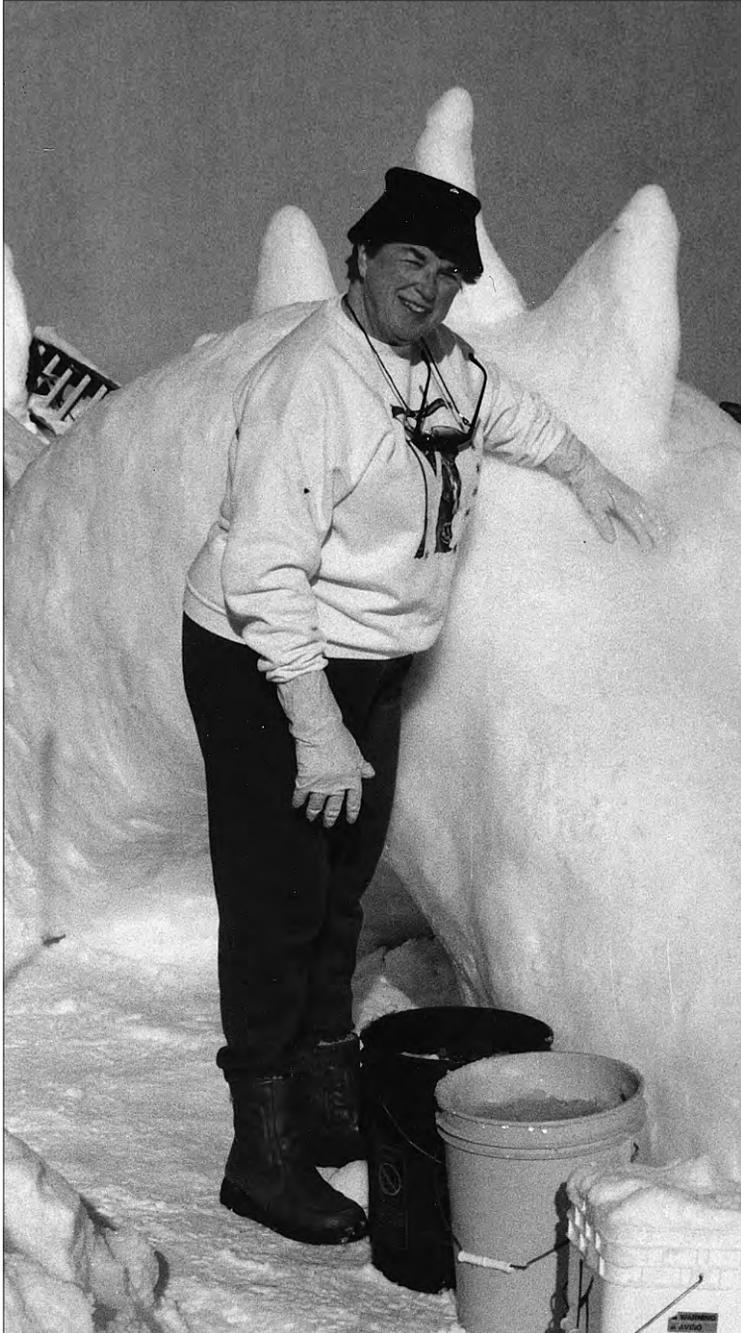


Photo by author

Fig. 26. Marilyn Krahn making spines along back of a Sharlie sculpture.

and failed attempts, it was decided that small round cake pans should be used to make them. Each cake pan was filled with fine slush, packed down tightly, and applied to the body of the sculpture to create fishlike scales.

The final step in completing a sculpture for the Krahn's was a process called glazing, which produced a finish similar to pottery. The uppermost layer of snow on the sculpture was slightly melted by rubbing it with warm water. The thin layer of water immediately froze, creating an iced, shiny look. Glazing gave a sculpture a smooth, finished appearance that reflected light and sparkled. It also was functional because a solid icy coating made the sculpture last longer. Marilyn said that she thought glazing was the most important part of sculpting: "I think the finishing, the glazing [is the best]. And the shininess of it and smooth edges and not having a rough texture on it. Because then it just shines beautifully, and everybody likes to see that. It looks like a jewel practically. It just glistens."<sup>10</sup> The result was much prettier and more striking than mere snow.

Nancy also emphasized the importance of the glaze: "I like the real shiny glaze. Now [local competitors] never looked quite as shiny as ours. But there is something with the way they finish theirs—it's extremely smooth. They do a lot of filing and stuff on theirs. And they do get that ice buildup, but it's not the ice that looks like it's coating it. Ours almost looks like it's been dipped in ice." Part of the reason glazing was important was because it produced a smooth finish. Nancy explained, "I like them shiny, but they don't HAVE to be shiny. But they have to look like you have really worked on either making them really smooth and flat and finished looking, not jagged and bumpy, and like the slush has been brushed off and then just [not] froze there in spots. . . . And no icicles hanging from it."<sup>11</sup> Dan agreed. When I asked him what made an excellent sculpture, he said, "[I ask myself] is it shiny, smooth, hard? Does it have a nice glaze to it? When you put lights on it at night, they really just shine. They look crisp and clean and smooth. You can see some [teams] that haven't done as many sculptures; the slush isn't rubbed smooth. So it's packed on there, but it's wavy and bumpy, and it's got little clumps on it. That's stuff that I look at."<sup>12</sup>

Achieving this shiny, smooth look was a delicate, time-consuming process. To begin the glazing process, Dan stayed every night after we finished

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10 Marilyn Krahn interview.

