

“We were a hit,” Tinner said. “We were so cute.”

Word spread. Pretty soon, the local Scandinavian groups — such as the Swedish Lodge (Vasa), the Sons of Norway and the Finnish Brotherhood — were inviting the troop to perform.

Obie, Tinner and Norrman — three troop mothers — decided to turn the troop into a dance group, giving rise to the Astoria Scandinavian Folk Dancers.

The first festival

The young dancers became traveling entertainers, and their venues grew increasingly prestigious. Twice they performed live on Portland’s KGW. Between high-profile gigs — including at the Lloyd Center, Seattle’s Space Needle and Knott’s Berry Farm in California — they journeyed along U.S. Highway 101, dancing at Scandinavian lodges.

“I remember a lot of laughing, I remember a lot of dancing, and I remember sore feet,” said Supple, who was 10 when the dance group was formed.

By the time the group disbanded in the early 1970s, the group of eight girls had expanded to 24 girls and boys.

On June 15, 1968, at the old 4-H site, the dancers hosted a festival to raise money for a trip to Disneyland and Solvang, a Danish village near southern California. They invited the local Scandinavian lodges to set up booths and sell food and crafts items, while the dancers headlined the event.

“We didn’t know if anyone would be interested or not,” Tinner said.

The dancers needn’t have worried: “I’m not kidding you: You couldn’t get in. It was so packed,” she said.

This was the first Scandinavian festival — the event that became the model for each one that followed — “and it was a huge success,” she said.

Traditions

Though the inaugural festival had a built-in fan base in the Scandinavian town, the event’s popularity reached beyond Scandinavian cultural groups and families of the dancers. “Everybody came,” Tinner said.

In that first year, the founders laid down festival traditions that have continued for five decades — from the Scandinavian court, to the walking parade, to the hex burning (a Danish ritual in which participants throw straw dolls into a fire to ward off bad luck for a year).

Even a first-year ceremony that received mixed reviews — namely, the princesses’ speech “What My National Heritage Means to Me” — has enjoyed unexpected longevity.

“Afterwards, a lot of people said, ‘Oh that’s dumb,’” Tinner recalled. However, “they’re still using that today.”

‘In awe’

Supple, who lived through the folk dancers’ adventures and the festival founding, later served as Senior Miss Finland and was crowned Miss Scandinavia.

She remembers her mother coming home from her full-time day job as a Clatsop County judicial assistant, cooking dinner, then working into the night to plan the festival entertainment.



SUBMITTED PHOTO
An original ticket for the first Astoria Scandinavian festival.



COLIN MURPHEY/THE DAILY ASTORIAN
Shirley Tinner holds up a photo of performers at one of the Scandinavian Midsummer Festivals which includes her daughter, Kim Supple.



SUBMITTED PHOTO
The cover of the original program for the first Scandinavian Midsummer Festival.



COLIN MURPHEY/THE DAILY ASTORIAN
Tinner has been collecting newspaper articles and memorabilia related to the festival since the beginning of the event, 50 years ago.



SUBMITTED PHOTO/KIM SUPPLE
Kim Supple, pictured here second from the right in the first row in a photo from a previous Scandinavian Midsummer Festival, was also heavily involved in organizing the annual celebration in Astoria.