

Wedding Celebration in Sarata, Bessarabia

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[Begin Translation/Transcription]

Wedding Celebration

The wedding celebration is fundamentally one of the best loved celebrations, since it is the means whereby friends and relatives, who seldom get to see each other throughout the year, come together. For the children it has to do with the desire for a lot of good food. The young people like the favorable opportunity to take part in the entertainment and to get acquainted with youth from other areas.

The demands for the preparation for this celebration often takes some time. Three weeks before the event, the young couple travels to the pastor for “the inquiry”. He draws up the notice document and, with good advice and well wishes, sends them back to their home. On each of the three following Sundays, time is set aside for the couple, during the worship service, where the pastor or the sexton makes known publicly to the assembled congregation the couple’s intention to marry [banns] (*ausgerufen*) or (*aufgeboden*) with these words: “Today is the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd public announcement that Emil Reich, son of Eduard Reich, living in Sarata and Else Müller, daughter of Bernhard Müller, living in Friedenstal, desire to enter into the state of marriage.

During these Sundays, the engaged couple travels to other villages to invite friends and acquaintances to the wedding. On market days, the couple travels to the market, along with their parents, and make the necessary purchases. Wreath and veil will be bought for the bride and a bouquet for the bridegroom. Both being paid for by the bridegroom. The bridegroom buys a ring for the bride and she buys a ring for the groom. These rings will be put aside until the wedding at which time the pastor will put the appropriate ring on the hand of each person. The engagement ring will have already been purchased earlier at the engagement of the couple and placed on the bride’s finger. As a rule, the bridegroom does not receive an engagement ring. As is often the case among the poorer farmers, the bridegroom also does not receive a wedding ring. The difference between an engagement ring and a wedding ring is that the first ring has a red stone and is worn on the ring finger (*Goldfinger*) of the left hand, while the last one, as a rule, is plain and finds its place on the ring finger of the right hand.

Later during the afternoon, on one of the three Sundays on which the banns are announced, the engaged couple goes around in the village to identify among the young people the necessary best-men (*Brautführer*) and best-women (*Brautführerinnen*), best-boys (*Brautbuben*) and best-girls (*Brautmädchen*) and asking them to be part of the wedding. At weddings, there are from 5-20 couples depending on the material situation of the bride’s people. It requires a large sum of

money to put on a big wedding, which the poor person is unable to afford, an expense which is covered exclusively by the bride's people. For that reason, in many instances, the wedding ends up being small.

The wedding celebration, as a rule, takes place on Friday, rarely on Sunday (used to be on Thursday). The final week is an indication to the elders of the bride's people (*Brautleute* or *Hochzeitseltern*) that there is really a lot to do and they want to do as much as possible to make the wedding guests feel as much at home as possible. Close relatives, friends and neighbors heartily give their assistance. Often they also contribute material goods (milk, butchered chickens, wine and the like). The first two of the best-boys and best-girls have a lot to do. As a rule, these are close relatives of the bridal couple (brothers and sisters of the bride and the groom). Best-men and best-women are chosen from among the young people of their school day mates – both difficult decisions.

For the first two of this group, there is much to do when it is a big wedding (in such cases there can be three couples). Three days prior to the celebration, a couple of best-boys go to the relatives and friends of the bride's people and, on behalf of them, invite them to the wedding. The invitation takes place by means of an invitation notice. As a reward, a box of matches is given to the boys for smoking. In earlier times, the invitation was given verbally only and made up of words something like this:

I am approaching you here on foot,
Had I a horse, I would have come riding in,
However, since the house and porch entryway are too small,
That is why I am coming on foot.

Good fortune in here, good fortune in here,
Are the master and mistress inside or out?
If they are out, I call on them to come in
Gather your goslings (*Gänslein*) and little chicks (*Hühnerlein*) –
Oh my, I wanted to say something different:
Gather your little sons (*Söhnlein*) and little daughters (*Töchterlein*).

Precious joy: I bid you quite cheerfully
Do not think badly of me!
I am an extended he-goat (*Bock*) –
Oh my, I wanted to say something different:
I am an extended invitation (*Bote*),
Sent out by the bride and groom,
On this coming Thursday
There is going to be a wedding,
Then we will stop in at the parson's place,
Might it be that there will be nothing to eat?

For sure, there will be something to eat,
Pack only your fork and spoon.

I have one more thing to request:
If you have a plate with roasted sausage,
That quells the hunger but not the thirst.
But if you have a glass of wine, then pour us one.
If you have a glass of brandy wine,
We will be coming to you more often.
If you have a glass of schnapps,
We would not refuse that either.
But if you have a glass of water,
Bravo! We will leave that one for you.
But if you have a beautiful young daughter,
That should be our highest joy and delight.

If you have nothing—tomorrow we will travel to Poland
And we will get ourselves a whole wagon (*Karutz*) load,
Had I thought about this earlier,
I and my companions would have brought one along.
So mend your dress and blouse
And send yourselves to the meal
And be so kind and show up
The wedding is going to be next Thursday!

