

The International Fib-Ark Boat Race Parade

by Marilyn Reeves

Since 1949 Salida's greatest claim to fame has been the International Fib-Ark Boat Race. Every Father's Day weekend kayakers come from all over the world to compete in the white water races along the Arkansas River, which flows through Riverside Park at the end of town.

There are numerous festivities in honor of this occasion: vendors selling arts, crafts, and food – tostadas, smoked turkey legs, and my favorite: tunnel cakes. Live music blaring from loud speakers. Carnival rides for the kids. And on Saturday morning, there is the Parade.

Back in the '50's, the Parade was a big deal. There were beautiful floats with crepe paper carnations and all sorts of other decorations. Perched atop of one of these pretty floats were the Boat Race Queen and her attendants in their pastel gowns, waving to the crowds as they passed by. There were antique cars, horses with riders dressed in colorful Western apparel, and clowns tossing candy to the kids. There were the Shriners in their tasseled red fezzes, roaring around in figure 8's on motor cycles and old jalopies honking their ooga-ooga horns. And there was the Salida High School Marching Band.

When I was in Junior High, I decided to become a majorette. After a couple of years of practice – and with the black and blue elbows to prove it – I was in the marching band. So on Parade Day I donned my purple & white mini-

skirted uniform and my brand new pair of white marching boots and joined the gathering of the band members at the upper end of F Street, where we commenced our mile-long march through town. We majorettes swayed and kicked to the beat of the drums, twirling and tossing our batons, and strutting our stuff in front of the crowds lining the street.

But about the time we passed my Dad's store in the lower downtown shopping area, my feet were killing me and I had to drop out of the parade. I managed to hobble over to the curb and pull off my new boots. Both my heels were sporting half-dollar-sized blisters which were bleeding into my socks. I limped into the store in my sock feet and sat there waiting for a ride home. So much for my career as a majorette!

In more recent years, my sisters and I would drive to Salida and help Dad set up the folding chairs at 3rd and F Street outside the Senior Center, where Dad functioned as Director for some 30 years. The parade no longer featured the pretty floats of my youth. The town had dispensed with electing a Queen. But there were still horses with Western riders, antique cars, enormous farm vehicles, and the ubiquitous Shriners. And the Salida High School Marching Band with its newly minted majorettes strutting their stuff.

Long live the annual Salida International Fib-Ark Boat Race Parade!