

Polterabend – Pre-Wedding Activity

By Alfred Opp, Vancouver, British Columbia

Edited by Connie Dahlke, Walla Walla, Washington

In Teplitz, Bessarabia, weddings and funerals were staged as big events, with relatives and friends invited. It was that way from the beginning of the village in 1817. And as we returned to Germany in 1948 we found that not much had changed there, either.

Large social events could not be held from late fall to early spring because it became dark so early in the evening. By the time there was enough light in the evening, the field work took precedence, so these events had to be carefully timed. In the early days, a date such as Apostle's Day, or John Mark's date, etc – one of the holy days – was chosen. Most of these days fell on Thursday. In later times, these dates were changed considerably.

As time passed, the population of the village grew, and so did the number of one's relatives. With no rental space available, folks used their barns for these events. To set up the barn, tables and chairs had to be brought in, as well as dishes and accessories. Friends of the bride and groom got together to decorate the place.

Young people, friends of the bridal pair, went through the village collecting the borrowed items that were needed. This activity was a joyful and colorful affair. Everyone in the village gave a hand to provide the needed items. The young people dressed up in colorful outfits, and the horses and carriage were also decorated. When all was ready, the Brautbuben-Mädchen went on the road, singing and cheering to collect the needed items. After the wedding celebration was over, the items were returned in the same cheerful way.

Baking and cooking for these large events was done in communal fashion. After all the preparations were in place, the couple met with the Pastor for a final time before the celebrations started. On the evening before the wedding, the friends of the couple got together to have some fun. The idea was to say farewell to youth before stepping up to a new life in earnest. The pranks and entertainment at these parties varied from home to home, depending on what was tolerated. My Mom told me about my folk's party, and also the party held when her sister got married. Food and wine was served to start the party. The groom said a prayer and gave thanks to both sets of parents. Then the best man got up and made a speech with lots of cheers and wishes for good luck. A friend of the couple then made a speech listing all the bad habits of the bride and groom, again amidst cheers and laughter. Somebody began playing songs on the accordion for a sing-along. The party continued with lots of noise-making and banging on various items brought for that purpose. At my parent's Polterabend, Dad's brother brought in a pair of Dad's pants and read a poem about what a Pantoffelheld (henpecked) husband he now was. The final act was to steal the bride. If successful, the groom got teased that he was not going to be a good protector of his wife. The same bride-stealing was often played at weddings. The groom received advice and trinkets to assure that the wedding night would be successful. The evening closed with everyone having a good time. At the end, a nice custom was for a friend to show up on horseback, read a prayer, and then ride off cheering for the occasion. Firing off gunshots was also part of such events. On these occasions, the use of Nussaschnapps (walnut-based schnapps) for the toast was a special honor.