On the day before the wedding celebration, the first couple of best-boys, using a wagon, have to pick up the tables and things to sit on from those who have been invited to the wedding. The best-girls, for their part, bring together the necessary eating utensils, lamps and flower bouquets and flower-pots. To this end, two spirited horses are decorated with flowers, paper roses and colorful ribbons.

Things start to stir early in the morning of the wedding day, taking care of last minute things. Everything which can contribute to the success of the celebration is quickly attended to. Later the wedding guests gather around. The wedding party, the best-boys and best-girls gather in some other house nearby (usually at the neighbor), where the bride is “crowned” by a woman with a wreath and veil. A bouquet is fastened to the chest of the bridegroom. During this time, every best-girl looks to fasten a bouquet onto the chest of a best-boy. After this “crowning” the whole wedding party gathers in the house of the wedding, the couple to be married in the lead, the other couples following behind. All take their place at the table in one room, the married couple at the head of the table. Behind them, on the wall, are properly formatted large initials of the names of the bridegroom and the bride, made out of greenery (most often from fir-tree bows). Then the feasting begins. First of all, coffee and sweet bread is served. This carries on with music, singing and speeches until around 10 o’clock when the sexton is called upon to give a prayer. Between 11 and noon, usually in the church, the pastor of the church finalizes the marriage. The civil marriage was already carried out in the morning, or sometimes on the day before, by the civil magistrate (*Bürgermeister*) in the town council office. The pastor gives a brief address to the bridal couple standing before the altar (the other guests being seated in the church benches), in which he speaks to both of them about their obligations to each other. Then

the rite of marriage is concluded. The pastor takes the rings and puts each one on the ring finger of the right hand of the bride and groom.

After the wedding ceremony, the wedding party heads for the wedding house (usually that is at the bride's home). While on the way, the young people of the village fire off many gunshots. This is supposed to bring good fortune to the young couple. Arriving at the wedding house, the young married couple is now given well-wishes from everyone there, first of all by the best-boys and the best-girls and finally by the parents of both sides. Now it is time to head for the table. Things start off with the much praised noodle soup along with chicken and potato salad.

The afternoon is spent in singing, music and pleasant conversation. Toward evening it is time to take pictures, taken in order to have a record by photo of the event of the day. The whole group of people attending the wedding go outside and stand in front of the house. In the middle sit the newly weds, their mothers next to them, then their fathers next, then beside and behind those in the wedding party and all other guests. In the evening, the wedding party takes a walk through the village. They stop for a brief time at the home of a friend or acquaintance. The evening is especially filled with delights of all sorts. The "rice pudding" (*Reisbrei*), with its sweet raisins, is relished especially by the children. In good weather, spirited dancing takes place out in the open. In bad weather, it takes place inside, although the "Brotherhood" (*Stundenbrüder*) were opposed to it because they considered this to be a sin.

Frequently it happened that the shoe of the bride is "stolen". The best-men then have to ransom it with a certain sum of money (the money belongs to the married couple). In order to prevent this, the best-boys come up with a sum of money from among themselves, turn it over to the bridegroom and tell him that the bride's shoe is now paid for and that those, who then steal the bride's shoe and are caught, have to double that amount.

The wedding celebration lasts long into the night. It lasts too long for the older folks and children; little by little they begin to disappear. Now things begin to liven up because the young folks now feel more free. Various lively party games, music and singing, dancing and story telling take place one after the other. At the break of day, the bride's wreath is removed. To this end, two chairs are placed opposite and close to each other. The bride seats herself on one of them, the bridegroom on the other. The best-men and best-women gather around the chairs and sing an appropriate song. At the same time, two women remove the wreath, veil and the bouquet from the bride and groom. The boys quickly grab the legs of the chairs and lift the young couple in the air a couple of times with shouts of hurrah.

Now it is time for the veil to reveal the future. The bride is blindfolded and the wreath and veil pressed into her hand. The best-girls gather in a circle, singing a song and move around the bride in a circle. When the song ends, they all stop in place. The bride then places her wreath and veil upon the head of one of them. This then is supposed to be the next of all the best-girls to become a bride. The future bridegroom is also discovered in similar manner by the young husband.

And with that, the wedding celebration is over. Daytime has arrived in the meantime and now begins the work of straightening out the house where the wedding took place. The kitchenware used for eating, which was not already taken home by the women who brought it, is sorted. The

best-boys again return the chairs and benches to their respective homes. The room is thoroughly cleaned. It is not until toward evening that rest and a normal life returned to the house of the wedding. The young wife looks after her property (dowry) in the house of her husband. Often it happens that the best-men and best-women gather at the house of the young couple on one of the following Sundays for a short celebration after the event. One says, the wedding celebration is being “buried”.

Friends and relatives have again dispersed – a beautiful celebration has come to an end.

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{signed: Liebl}

[End Translation/Transcription]