

German and Russian Holiday Foods

Electronic mail message from Mary Lynn Axtman, Fargo, North Dakota

Holiday Greetings to each of you,

Growing up in Pierce County, ND with half it's population as Kutschurganers directly from Russia and their descendants, some of the distinctly German and or Russian food items that were always present during the twelve days of Christmas, Christmas Eve to the Feast of the Three Kings in January included:

-- Halvah, a Turkish sesame treat made with crushed sesame seeds sweetened and flavored with vanilla and/or chocolate. The primary company and brand name is the JOYVA Company in New York. Have several blocks of it in my fridge right now for our Christmas Day dinner. The country of Turkey is close to the Ukraine.

-- Fruits and nuts: remember the efforts in the early German Colonies to plant trees and vineyards surrounding their villages? In later years, these produced copious amounts of fruits and nuts for their use. Wine with a light alcohol content was drunk at most evening meals or with guests. Fruits, fresh or dried found their way into baked goods such a fruit custard kuchen or the traditional fruit cakes that were wrapped in wine soaked fabric and aged well in a cool cellar. Cherries, fresh in the summer and dried for the winter were used in large amounts and were also a reminder of those back in the colonies. Here, chocolate covered cherry or other dried fruit candies were made in large amounts for the Holidays by my family. Have some of those also. Almonds were another favorite nut used in holiday foods. Marzipan, ground almond paste, was also used for candies. An overflowing bowl of nuts and nutcrackers were always present for the usual card games with family and guests. Peanuts and larger amounts of available sugar seemed to have been the North American contribution to their Holidays.

-- Fish and Herring: the Holidays were not complete without a large jar of pickled herring. The Black Sea and rivers near the colonies had large amounts of fish and herring that were used and preserved. Have a jar of pickled herring in my fridge for Christmas also.

-- Schnapps: The Russian government had the monopoly on all the grain produced and a major product was the alcohol, vodka and other hard liquor beverages. Thus, in our homes there was always a bottle or several of prepared burnt sugar, water and Everclear alcohol ready for Holiday guests, parties, weddings and for the evening of New Years, those 'Shooting in the New Year' guests who made the rounds. Also have some in my fridge right now.

-- Don't believe that chocolate might have had any Russian roots but for each of my grandparents with some twenty to thirty grandkids, a nickel Hershey candy bar for each was considered to be a wonderful and special gift for us. Couldn't get by with that today!!

Hope this might give you some 'flavor' of how our Kutschurganer families assimilated some of the old country and the new country foods into our Holidays