11 Nancy Krahn interview.

12 Dan Krahn, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 21 February, 2001.



Photo by author

Fig. 27. Dan Krahn spraying snow sculpture at night to create glaze.

working to mist the sculpture down with the garden hose. This light misting of water froze during the night, creating a layer of ice (fig. 27). The last eighteen hours of work was spent glazing the sculpture by hand. The main method was using buckets of warm water. We dipped our bare hands in the water or used rubber gloves and rubbed the sculpture down from top to bottom. Another, less-effective way to glaze was to iron the snow with a small, traveling clothes iron (fig. 28). This method was very time consuming, however, because the snow cooled the iron, and you had to wait for it to reheat.

During the construction process, team members worked together and socialized intensely (Gabbert 2002). The result was a strong sense of bonding and community among team members within a workplace environment:

Gabbert: What's your favorite aspect of sculpting?

M. Krahn: I think the camaraderie of sculpting with people. You exchange unimportant details that generally reveal a lot about a personality, and just plain making new friends. It's a nice thing . . . and then the first time you win anything it's so exciting! And the years of disappointment are so devastating. And you know you quickly forget it 'cause everybody that comes by your sculpture thinks it's great. So, I think camaraderie and the fun of doing something—doing a real project together—is fun.<sup>13</sup>

13 Marilyn Krahn interview.



Fig. 28. Nancy Krahn ironing snow.

Nancy felt the presence of and interaction with people transformed a difficult job into one that was fun and provided an occasion for talk and interaction:

The first few days when we go out there, and there's only one or two of you out there, it's really boring. I hate it . . . just because it's so much work. You're stomping all that snow in, and if you're the only one out there, it's just really boring. You don't feel like you get anything done 'cause there's nobody to mix slush for you, and there's nobody to get something for you or hand you up a bucket of slush so you don't have to climb down off of whatever you're on. So that's why I think the building as a group is more fun. And you know it's amazing how much you find out about the people that you're working with 'cause you have nothing to do but visit.<sup>14</sup>

14 Nancy Krahn interview.

Building a snow sculpture also generated a sense of festivity, camaraderie, and community with other sculpting teams. Marilyn explained,

Everybody in town—everybody who makes sculptures anyway—has a feeling of kinship or camaraderie, or you—you know, if it's raining, why you all cry together, and if it's good sculpting weather like this year, why you all celebrate together. It's a sharing of the same circumstances; I guess that you comment on each other's skills. And you know you've all been—if you're a first-timer, why we've all been there! So you know you share those feelings.<sup>15</sup>

The most intense time of sculpting for all teams was Thursday evening. It was during this pre-festival time period that most bonding, socializing, and community building occurred. The work pace for all sculpting teams peaked as each one feverishly worked in subzero weather to complete its sculpture before the 8:00 a.m. judging. Many teams worked the entire night (see Nordberg 2001). Across town people used bright construction lights, ladders, and moving equipment; pockets of people sculpted, ate, drank, and socialized. The Krahn's did not work all night, but they frequently worked until at least midnight to get their sculpture as perfect as possible. Nancy thought that Thursday evening was important enough that visitors might enjoy it: "I almost was thinking that would be kind of a fun thing—to encourage people to come up before Winter Carnival when people are out working on the sculptures—because it's really pretty fun. And you see that more and more on Thursday night and stuff; people do go out and watch as people are building 'cause they've figured out that that is a lot of it."<sup>16</sup>

Snow sculpting was fun for many people, but it also required a lot of work and sacrifice. These too, produced feelings of camaraderie and community bonding. Snow sculpting was extremely time consuming. The Sharlie sculpture took approximately three hundred "man hours" (an emic local term) to make.<sup>17</sup> It also was hard physical work, akin to shoveling snow for six hours a day. Team members sometimes got soaked from the water in subzero weather. The work was somewhat dangerous. People hauled buckets of slush up ladders, and it was easy to slip and fall on the ice; accidents had happened in the past. Krahn team sculptor Karen Morris, for example, once

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15 Marilyn Krahn interview.

16 Nancy Krahn interview.

17 A man (or woman) hour equals one hour of work per person. For example, eight man hours could be achieved by four people working two hours each.

slipped on the ice, cut her eye, and had to be taken to the emergency room for stitches. Therefore, team members sometimes sighed about the amount of work still left to do, worried about and fought inclement weather, and talked about past sculpting disasters (such as years when pieces had to be rebuilt several times due to rain). Bammer acknowledged the sacrifices made by her team members by buying lunch and offering hot drinks at the end of the day “for fortification.” It also cost a lot of money to make a sculpture, depending on its size. The slush-on method required enormous amounts of water, and water was expensive in McCall.

