

November 3, 1982

7316 Elmwood Ave.
Middleton, WI 53562

Dear John Beale,

Sorry about the delay in responding, but finally you'll find enclosed a MORRIS ALE INFO PACKET. This should give you an idea of what we considered and encountered as we stumbled through our preparations.

As to your request for confirmation of the Ale(s)' success, most of the evidence is anecdotal. The first year we did get a brief clip on the evening T.V. news, but it was only a clip: maybe a long-shot of the assembled dancers, 30 seconds of close-up on legs with bells, ending with the cliched
** 'adorable-baby-held-by-costumed-figure' shot. I believe it ran behind the weather summaries. All newspaper coverage was in advance, cleverly planted by ourselves, attempting to attract an audience.

There is evidence ... Year 1, as I assist an elderly woman using an aluminum walker over to our last mass dance site she glows, "Morris dancers! The last time I saw morris dancers was in England, ten years ago with my late husband. So when I read that you were coming, even though I just had major surgery two weeks ago, I knew I had to be here!"

We were contacted Year 2 by the Cambridge Art Fair people. They were disappointed that we had changed the date of our ale so it no longer coincided with their Fair. Could we still come? Yes, we said, but this year we'd have to charge a fee. (All tour stops were obviously unpaid.) A week later I get a call from the committeewoman, "Well, we met with the Town Board and I told them about your fee. They reluctantly agreed. You see all of our other entertainment is volunteer. But, they said, if we have to pay money to get the morris dancers back...then we'll pay money. (long pause) But please don't let the choir director know."

Year 1, when we scheduled a tour stop in the small town of Mineral Point, the morris teams arrived to find a substantial part of the town assembled around the central green; lawn chairs and beer coolers, waiting for the dancers.

But other than that... we had no sponsors, just the help of a lot of friends. The fees we charged participants covered all our expenses.

In fact, I think our team is philosophically leery of letting the Ale become more than a gathering of and for the dancers. Those who pay call the tune, so to speak, and within the current price range we don't mind footing the bill.

I don't know if that is any help to you or not. Good luck in your endeavors.

Sincerely yours,

Mike Weinberger

** I believe the baby was of the Bloomington team, and the costumed figure the Bloomington Hobby.

I. MAILINGS: (samples enclosed) Biggest complaint was that we didn't send initial mailing early enough for people to make arrangements.* We mailed in late January, early February, or March. ** Our memorial day weekend is not a 3 day weekend for the Canadians.*

II. CAMPGROUND ACCOMODATIONS: For the sake of economy we looked for public campgrounds (state, city, county parks). We used the following criteria in deciding on the county park: 1) Plenty of space for camping 2) away from non-Morris campers (mutual non-disturbance) 3) communal gathering area; we had a shelter and a tent 4) space for mass dancing. Minor considerations: 5) ease of access; not difficult to direct out-of-towners to and fro; 6) close to other activities (i.e. tours)

We discovered public space gets reserved early! We tried to be sure and stake our claim at the first possible moment, the first week of January in each year. Also, we were able to make special arrangements with the county board to camp in an otherwise non-camping area. (Sending our respectable member to negotiate.)

III. BUDGET (see enclosed)

IV. FOOD: Each team was responsible for their own meals throughout the weekend, with the exception of a tour lunch, Year 1, and a catered dinner, Year 2. (More of these later.) At the campsite, we provided charcoal, coffee, tea water, and beer. This required renting coffee urns, which we learned, take a long time to brew and a short time to empty (Why are all the dancers jittery?). We would rent a second large coffee urn in the future. We offered to rent gas stoves for any teams that didn't want to hassle bringing them and were willing to send money.

Year 1: Saturday tour lunch provided; Saturday evening everyone asked to bring dish for potluck. Complaints were that lunch stops were often in late afternoon and were not long enough to eat, drink, and dance. (A general defect of Year 1's tours.) Also, at the end of those tours, people were not excited about preparing potluck meal.

Year 2: We scheduled shorter tours, starting with long stop in downtown area around noon, so teams could dance, eat, and drink. All we provided was a list of restaurants and bars. That evening, after tours, we catered dinner. To do this cheaply (Note 1982 budget: 3 Cooks...\$60.00; Catered Dinner Food... \$182.82; TOTAL: \$242.82 for 104 + people!!!) we enlisted the help of friends. At the last moment, one of these, the chief cook, fell ill. Substitutes were found and the dinner was a success (I think only complaint was too little fruit punch) but it was more exciting than we wanted it to be. Commercial caterers might have been more expensive, but certainly more worry-free.

V. TOURS: Year 1... we tried to plan tours that highlighted scenic areas of Wisconsin and provided large audiences (tour stops were at an art fair, a tourist attraction, a winery, an historical small town, and a famous restaurant). Except for the small town and art fair, crowds were minimal. Most everyone complained about the length of the drives and the tight schedules.

Year 2... we scheduled all tours in the immediate Madison area (city parks, the University mall, the State Street area, a nursing home, and the community center of University student housing). This led to less driving but more elaborate driving directions. (Maps and directions were made up, distributed, and soon discarded.) Very few people were interested in watching at the parks or at student housing. (One criteria for tour stops maybe too trivial to mention is good dancing area: space and surface.) Our team enjoyed splitting off into small tour groups, as it gave us a chance to interact more closely with a manageable number of people. With two days of touring, we'd like to visit with two different groups.

VI. POST-TOUR DANCE: Year 1...We returned from tours to the campsite and, after the potluck dinner, danced there. We relied on what musicians there were among the morris teams for music.

Year 2...We held a more organized dance. Added expenses in 1982 budget included rentals of Olin Park Barn, a sound permit, microphones, and a sound system. We also enlisted the aid of local (non-morris) musicians to play for the dance, since some of the morris musicians had voiced their preference for dancing over playing the music.

VII. WORKSHOPS: Year 2 we had another day to schedule, so we organized workshops. (See enclosed note) Since Minnesota Traditional Morris was involved we incurred some phone costs. (I think most of 1981's phone costs came from trying to locate morris teams to invite; an expense we avoided Year 2. See enclosed address list.)

VIII. MISC.: We always found ourselves looking for more volunteers. People for security, watching the campsite. People to check-in arriving teams, guides for the tours, folks to clean the Olin Park Barn before the catered dinner, Year 2. Our payment, besides our undying gratitude, was usually to offer them free admittance to ale activities. Our team felt our expenditures on rentals were all well worth the money: the tent, lights, bullhorn, extension cords, coffee urns (also used to heat tea water). Even after much planning, there were always complaints, but somehow it all worked out and the result was a lot of fun.

PS. If it's cold, have plenty of coffee, if it's hot, there can't be enough beer.