Weddings In Old Acadia

By Renee Evans

The courtship of an Acadian couple was much more complicated than one of today. Before a young man could visit a young lady, he had to first send a friend to ask her father's permission. After obtaining permission to call, the Acadian couple was seldom left alone. Many a suitor spent the entire evening playing dominoes with the girl's father. While they played, the young man was questioned by the girl's mother and most of her aunts. They asked about his family tree and his social and financial assets.

If the young man should continue to call over a certain length of time, her father would ask what his intentions were. He did this to save his daughter's time. For, if the young lady was not married by the time she was twenty-five years old, she would be considered an old maid. Her father would say he didn't want his daughter to marry a man whose heart was like an artichoke, having a leaf for everyone.

Starting their life together was a very serious matter. Both families met to discuss the family skeletons. After all were satisfied, the Betrothal Contract was made. It was signed by the couple and a group of witnesses.

The maiden's father would then announce what gifts he would present to her on her wedding day.

The date for the engagement breakfast was set. All the relatives of the espoused pair came.

Even when he gave the young lady the engagement ring, they were not alone. For after the breakfast the ring was presented. It was usually a ruby set in a yellow-gold band.

A few days later the groom-to-be gave his chosen one a wedding basket. The bride was always glad to receive it and the gifts it held. It was usually a hand-made basket filled with shawls, lace caps 'with matching gloves, and modest articles of jewelry. Of course, she was not permitted to wear anything from the basket before she was married.

After everything was set, the young lady was not permitted to part with her parents or leave her parent's home for more than three days at a time. If this rule was broken, the engagement was reconsidered before going into marriage.

The wedding date was set by both families. A meeting was called and a convenient date was decided upon.

Next, came the preparations for the wedding. First, a stand for a cake was made. A round piece of wood was cut and a small pole driven into the center of it. The layers were baked in thin shapes, each layer had a different filling set at regular intervals. Then the cake was cut, each slice resembled a ribbon, hence the name Ribbon Cake.

The wedding dress had been handed down from bride to bride through the generations of the family. After each wedding it was carefully stored away for the next bride-to-be.

The Acadians had certain days which they considered best for marrying. Saturday was a work day and no one wanted to be married on a common work day. They thought it would mean work, very hard work, for the rest of the people's lives. Sunday was a day of worship and rest. It was also considered common. Friday weddings were sure to bring bad luck with crops and money. This was believed because criminals were executed on Fridays. It was called "jour noir" or Hangman's Day.

The men and boys of the village made the new pair a house. After the house was completed, they plowed the land that the groom had chosen for his field.

The women were kept busy making gifts for the new bride's home. A real fashionable wedding was held in a very old Cathedral. However, most ceremonies were performed in the bride's church.

Wedding rings were worn by both bride and groom. They were known as Alliance Rings. Both were engraved with the initials of the pair and date of the marriage.

The guests never threw rice as man and his wife left the church. The bride never tossed her bouquet. It was sent to the cemetery, where it was placed on the grave of a loved one. This was done so the deceased could share their joy. It was placed in a vase with her name attached to it.