Consequently, snow-sculpting teams considered their pieces and the sacrifices they entailed as gifts to the community because sculptures were the most important element of Winter Carnival. Most people believed that without them, Winter Carnival would fail. As discussed in the previous chapter, business owners were very involved in community life. The traditional role of local businesses was that of a patron. Businesses were asked to donate money to local charity functions and support school fundraisers, music groups, Scouts, the Optimist Club, churches, sports teams, and many other activities. Business owners were also expected to donate time by volunteering, including serving on the board of the chamber of commerce. These donations of money and time were considered a business’s way of giving back to the community that supported it (Lavenda 1997, 72–73). In this general context of business patronage and obligation, snow sculptures were a contribution to the community, another way of supporting civic life.

The public responded to the sculptures as gifts by actively showing their appreciation for sculpting efforts. Team members became public figures during the construction process because they worked outside and hence were visible. Teams engaged in sculpting attracted the attention of residents who walked by as well as the media, such as the newspaper and television. Not many tourists were in town during sculpture construction since Winter Carnival had not officially begun, so the people who stopped usually were locals whom the Krahns knew. People walking by frequently paused to talk and admire our project, or friends sometimes encouraged the team by bringing small gifts or hot chocolate. Nancy’s sister, Victoria, for example, brought cookies to the team. The local paper frequently interviewed team members. Journalists from other cities, such as Boise, stopped by. Passersby took pictures.

That they received public attention and that people expressed

appreciation for their efforts was important to most Krahn team members. This appreciation instilled a sense of pride and ownership among sculptors. Nancy especially liked talking to people on the street.

N. Krahn: People would stop by, especially since we work in the day-time. They would always stop by when we were building.

Gabbert: And what would they say?

N. Krahn: Oh, you know, just came by to visit and see how we're doing.<sup>18</sup>

Mark Bennett also acknowledged the importance of public support for building sculptures:

You spend so much time explaining to people the process and how the sculpture is built and how this individual sculpture was built—because it kind of varies from year to year exactly how you do it. People are funny—you get a lot of encouragement from people walking by while you are actually doing the building—the people who live in town and you know. They're just very supportive of you doing this work. And then after the sculptures have been made and you, like, are doing the repair work or maintenance, the people walking by. You can spend—it's very appealing to my vanity to be able to talk to all the people who want to know, "How do you do this?" And it's just like going on and on about it and repeating the same thing over and over. But people are truly interested, and they're very flattering about how they're receiving the sculpture, so that's very cool.<sup>19</sup>

There was a sense of reciprocity between snow-sculpting teams and the general public that was not official but was felt to be appropriate in some way. The attention and appreciation made the effort of sculpting worthwhile.

Sculptures were a gift to an imagined collective; they were also somewhat obligatory. Winter Carnival was an event that was supposed to help local businesses, so businesses were expected to contribute to its success. Building a snow sculpture was looked on as one of the most important ways of supporting Winter Carnival. The obligation to build a sculpture existed even if Winter Carnival did not benefit a specific business directly. Several members of the Krahn's team pointed out that, as a furniture store, they did not immediately benefit from Winter Carnival because nobody bought furniture during the festival (see chapter one). Yet they felt it was important to participate anyway. Nancy said, "We do it mostly because we like to be

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18 Nancy Krahn interview.

19 Mark Bennett interview.

involved in whatever is going on with the city, and we think it's important to participate in the things that are going on."<sup>20</sup>

The complexity of sculptures as both gift and obligation meant that the primary audience for snow sculptures in the local competition was other locals, rather than tourists. Increased tourism was the final product; it was what happened as the result of sculpting. In small towns like McCall, every business was not just a *what* but also a *who* since most people knew who owned and worked at each establishment. Local people talked about and evaluated which businesses (and therefore who) had contributed a snow sculpture, who had not, and how. Locals were the primary audience because constructing a sculpture was a visual, public means of staking a claim of belonging; by making a sculpture, one was being generous, neighborly, and fulfilling obligations of good citizenship. In this sense, anybody could stake a claim of belonging by building a sculpture. The community boundary was based on evidence of participation, rather than class, old-timer/newcomer status, or other conventional markers.

The audience also evaluated a sculpture's aesthetic qualities as visual evidence of concern for communal welfare. The specific aesthetics reflected particular sets of values (Del Negro 2004; Shukla 2008; Posey 2008). Generally organizations and businesses that made sculptures, especially first-timers, were applauded for their attempts, no matter what the result. Businesses that had a history of participation in Winter Carnival and experience building sculptures were more carefully scrutinized. For example, sculptures that seemed last minute, sloppily executed, or slapped together just for the sake of doing something were not considered very valuable contributions. Participants were thought to be just "skating by."

Such judgments, however, were tempered by an understanding of who had made the piece. Sculptures built by children or students, for example, or people who were new and inexperienced, were not subject to such criticisms. Conversely, excellent sculptures—those that illustrated good detail, smoothness, shininess, cleanliness (clean snow), symmetry, and were extraordinarily large or particularly clever—were highly praised. Leslie Prosterman (1995) closely examines home-economy aesthetics exhibited at county fairs in the Midwest, arguing that the criteria by which they were evaluated constituted an eighteenth-century value system that leaned toward balance and centeredness in community life. The aesthetic criteria she identifies are similar to those

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20 Nancy Krahn interview.

in the local snow-sculpting competition. When they were evident in a sculpture, they became proof of a team or business's concern for communal welfare. The sculptures were considered valuable contributions both because of their beauty and the amount of time, skill, and care it took to make them. The participants' status increased as a result, at least temporarily.

