



There's a rumor in the Poker family that they are direct descendants of Charlemagne, who was also known as Charles The Great. You had to know the guy to understand why he was called "Great." Chuck The Great, as he was called by his friends, is sometimes also called "The Father of Europe," "The King of The Franks," (very handy to have around at picnics), "Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire" and holder of a lifetime "Subway Sandwich Discount Card." He had no self-image problem and was, without doubt, an alpha male. Even when the pope crowned him king he feigned surprise and said, "Who, me?" Politicians have been full of you-know-what ever since.

Even though he was a major force in supporting the arts it is also likely he was no fan of stand-up comedy. The man could suck the life out of a party just by walking into the room. He was completely expressionless. That was a gene inherited by The Pokers and what we now know as a "poker face." So, it set the pattern for all the generations of Pokers that followed... until a later time when everything changed and the Poker Family immigrated to the young State Of Texas in 1847.

But long before the time of Charlemagne, the Franks were a major force with which to contend. The Franks had lived in an area near the Rhine River. Their leader was another very humorless king, named Franko. You cannot make this stuff up. Well, you can... but this was a real person. These days when we talk of the Franks, as we often do, it's in reference to a type of sausage. That's sort of an interesting historical alliteration: From big dog to hot dog. If the original king of the Franks had been named King Texas we would be visiting the Eiffel Tower in "Paris, Texas" since France was named after him. Fate is funny that way.

But what was the reason the Poker family emigrated to Plano? Due to the "Great Croissant Controversy" in late 1846 they had a choice: Leave or face the guillotine. It seems the French government was in need of raising some cash for a few of their meddlesome adventures. To raise money for an attack on Bavaria they levied a flat tax of three Francs per pastry. They also stopped offering ice in Diet Coke, a practice still in effect today. There were some other odd changes, too. For instance, there was tax on a new service where men could pay a woman to read them poetry. They were known as prostitute. Later, when they expanded their services, the name was shortened.

The Poker family just wanted to go to America where a good cup of tea wasn't taxed and you could get pizza by the slice. It was the

Franco-American dream, just like Spaghetti-O's. But they also had the authorities chasing them for using the wrong kind of cheese in their crepes to offset the cost of the oppressive taxes. The French, always known for having their priorities straight, are very serious about their crepes.

When they arrived at the Port of New York they discovered that there were three major things missing from the landscape: overpriced wines, rude restaurant service and a good card game. These were their first contributions to American culture. You can still get rude service at some restaurants in New York even today.

The Poker family migrated south to Boomer, South Carolina where they set up a business selling pretzels to the tourists and large seashells with the words, "I ♥ Boomer" painted on the side. That was a big seller. They raised enough money to buy the little town and renamed it Charleston after Charlemagne. Charleston would end up being the salvation of the Poker family. Earl Roy Poker was the real thinker of the clan but most members of the family just called him "Crazy Roy." In early 1847, he came up with an idea he thought would revolutionize communication. No, it wasn't the telegraph. Stationed every twenty feet for sixteen miles he had one man stationed for a total of 4,224 men (do the math) who passed a phrase from one to the next until it reached the last man. The only problem was that the original message was "It's a nice day today" but by the time it reached the last man it had transformed into "Ertzen ice der ta-der," which made no sense at all. It's often thought that this is the way something as sane as Latin evolved into something as gutturally impossible as German. No disrespect to our German friends but, let's face it, when I vivaciously say "Ich wünsche etwas Eiscreme!" it doesn't sound as friendly as "I want some ice cream!"

Anyway, the "communications" experiment was a bust and just a year or so later telegraphs went into wide use. Still, Crazy Roy kept coming up with some real gems. A family favorite was something he called the "Turkey Cannon." He would load up dressing, a variety of spices, some celery and carrots, anchor the turkey with its cavity as wide open as a hippo's mouth and launch a glob of stuffing into the turkey. Being that this was Crazy Roy's invention, a lot of extra stuffing had to be made because he kept missing the turkey and plastering the kitchen wall. The kids thought it was funny and the adults were disgusted. They were disgusted, that is, until one day Velma Nordine Poker noticed the image of the Virgin Mary on the wall. She said that

instead of the Baby Jesus she was holding a turkey. That was a sign. A sign that things were about to turn around for the family and it would start with the feast of Thanksgiving. Unfortunately, that Thanksgiving would be their last in Charleston since some of the local religious leaders would not tolerate the sacrilege. They were, once again, chased away from a place they called home.

Once Aunt Velma, as everyone called her, claimed that she had levitated a biscuit using only the power of her mind. Uncle Bertram, her husband, said to her, "Velma, if you don't get some gravy on the table to go with my biscuit I've a mind to levitate your butt right out to the porch." Gravy was a lot more important back then and it was a cold November so she reacted quickly.

People forget that the first big depression we had in America started in 1837. Most people only know about the Great Depression of 1929 but the depression of 1837 was devastating. There was only one thing that was better about the depression of 1837: A shortage of buildings to jump off. There were no big buildings or cliffs in Charleston, just the nearby sand dunes of Folly Beach. Kerwood Derby, the local banker, jumped off of one of the dunes in a failed attempt to end it all. What he got was sand burns on his knees. This was not an option for the Pokers so they packed everything and headed to Texas.

Once in Plano, Crazy Roy spent an awful lot of time at a local dive called "The Local Dive." It was a play on words because it was right next to a scuba shop. We tend to impose our ideas on the past so when I say "scuba" you may automatically be thinking rubber suit, air tank, etc. They didn't have those in the mid 1800's. A scuba outfit consisted of a pair of sealed glass goggles, boxer shorts and a ten-gallon glass container (full of air) with a long straw. Out of water it weighed eighty-four pounds and had enough air to last nine minutes and thirty-two seconds... which was precisely the amount of time needed to set a lobster trap. It was quite impractical because the air bottle was so big that swimmers kept being pulled back to the surface because of its buoyancy. That, and the fact that there were no lobsters within four hundred miles of Plano, made the whole process dubious. No one had thought to invent a snorkel, which is one of the funniest words in the English language... even funnier if you know it is originally from an even funnier German word. The French cannot be blamed for that.

Anyway, it was at "The Local Dive" that Crazy Roy came up with a funny dance that most people who came into that establishment

deemed in bad taste and “The Devil’s Work.” Crazy Roy got somewhat of a bad reputation because he had lost what little mind he had, donning beads, wearing lipstick and a funny hat he borrowed from his old uncle Shecky. It caused a lot of talk back in the day.

It wouldn’t be until 1924 when his idea would be adopted in a play called “Runnin’ Wild” and *that* was the birth of “The Charleston.” Six years later Ray Charles was born. He never danced “The Charleston” but later came to appreciate Hip-Hop... so we hear. No one knows what happened to Crazy Roy but it’s said that on cold winter nights at Kadisto Beach, South Carolina you can still hear it on the wind: “Ich wünsche etwas Eiscreme!” Ice cream is still very popular there.

Crazy Roy would have been credited as the inventor of Poker if not for a massive fire in downtown Plano in March 1881 that destroyed public records of the Poker family. Rumor has it that Crazy Roy was wearing shoes that were too tight for his vigorous dancing and he knocked over a kerosene lamp that caught the first building on fire. But when one door closes another one opens as the Pokers of Plano made a fortune selling tents. Some accounts have the Pokers moving to Oklahoma the following year but many of the details are lost.

Sometimes the footnotes of history are the casualty of bad shoes.