

Schnaepple

Electronic mail message from Dr. Roland Wagner, San Jose State University, San Jose, California

Carolyn's post about cards being sinful reminded me of a few other things there many German Russians in my home area thought evil or devil inspired or sinful. Here is my list: playing cards, "Teufel Karten" my grandmother called them, and we learned to hide them when she showed up; dancing; movies (favorite occupation Sat. nights for strict baptists was to park in front of the movie theater when movie was over to see who came out of that den of iniquity); drinking alcohol (some baptists were called "ash baptists" because they got their polished shoes full of ashes because they went in the back door of the town bar to get their "bottle", thus walking through the stove ashes thrown there, which too easily identified their "sin"); ministers wearing robes (grandma walked out of church once when the new minister showed up wearing a robe, "too much like the catholics" she said.) I feel guilty just writing this.

A great story, Ron! I was raised in a strict German-Catholic family, with roots in the Beresan colonies from the Black Sea region. Those folks loved to get together on weekends to play cards (no money or betting was involved), the men would drink "Schnaepple" (usually Kessler's whiskey, maybe they just liked the name), and the women folk would all sit in the other room and chat, watching the antics and the loud jokes of the men-folk, lovingly but slightly disapprovingly. After a couple rounds (or so) of someone shouting out, "Down with Kessler!", the mood would finally strike the men-folk and they would adjourn to the other room, each one would grab a musical instrument of choice (accordion, banjo, fiddle, whatever) and they would strike up lively old German dance tunes. We kids would fall asleep in the corner, watching and listening. It's interesting that we sometimes hear of guilt as being a uniquely Catholic trait, but those folks didn't seem very weighed down by it.

Such innocent times.