Conversely, not building a sculpture staked a different kind of claim. Stronger criticisms were reserved for businesses that did not build sculptures at all.<sup>21</sup> The Krahn's, for example, shared a parking lot with another store. For many years, the neighboring business was a sports shop called Mountain Regatta, and the two businesses built their sculpture together. They considered it a mutually beneficial act since the sculpture attracted visitors to their shared business space. Eventually, however, Mountain Regatta closed. A new shop, which sold art, opened in 2001. The new owners opted not to participate in constructing a snow sculpture—they neither built one of their own nor helped the Krahn's. Rather, they simply waved a friendly hello as they walked past into their store. Nearly every member of the Krahn team commented on their lack of participation. The business owners were perceived as unfriendly. Krahn team members were incredulous that anybody would walk by a team of hardworking snow sculptors every day for two weeks without stopping to offer to help; that indicated in their eyes, a complete lack of community spirit.

This oversight on the part of the owners of the art store (which has since gone out of business), illustrates that not only could the construction of sculptures intensify social relationships but also lack of participation could potentially damage them. One team member said that the owners obviously had no idea of the way to fit into a small town. Another stated flatly:

[Those people next door] *did* benefit by having Sharlie. . . . They were very poor neighbors, very poor neighbors. . . . They could have put in

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21 These judgments were tempered, however, by how much volunteer work a person did around town, illustrating the importance of volunteerism to notions of community as discussed in chapter one. People who were perceived as contributing to the community in other ways were excused. Business owner Rob Lyons, for example, owned a local restaurant named Sharlie's and felt somewhat guilty about not making a sculpture in 2001 since restaurants benefit directly from carnival crowds. On the other hand, Lyons pointed out that since he was chairing Winter Carnival (a difficult and thankless job), he had an excuse; others agreed. Bob Scoles, a founder of Winter Carnival, no longer made sculptures but also was excused because he had put in his time. The contingent nature of such judgments further illustrates the complex relationship between building sculptures and contributing to community.

five hours and made a lot of points, and just the sheer thing of, like, helping. . . . [They] are doing . . . art in a place that has snow eight months of the year, and then they don't even help on one of the major things that brings people into their walkway. Right next door! . . . I'm sure they're probably very nice people, but it was either a complete miscalculation of what the community is about, or how a community really runs, works, and interacts, or. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Stronger criticisms were targeted toward businesses that did not participate in any way in Winter Carnival but directly benefited from tourist crowds. They included bars, restaurants, motels, gas stations, grocery stores, and other service-oriented businesses that generated income from an influx of visitors, even if only for a single day. The fact that some of these businesses did not build snow sculptures was seen not merely as not doing one's part or lacking a sense of community, it was interpreted as taking advantage of the generosity of other people's time, effort, and hard work for personal gain. This was considered a much bigger affront than simply lacking community spirit.

Whitetail Resort was the most salient example in 2001 of a service-oriented business that did not participate in making a sculpture that year. Its lack of involvement was interpreted both as a lack of sense of community and as evidence that the owner was taking advantage of people. The owner, Doug Manchester, who was board member, chair, and/or director of Manchester Financial Group, Manchester Resorts, Inc., and Summit Resources, Inc., among many other businesses, had been a controversial figure since he began investing in McCall in the late 1980s. He was one of the first out-of-town entrepreneurs to push accelerated development in McCall.<sup>23</sup>

Manchester purchased the historic Shore Lodge in 1989. It was the only place in town with a ballroom large enough for dances, banquets, fund-raisers, and other social functions, and it held memories for many local people. Manchester renamed the hotel Manchester-at-Payette-Lake after he bought it and transformed it into an exclusive private club with annual membership dues, leading some residents to feel that Shore Lodge had been taken from them.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Anonymous, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, February 17, 2001.

23 For more information on Manchester and his projects, see the Web site at <http://www.dougmanchester.com/Vitae.html>

24 The hotel was eventually sold and the original name restored. For the 2009 Winter Carnival, the building sported a banner that read "Welcome Back Shore Lodge."

The owners and managers of Shore Lodge had always actively participated in Winter Carnival by building large, elaborate sculptures. Shore Lodge managers and employees built some of the most popular sculptures in the 1960s, such as “King Neptune” and the “Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe.” Managers and employees continued making sculptures for a decade after Manchester’s 1989 purchase. But the hotel, which had been renamed Whitetail Resort by 2001, stopped constructing sculptures between 2000–2004, likely due to the fact that the building was being remodeled. Although the actual time frame that the hotel stopped making sculptures was relatively brief, the public noticed. Many people commented to me about the hotel’s lack of participation in those years, which was interpreted as evidence of Manchester’s perceived lack of commitment to the community and yet another way he was taking advantage of it. Not building a sculpture was one important way that people identified Doug Manchester as an outsider and framed him as somebody who was uninterested in the welfare of the whole.

