

The Annual Picnic at Fancy Farm by Mrs. Robert L. Spalding

In the Mayfield Monitor of July 31, 1880, there appeared the following notice: "There will be a barn dance, picnic and 'gander pulling' at Fancy Farm next Thursday. Those that have never seen the latter should turn out on this occasion. It will be interesting."

For years the picnic was held, according to the notes of Mrs. Pearle Curtsinger, who received most of her information from her father, Lyndal Willett, "down by the creek", where the water was clean and clear and the trees gave abundant shade for a nice summer get-together. The men pitched horseshoes or played baseball with stout sticks and a rag ball, while the girls and women visited with each other and caught up on the news. There were many games played for prizes.

Her recollections continue that the event was a Sunday family dinner after church. The picnic was moved around 1912 to the school grounds so that if it rained, they could move inside the building. Then it was held on Wednesday of the last week of July just before the primary election, which at that time was held in early August. Candidates for county and state office began to come to speak to the large gathering and make their "last ditch stand" before the voters cast their ballots the following week.

In the early years, members of the parish made ice cream in old-fashioned freezers, turning them by hand and covering them with tarpaulins or old quilts to keep the ice cream cold and firm. The women cooked all kinds of vegetables from their gardens, made salads and killed, plucked and fried chickens early on picnic morning. A few days before, the men had killed and dressed sheep and goats and made ready the pit to cook the meat for twenty-four hours so it was fork-tender. A delicious sauce sent out a tantalizing aroma over the area.

There were some booths where one could try his skill pitching a ball at bottles or tossing a ring over canes. There was a "fishpond" where, for a nickel or dime, a child could drop a basket on a rope over a curtain and catch a fascinating prize. The man in charge of that booth was a bachelor, Walter Bolds, who for many years was sexton of St. Jerome. It was his delight to send the basket back with "a nickel toy for a fine little boy" or a "doll with a curl for a sweet little girl".

There was always a lemonade stand, and another where strawberry, peach, and lemon soda pop was iced down in tubs. The ice which had been stored earlier in cellars was brought to the grounds and covered with sawdust and tarps. How delicious that soda pop tasted, for it was not an everyday treat then.

Some of the stands have been in the family for years, passing from father to son to grandson with all their children and in-laws to help. Allard Cash and his family have worked the lemonade stand for forty years. Today, that stand sells several kinds of drinks and candy. It is surprising to find that Joseph Carrico and his son, Rudy, who for many years have bar-b-qed meat on their own pits for those in and around the community of Fancy Farm, did not work in the bar-b-q pits, but spent twenty-five years in the lemonade stand. One delightful story Mr. Carrico has told is of using a new washing machine, donated by the Maytag Company he worked for, slicing the lemons, putting them through the wringer and "presto", a few additives and they had a tub of lemonade. All through the day you could hear the "lemonade barker" calling: "Ice cold lemonade, made in the shade, stirred with a spade, by an old maid, five cents a glass." The

Adolf Pendel family has worked the bar-b-q sandwich stand since its beginning some twenty-five years ago. The Elder families have worked the meat cutting stand for over forty years.

Ernest Carrico, known as "Fat" to all his friends, bought and sold cattle, and starting in 1906 he became a vital part of the annual picnic, spending several months a year traveling in his open top buggy, pulled by a sorrel mare, looking for quality sheep, which he brought to his farm to graze until picnic time. The day before the picnic, with the help of his two sons, Spalding and George, and several parishioners, the sheep were herded to the farm of Bernard Carrico, slaughtered and readied for the pits. The meat was cooked on the Bernard Carrico farm in a spot known as the "locust thicket". It soon became more convenient to cook on the school grounds and Ernest Carrico had pits built which are located behind the school cafeteria. No cover was built for the pits to protect the bar-b-q from the almost annual thunderstorms. Tom Spalding recalled the time the storms were so bad, they had to wrap the meat up and take it to the Will Cash barn to wait for the storm to subside.

As the quantity of meat cooked increased, Ernest hired Mack Woodfork and Sam Gray to help. These two from Milburn helped cook for years and during that time, Mr. Woodfork gave Ernest his recipe for bar-b-q sauce which has since become famous. Several years ago, people from the Southern Living Magazine attended the picnic and made a film on the picnic which was shown on Kentucky Educational Network. They also managed to obtain the special recipe for the bar-b-q sauce which can be found in a Southern Living Cookbook along with a story about the picnic.

Shortly before ill health forced Ernest to retire, he had a roof built over the pits. He had given almost 40 years to barbecuing the meats at the picnic. Spalding Carrico succeeded his father and did the barbecuing for several years. Sometime later, Joseph Carrico, Ernest's brother, opened a pit and cooked for the community until his death. For the past twenty-two years, Harold Carrico, Joseph's son, and Bernard Hobbs and their sons have done the meat cooking at the picnic.

The meat is placed on the pits at 8:00 a.m. Friday, after a blessing, and cooked all night to insure "its" flavor and tenderness. In 1975, 11,000 lbs of pork and mutton were cooked along with approximately 500 chickens; and in 1986, 14,000 lbs of meat was cooked and 1,200 lbs of chicken was fried.

Bread has been delivered to the picnic for twenty-two years by Charlie Toon, with the help of Lyndal Hobbs for ten of those years. Both men are now retired from the bread company. In 1986, 350 loaves of bread and 200 packages of buns were used.

Dinners during the first years were served outside on long trestle tables but later it became easier and much more sanitary to serve inside the basement of the grade school building, now called Haeseley Hall. Women cooked the food in the kitchen on one side and carried steaming bowls of vegetables through the hallway to the dining room, serving everything family style. A big stove was used to keep the meat warm. The heat from the stove also kept the workers very warm and the hot August days provided little relief.