### Complicating the Local

A number of elements framed the local competition as amateur. People did not describe it as amateur—they used the term “local”—and might have taken offense at that description. By *amateur*, however, I simply mean non-professional and in no way imply a lack of talent. First, there were a number of excellent snow-sculpting teams, but most local people who sculpted did not consider themselves professional artists or even artists at all. Some teams had members with artistic backgrounds. Marlee Wilcomb was a member of the Krahn team who also was a professional artist. Karen Morris, who was a team member, had a background in design. Sculptor Mark Bennett had worked in theater. But many people I talked with said that they liked sculpting because they felt they didn’t need to be an artist to participate. Several people actually insistently claimed the opposite, saying specifically that they weren’t artists but enjoyed making sculptures, and this was one important reason why they liked participating.

This act of purposely claiming nonprofessionalism or nonartistry as an indicator of localness has been documented in other contexts, such as wood-chopping competitions in the Northeast (Kruckemeyer 2002). Many people thought snow sculpting easy or forgiving because it could always be redone. Marilyn Krahn, for example, did not consider herself artistic but still enjoyed sculpting: “Well, I thought I would be wonderful at sculpting,

and I'm really poor. But I'm a good sweat person, and I can haul buckets, and I can get the stuff out and water it, and I have the perseverance to stick with a project. And so it doesn't always take a sculptor. Some people who don't have a creative tendency are very good at sculpting. So I don't think you know until you try it."<sup>25</sup>

When I asked Nancy Krahn if she considered herself an artist, she replied,

Not at all. I don't. I would say that of the two of us, Dan has the artistic talent. I can tell what colors go together and things like that. I have a good enough eye to tell when something does or doesn't look right. But actually to sit down and draw or do anything like that, no, I don't consider that I have any artistic talent at all.

Gabbert: But snow is OK.

N. Krahn: Snow is OK. But it's only because there's enough other people there to tell you, "OK, that's pretty good, but let's shave this down here, or add some there," and so other people help you along, like Karen. Karen especially is good."<sup>26</sup>

Dan Krahn also did not consider himself an artist: "No, I don't consider myself artistic. I can do the larger detail and the work part that needs muscle. . . . We've done log houses, brick houses for the Three Little Pigs—and we've made a river-rock chimney—yeah, I do something like that and carve that in, but nahh, . . . I really don't do the artistry stuff."<sup>27</sup>

Most people who sculpted in the local competition were not artists, so in fact the local competition exhibited a range in the quality of sculptures that further framed the event as amateur. Not all sculptures were good. The ones that won top prizes were always excellent, but many sculptures were fair-to-middling. Such pieces might have been constructed by children, or people with little or no experience in snow, or those who simply did not do a good job. These run-of-the-mill and sometimes even poor-quality pieces were still considered valid contributions to Winter Carnival and entered into the competition for judging. The local competition was democratic with respect to talent.

The local competition also did not adhere to national regulations for snow sculpting. Rules evolved locally over time. Unlike national competitions, for example, some internal supports were allowed in the local competition, and

25 Marilyn Krahn interview.

26 Nancy Krahn interview.

27 Dan Krahn interview.

there was no set time limit. Additionally the slush-on method, which is a process of addition, is not the standard competition method.

Residents therefore evolved their own set of aesthetic criteria for determining good sculptures as a result of this localized construction process. As already mentioned, these included clean snow, good detail, smoothness, shininess, and, when possible, extraordinary size, which could only be achieved with the slush-on method. Nationally regulated competitions begin with prefabricated blocks of snow, so the final pieces do not exceed a particular size; furthermore, there are strict time limits in regulated competitions, so teams usually do not have time to glaze or smooth their pieces. The slush-on method and resulting local criteria meant that most pieces in the local competition were staunchly realistic. Abstract sculptures were viewed as having less detail and therefore considered less complicated and skillful. They were not commonly constructed in the local competition, and they rarely won prizes or were considered favorites when they were built.

Tensions between the local evaluative criteria and the tastes of professional artists were evident historically in debates over who should judge the local snow-sculpting competition and what standards they should use. Organizers frequently tried to find judges who did not live in the area to avoid appearances of favoritism, and their identities were usually kept secret. Sometimes (though not always) they were professional artists. Yet the judges did not always or necessarily pick the sculptures that were most popular with local people because they sometimes used a different set of artistic criteria (Lavenda 1996). Judges might have had artistic backgrounds, but they did not necessarily have snow-sculpting experience. People who sculpted said that the judges sometimes did not understand what made a really good sculpture—they were unable to appreciate the pieces because they did not understand the importance of, say, good detail or smoothness and the way these criteria indicated the skill level of the team in the minds of local people. To remedy the ongoing tensions between locally developed aesthetics and the judges' ideas about art, the chamber of commerce gave judges score sheets containing criteria that were supposed to balance the two. In 2009 the criteria were visual impact, artistic merit, originality, detail, difficulty, and theme presentation. Sculptures earned up to ten points for each criteria: a maximum of sixty points was possible. The score sheets continued to be a point of debate, and the criteria were revisited frequently.

One factor that began to muddy amateur/local and professional/artist distinctions in the local competition was the practice of outsourcing

sculptures. Stoeltje (1989) notes that the professionalization of rodeo occurred during a time of significant historical transformation in the nation, when western settlement was completed. Similarly in McCall, most sculptures until the 1990s were made by teams of people associated with a local business, including store owners, employees, and friends and family, such as the example of the Krahns. Over time and for a variety of reasons, businesses began to outsource their sculptures, which meant that, rather than making them, businesses sponsored the sculpture by paying somebody else to do the work. Most sculptors today are actually paid to make sculptures because outsourcing has become common.

There were a number of reasons for outsourcing. Some businesses had made sculptures since 1965. Founder Bob Scoles said that nobody ever expected the revival of Winter Carnival to last so long, so people grew old or tired of doing it. Other participants lacked the necessary people power and time. Patty Hovdey and her husband, Dean, owners of Hometown Sports, participated in Winter Carnival by building snow sculptures starting in the 1970s. They began sponsoring sculptures in 1998 because they decided they could no longer in good conscience ask their employees to make the sacrifice a sculpture demands. Both Patty and Dean believed their employees had more obligations than they had had in the past. The Hovdeys pointed out that even in the past, building a sculpture had always created a little tension between those employees that participated and those that did not. The Hovdeys eventually found it better practice to outsource the work.<sup>28</sup>

Outsourcing was a practical solution that allowed businesses to still claim belonging by giving a sculpture without the enormous investment of time and energy required to make one; it was a way to accomplish community without the labor. Most people in McCall have made sculptures at some point and know how much time, effort, and energy they required; they understood why businesses decided to outsource. The Krahns, along with the Forest Service, were examples of the few teams left in town that still sculpted their own pieces, and this was largely because both organizations had large social resources—staff, family, friends—upon which they could draw.

Outsourcing had the effect of introducing a wider variety of participants into the local sculpting competition. Initially, businesses outsourced sculptures to local groups that wanted to earn money, such as the Boy Scout

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28 Patty and Dean Hovdey, interview with the author, field notes, McCall, Idaho, 16 July 2005.

troop or a school athletic team. During my research period the chamber of commerce sometimes advertised across the state for potential sculptors on behalf of businesses that wanted to sponsor them because finding people who were willing to make sculptures, even for money, could be difficult. The reasons were that first, sculptures were a lot of work, and second, a successful event demanded a large number of sculptors. Paid sculpting teams came from all over the state. Art classes at Boise State University, fraternities and sororities at the University of Idaho, and professional artists all participated in the local competition at some point. By the end of my research period in 2009, there was even a company called Ice Is Nice that people could hire to build their sculpture.

Outsourcing constituted a commodification of social relations that shifted, though did not entirely change, some of the previously discussed social dynamics. People still evaluated whether or not a business contributed to Winter Carnival by sponsoring a snow sculpture, so the audience for the local competition was still strongly local. The nature of the evaluations changed somewhat, however, because this newer financial arrangement required an investment of capital, rather than an investment of time and labor. In 2009 it cost between two thousand and five thousand dollars to hire a person or team to make a snow sculpture, a sum that many businesses could not afford. Tom Grote, editor of the *Star-News*, for example, paid two thousand dollars, plus motel and travel expenses, for the two-person team he hired in 2008 to make a sculpture entitled “The Duel: Sharlie versus Bigfoot.”<sup>29</sup> Businesses that did not sponsor sculptures claimed that they simply could not afford it, so the debate shifted to whether such claims were justified, or whether people were simply using lack of finances as an excuse to get out of making a sculpture.

The other way outsourcing shifted local discussion over snow sculptures was by heightening the strain between professional artists and nonprofessional locals. Paying people to make sculptures naturally attracted professional sculptors. Key Bank was one of the first businesses to hire a professional sculptor, but contributions by professional artists were commonly part of the local competition by the time my research period ended. Some of the sculptors used the local competition as a forum to practice for state championships. Some residents felt that the inclusion of professional sculptors enhanced the local competition by giving it weight and significance

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29 Tom Grote, e-mail communication with the author, 19 June 2009.

that it did not previously have. Others felt that it was unfair for local participants to have to compete against professional artists (see Kruckemeyer 2002). Karen Morris felt that professionalizing the local competition could make people feel less confident about sculpting their own and that it might lead to making Winter Carnival more of a professional event, akin to some other winter carnivals. On the other hand, she understood the necessity of expanding participation, suggesting that one solution might be to have distinct professional and non-professional categories.<sup>30</sup>

The result of this shift was that the local competition wasn't strictly local in a geographical sense, nor was it entirely amateur. Rather, it remained local because locals organized and paid for the sculpture production (James-Duguid 1996), local people were the primary audience, and the production of sculptures remained a source of local talk. It was unclear to me whether building snow sculptures had always been a source of debate in Winter Carnival, but whether this discussion was a recent development misses the point. What is important is that sculptures generated talk about the nature of belonging in the present and their construction and display were complex acts involving aesthetics and politics. To build (or sponsor) or not build (or not sponsor) a sculpture was an active choice for which one's neighbors, coworkers, and friends were the primary audience. The actual creation of sculptures and the discussions surrounding them occurred before Winter Carnival officially began, outside its framework. Tourists became the primary audience for sculptures only after Winter Carnival began as sculptors finished making them and returned to work. What was left for display were icy manifestations of ideas about social relationships that had obtained during that year and that reflected people's relationship to a larger, imagined collective whole.