Many of the older people in the community speak of the thick sawdust that was spread on the grounds for dancing. During the 1940's Kiser Hayden would wet the grounds to keep the dust to a minimum.

Gradually, the picnic began to evolve into an annual homecoming as relatives working in cities throughout the country started planning their vacations to coincide with the date of the picnic. The day of the picnic was changed from the last Wednesday in July to the first Saturday in August to accommodate the many with public work.

During the early years of the picnic, various items were given away. In 1924, the first car was raffled. It was a two-seated, three door model T Ford with no windows. This \$315 beauty, on by Paul Carrico, had to be cranked. During the war years, from 1941 to 1946, no car was given away. One year Mrs. Clarence (Edna) Carrico crocheted a bedspread for first prize. Another year, Elisha Willett donated an ice box for first prize. In 1944, Mrs. Leon (Mae) Carter won the first prize of a red, white, and blue quilt, and in 1946, Bob Spading won an ABC washing machine.

In 1976 Cecil Morganti of Mayfield won the car. In 1977, Bob Spalding, who was a picnic chairman, was standing next to the drum that held the names. When the little girl who picked the ticket out of the drum handed it to Mr. Spalding, he just stood there looking at it. He later commented, "I was stunned!" I had been chairman the year before and I was standing in the same place last year when the ticket was picked. I thought I was dreaming." Cecil Morganti, who had won the car in 1976, also won the car in 1977. What are the odds against someone winning two years in a row! (Mr. Morganti died in 1986). The car winner in the Picnic Centennial year, 1980, was Mrs. Sandra Toon Vaughn; the car winner in the St. Jerome Sesquicentennial year, 1986, was Jeff Jackson of Arlington.

The bingo games have been a highlight of the picnic for years. One year when Farland Robbins was Graves County Attorney, he refused to allow bingo to be played at the picnic. In the confusion that followed, Mr. Robbins threatened to have Elisha and Ethel Hayden, who were the chairmen of the bingo game, arrested. When it came time for re-election, Mr. Robbins was defeated to which he remarked, "I didn't get beat; I got bingoed."

Even though the picnic started mainly as a family reunion, politicians began coming to them because it provided them with a speaker's platform, a crowd of people and a good dinner. In front of the old school building grew a stately oak tree where the politicians chose to speak. The massive oak succumbed to lightning on April 15, 1974, but the stump was left and in 1975 Governor Julian Carroll presented a plaque to Fr. Walter Hancock to be encased in the remaining stump. In 1979, the stump was adorned in sculptured concrete by Lavelle Thompson, a local painter with artistic talent, and the plaque was set in place. It reads: "Lightning struck this 133 year old oak tree on April 15, 1974. The tree trunk remains a symbol of the years since 1880 where political speeches were made on the first Saturday in August at the Fancy Farm annual picnic. Some of America's greatest statesmen have spoken under the shade of this great oak tree." Louie Nunn, a Republican, who was governor from 1967 - 1971, speaking at the 1979 picnic made a quip about the tree dying from years of political oratory, stating that "too much fertilizer will kill anything."

Over the years the picnic has had some outstanding political speakers. Some of those who have honored the picnic with their eloquent oratories were US Senators Alben Barkley, Thurston Morton, and John Sherman Cooper; Congressman Frank Stubblefield and Carroll Hubbard; Governors AB "Happy" Chandler, Keen Johnson, Earle Clements, Bert Combs, Wendell Ford, Julian Carroll, John Y. Brown, Jr., and Martha Layne Collins. One of the most remembered

visits was by George Corley Wallace, Governor of Alabama. Governor Wallace spoke at the 1975 picnic as a presidential candidate for the 1976 election. Today, the Fancy Farm Picnic, the first Saturday in August, is a must for present US Senators and Congressmen, state office holders, past Governors, and any politician in the state who aspires to a state office in the near future.

Traditionally, most of the food used at the picnic is donated by the people of the parish. A variety of home grown beans, peas, corn, tomatoes, and homemade pickles and approximately four hundred pounds each of slaw and potato salad is made by the ladies of the parish. The meal is topped off with a vast variety of home-made pies. In recent years, as very few people now raise chickens, each family is asked to donate \$5 for the purchase of chickens. The chickens are cooked throughout the day by members of the Knights of Columbus. Not too many picnics ago, most of the meat and wood for the cooking the meat was donated by local farmers. In the past few years, due to the need for large amounts of meat and wood, and because of Health Department requirements, the meat is purchased from inspected packing houses and the wood obtained from local saw mills.

For years, Friday night has been the kickoff for the annual picnic featuring an "all you can eat" fish dinner with all the trimmings cooked by the Knights of Columbus. Around 1982, at the request of many, a fun-run was included in the Friday night festivities along with a band for square dancing.

Beginning as a family and parish reunion, the picnic provides a time for the people of Fancy Farm and surrounding communities to come together for fellowship, country food, political speaking, and entertainment. People from all across the country return to Fancy Farm for this homecoming event which is now held annually the first Saturday in August. (The St. Denis Parish picnic is held annually the first Saturday of July; and the St. Charles Parish picnic is held annually the third Saturday of July.)

According to Bob Spalding, who has been chairman or co-chairman for many years, some 650 to 700 people, mostly residents of the Fancy Farm community come together on this one day to work for the Lord. One has to attend the Fancy Farm picnic to imagine it. Tired volunteers clean the grounds, dismantle and store the booths the next day, while chairman and co-chairman make notes for next year's event. "This blend of politics, community spirit and home cooking puts Fancy Farm in Kentucky headlines" on the first Saturday in August.