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The Krahn's finished glazing their Sharlie sculpture late on Thursday evening. The sculptures were to be judged early in the morning on Friday. The final step was for them to take a picture. This was the moment when the sculpture was the most perfect; it was finished, and it had not yet been ravaged by the weather or damaged by enthusiastic visitors. The picture was later framed and hung on the wall of their business, joining a host of other photographs of other sculptures and sculpting teams from the

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30 Karen Morris, interview with author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 19 February, 2001.



Photo by author

Fig. 29. Pictures of past snow sculptures hang on walls of businesses across town.

past (fig. 29). These pictures became the basis for telling stories about past Winter Carnivals and fond memories. They reminded the Krahn of friends and coworkers and their experiences of building sculptures together. Other businesses had walls of photographs of their sculptures, too, a history of participation and concrete evidence of good citizenship.

## Part II: The Idaho State Snow-Sculpting Championship

In 1987 festival organizers planned the first annual Idaho State Snow-Sculpting Championship, which added an additional competition to the original Winter Carnival activities. The new event was the brainchild of Jane and Hal Sager, who had participated in national competitions and were important festival organizers. The addition of the Idaho State Snow-Sculpting Championship was directly linked to the expansion of Winter Carnival from a three-day weekend to a ten-day event in 1985, a decision in which Jane was involved. She explained that the primary reason for initiating a state competition was so that tourists would have a fresh set of sculptures to look at over the second weekend of carnival. Sculptures are delicate and difficult to maintain for ten days, so the local pieces started to look worn by the end of the festival. Sager said, “[We] got much better crowds the second weekend because there were fresh sculptures to look at.

The people before who came up the [second] weekend were seeing week-old sculptures, and not many city sculptors would maintain theirs [because] it's hard to do."<sup>31</sup>

Sager's comment suggests that visitors and tourists were the primary audience for the Idaho State Championship. The organization, aesthetics, and position of the state competition within the festival supported her contention because they worked to frame the event as a serious and professional competition geared toward outside audiences. Organizationally, for example, the Idaho State Snow-Sculpting Championship was a highly regulated event that generally followed national rules and guidelines. Many states across the country have state championships that abide by similar rules. Teams consisted of three people, and a sign identified the teams publicly according to their geographical residence. The teams that competed in the state competition were rarely from McCall. Most came from towns scattered throughout the state such as Sandpoint, Cascade, Boise, Star, Indian Valley, and Emmett. But teams did not have to be from Idaho to compete. In 2005, for example, one team came from Minnesota. All teams competed for the title of Idaho Snow-Sculpting Champion.

Teams submitted a drawing of their sculpture beforehand, and it had to be approved by competition organizers (at the time of my research Sager's daughter, Diane Wiegand), illustrating a greater centralization of authority. Many teams also constructed scale models in advance (fig. 30, fig. 31). Teams did not gather their own snow but worked with prefabricated blocks that measured five-by-five-by-eight feet. And, as in other regulated competitions, no supports or armatures of any kind were allowed; the final sculpture had to be made entirely out of snow. Teams were given three days to finish their sculptures. The competition began at noon on Tuesday during the middle of Winter Carnival week and ended at 11:00 a.m. on Friday of the final weekend. Teams worked as much as they wanted during that period. The high degree of regulation defined the state event as a serious competition. Sager pointed out that "[the] local level can use armatures and have as many people as we want, and we can take as long as we want. [The state competition is] a real competitive event; in this case it's three days, three people, no armatures, no power tools. Work as many hours within the three days as you want. It's a different type of thing."<sup>32</sup>

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31 Jane Sager, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho, 19 July 2005.

32 Ibid.



Fig. 30. Models may be built by artists prior to sculpting in the Idaho Snow Sculpting Championships.



Fig. 31. Finished sculpture based on model.

Photos courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

The regulated organization of production was reflected in both the style and content of the finished sculptures. Because sculptors began with large blocks of snow and did not add slush, the sculpting process was one of extraction, rather than addition, like working with stone rather than clay. The finished sculptures were somewhat blocky and relatively the same size, reflecting their structural origins in the prefabricated blocks. None of the sculptures were glazed due to the time limitations, and they were frequently less clean and white than the pieces in the local competition since artists did not have an opportunity to gather and prepare their own snow. State sculptures were also not compelled to follow the festival theme, and the result was a greater number of abstract pieces. Professional artists actively participated in this competition, so abstractness may also have represented professionalism to some people.

The state competition reversed many of the dynamics in the local competition because it symbolically transformed strangers and professionals into locals. It accomplished this in two ways. First, unlike the local competition,



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 32. Artist working from block of snow in the Idaho State Snow Sculpting Championship.

the state one was embedded entirely within the official festival structure. It highlighted the artists and the construction process, giving sculptors a major festival role (fig. 32). People and labor were on display because artists began and ended their projects during the festival. Winter Carnival began on Friday, and state teams arrived the following Monday night. There was an opening breakfast for them on Tuesday morning, which provided an opportunity for people to meet and interact. Teams began to sculpt at noon, and they finished on Friday; the sculpting teams were also concentrated in a single area, unlike the local competition, where they were scattered about (fig. 33).

This centralized organization of time and space allowed visitors to view the process of making a sculpture, rather than merely looking at the final product, and created an additional attraction. Sager said, “[We knew] if



Photo courtesy of the McCall Area Chamber of Commerce

Fig. 33. Finished sculptures for the Idaho Snow Sculpting Championships, ca. 1993.

there was something going on midweek, we would get people up here to see what was going on. Our experience in building sculptures for the McCall event [was that] people would stand there in awe watching what we were doing because it is a very interesting process. With an actual sculpting event going on, people would come up to see it.”<sup>33</sup> Competition organizer Diane Wiegand agreed: “It’s a big event that people can actually watch from beginning to end in a short period of time. People come and they stay longer now. You can go down there on Thursday night—most of them work through the night—we do hand-dipped corndogs for anybody who’s walking around there.”<sup>34</sup> To passersby, state competitors assumed the role of locals while the artists also felt local because they contributed to the festival by making a sculpture and received attention from and interacted with festival visitors. At the same time, the state competition provided local residents an opportunity to be entertained, taking on the role of visitor and guest, rather than host. Wiegand noted that at any particular time, “You’ll find fifty to one hundred people [watching the event], and a lot of them are from here.”<sup>35</sup>

A second reason that the state competition transformed strangers into locals was because participation generated a sense of belonging to the area. According to Wiegand, some of the sculptors considered McCall their second home, and they looked forward to participating annually. Sager

33 Ibid.

34 Diane Wiegand, interview with the author, tape recording, McCall, Idaho 19 July 2005.

35 Ibid.

added, “The state competition creates ties to the area. Absolutely. They [the state sculptors] love McCall. It becomes part of you if you spend any time here.” State teams, Sager said, are treated to a kind of “working vacation.”<sup>36</sup> Reciprocity existed between the state teams and the city, much like the dynamic between the general public and teams in the local competition. Teams were given free lodging, meals, and T-shirts; a local hotel donated rooms, and a local restaurant prepared free meals. Wiegand said that many participating teams saw the state event as a kind of free vacation in a beautiful resort in exchange for a sculpture. “The whole time that they are here they are wined and dined and catered to,” she said.

Additionally participation created a sense of belonging among the sculptors because many of the same teams returned year after year and formed a sense of community based on their participation in the competition (Kruckemeyer 2002, 314). Returning teams grew to know each other and looked forward to their annual weeklong trip to the area. Wiegand said “I have some people who have been doing it for fifteen [years].” She emphasized, however, that “some teams are brand new. I always like to have at least three or four brand-new teams if I can.”<sup>37</sup> Sager told a poignant story about a state team that didn’t want to leave its sculpture because one of the team members was dying of cancer and knew that she would not be back. “Th[is] kind of thing stick[s] with you,” she said. “Those kinds of experiences are what it’s all about.”<sup>38</sup>

The event, therefore, was a mechanism for producing a team that was at once local, professional, and tied to the state. At the same time that they symbolically were made local, winners of the competition received the title of Idaho State Snow-Sculpting Champions. This newly invented, professional, local/state team was then inserted into national and international contexts that were both nested and hierarchical. Winners, for example, were eligible to compete in the U.S. National Snow-Sculpting Competition, which is usually held in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. They also participated in international events, such as the well-known snow-sculpting competition at the Sapporo Snow Festival in Japan and the Olympic Winter Games Arts Festival International Snow-Sculpting Competition. Sager explained,

The artists who have won the Idaho competition have won the nationals. They went to the Calgary Olympics—the Olympics have

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36 Jane Sager interview.

37 Diane Wiegand interview.

38 Jane Sager interview.

an artistic thing, beyond the athletics. Hal [Sager's husband] just judged the team to go to the 2006 Olympics. He was asked to be a judge for that. We have sent people to Sapporo, where they have an international event, and we won that. This is coming out of the Idaho competition. I think it is a significant type of thing and it enhances McCall's reputation.<sup>39</sup>

The champions that were created through the state-sculpting competition allowed the community to shape a cosmopolitan identity by participating in increasingly important and structured events. Festival organizers used nationally established levels of competition to insert themselves as equals into a hemispherewide series of related affairs.

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The local and state competitions were at once complementary and oppositional, and they worked out notions of citizenship and belonging at different scales and in different ways. Tourists were important in both cases, but the primary audience for the local competition was other locals. In McCall social relations hovered between obligatory and voluntary. The local competition concretized conventional values that had been challenged by resort development and were openly questioned and debated through the construction and display of sculptures. Debates about local citizenship and belonging were enacted through participation in and talk about the production of art, while broader realms of belonging were imagined through the content and form of the sculptures themselves. The state competition, in contrast, was a device for producing a team that was at once local and professional, conflating categories that were seemingly opposed in the local competition; the primary audience for this event was visitors and tourists. Having merged these categories and crowned a winner, McCall then used the champion team to situate the town in a global environment.

The two competitions worked in tandem through differently organized processes of production. In doing so ideas about social relationships with respect to a larger whole were debated, contested, and explored here on an annual basis using art. But the relationships and identities constructed were temporary—though remembered, photographed, and talked about—because the public art was impermanent and created within a framework of play. Winter Carnival ended on Sunday evening of the second weekend. All sculptures were demolished with backhoes by early Monday morning, and city spaces were reclaimed for everyday life.

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39 Ibid.

Social Science/Folklore & Mythology, Customs & Traditions

# WINTER CARNIVAL IN A WESTERN TOWN

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