

INTRODUCTION

Someone once said, “What we learn with pleasure we never forget”.

Aside from all the planning, hard work and anxiety associated with our Parish Picnics there must have been many good times because so many people have such wonderful ‘picnic memories’.

Each generation has used its time, talent and material resources to provide an enjoyable event for a worthwhile cause.

I hope you will enjoy reading these ‘little bits of the past’ – and jot down your own memories of pleasant picnic experiences so they can remain fresh in the minds of your family and friends.

I want to thank each one who helped in any way to prepare this little collection of recollections.

SOCIAL LIFE IN ST. FLORIAN

The years between 1873, the first 4th of July picnic at St. Florian,¹ and 1909, probably the first Church sponsored picnic, were years of formation and development for St. Michael’s parishioners. During this time the people established themselves as a Parish and a prosperous community.

Spirit of Cooperation

Hard work. Ingenuity, perseverance and a lot of cooperation were needed to make this former plantation their home. The spirit of neighborliness was a part of daily life – one example is Stumpe’s Spring. This remarkable spring provided water for the households in the area, and in the summer it kept their milk, cream and butter cool. The spring was protected by a little springhouse. A real problem presented itself. The milk and cream were in glass containers – and with so many people using the facility a jar would often get broken. Cleaning the spring after a spill was a tedious and lengthy job. To solve the problem they installed an underground pipe, made of hollowed logs, from the spring to a shady spot about 150 feet southeast of the spring to the pit where the people could place their dairy products without endangering the spring. For added protection a little shed was built over the pit.²

Social Gatherings

Social life developed with ‘get-together’, picnics and dances. The first gathering place was Father’s Well. Supplied with a bucket and dipper it was especially appreciated on summer Sunday evenings when the congregation gathered for Vespers.

The people of St. Florian soon made friends in the neighboring communities. Families and friends enjoyed getting together on Sundays, Holy Days and holidays. There

were several places they frequented. Mamie Rasch remembered one of the first gathering places, "The Park", still marked by the old hand pump on the Middle Road – at that time it was part of the Kasmeier farm. Flora Kasmeier Schaeffer remembers walking over the fields with her Daddy when she was a little girl. They came to the pump – he put his hand on it and said, "The old pump is still here, I remember when all the young people in the area would gather here every Sunday afternoon".

Some years later "The Grove" was a popular place – it, too, was on the Middle Road a little closer in, close to the culvert where the big oak tree now stands.³ Another was Schmidlkofer's Spring – later a storm went through and tore it up so it wasn't used any more. Lock 6 was a favorite; it was a special treat to ride the dolly that pulled the boats through the lock. Flora Schaeffer remembers one such picnic, "A number of families got together, the Grossheims, the Kriegers and anyone with a wagon – we packed a picnic lunch (twice as much as we needed). And went to Lock 6. We had such a good time – we even got to ride the dolly." Another favorite place was Tate's Spring. Martha Locker Tate recalls one cold winter day when a group of young folks walked to the spring to see the water frozen on the water wheel.

The young folks also enjoyed their dances held in the homes. In the early days, if the dance was held on Sunday evening and you had received Holy Communion that morning, you would go to the dance, but out of respect the Holy Eucharist you would not dance.⁵

The social life included games such as 'horse-shoe' and 'cards' – meeting friends at the local store – or spending the day with relatives.

PARISH PICNICS

For a number of years the gatherings, picnics and dances were purely social – then a special need brought about a change.

At the turn of the century the parishioners of St. Michaels were beginning to want and need a new church. A building fund was started and monthly collections were made, but the outlook was not very promising. In 1908 Henry Willen died, he and his wife, Mary, willed \$7,000.00 to the building fund. With this sizeable amount of money the people felt confident in going ahead with their building plans. At this time they decided to have a 4th of July picnic for the benefit of the Church Building Fund.⁵

"Spring Lot" Picnics

The parishioners had enjoyed picnics at various locations in the area, but since this was to be a "Church" picnic they thought it best to have it close to the Church – hence, Stumpe's spring Lot was chosen.⁵

The first picnics were more of a 'social'.⁴ On picnic mornings Mamie Rasch remembered the young ladies of the parish coming to her house to make the custard for the ice cream. They brought eggs, milk, sugar and things they needed. They had a lot of fun working together. Martha Tate remembers going up to 'Mamie's' to cook the custard. She said it took a large group because there was a lot of work to do. The custard had to be

carefully stirred as it cooked – they had to draw water from the well and put it in tubs to cool the custard - and it had to be stirred as it cooled. Then it was taken to the picnic ground and frozen in hand freezers. It was all a lot of fun. They brought blocks of ice from the ice plant in East Florence and packed it in sawdust. People donated cakes and lemonade was made on the grounds. While the ladies prepared the food, the men prepared the picnic grounds.⁴

Festivities began in the afternoon. The big attraction was visiting and enjoying ice cream, cake and lemonade. There were no ice cream cones, so each person brought his or her own dish and spoon.

Parents with young children would start home about dark. The dance started in the evening. The first year or two they did not have a dance floor, they just put sawdust on a level spot on the ground. Area musicians provided the music.⁴

The picnic really started after lunch – but Martha Tate’s father always went about 11 o’clock – he said he saw people there he hadn’t seen in a year. People came from Jacksonbury and from way out in the country.⁴ Some people living on the edge of Mississippi and Tennessee have told how their families filled their wagons with hay – they left on the 3rd to come to the 4th of July picnic, and they returned home on the 5th – having slept in their wagon.⁶

The Picnic Expands

We have no record of when they cooked the first pot of chicken stew. At that time they extended the picnic grounds across the creek – there they cooked and sold the stew. A board was set up and used as a counter.⁷ Stew plates were served and a small tray of stew sold for 10¢. Families would bring their homemade bread, buy a tray of stew, spread a quilt on the ground and enjoy their stew sandwiches. They say necessity is the mother of invention – this is how the famous ‘nickel sandwich’ got its start:

A child came to the counter with a nickel – the ladies, Agnes Beumer, Julia Buffler and Kate Turner were concerned because they had nothing the child could afford, their cheapest item was the 10¢ tray. After talking the situation over they decided to make a stew sandwich using the heels of bread, (the heels were not used on plates, and were sturdy enough to make a good sandwich). Shortly after the child left the stand with his prize purchase a steady stream of children came with nickels wanting a nickel sandwich. This was a popular item for many years – however, later the price had to be raised to a dime.⁸

One year someone gave a beef – they made beef stew in addition to the chicken stew, but it wasn’t too successful and they never tried to again.⁸

The next big addition was barbecued pork. Mr. Lawrence Buffler said the first year they had only one pig. The next several years they barbecued one or two shoats and one goat – the shoats were donated by parishioners, but they had to go up around the Tennessee state line to get the goats because no one here raised them. The pigs couldn’t weigh more

that 100 lbs. On foot – they dressed out at 75 – 80 lbs. The pit was simply a hole dug in the ground with a rack at ground level to hold the meat. It was difficult getting the hot coals under the meat without getting ashes on the meat.⁹

There was a period of time when the Church took out ‘picnic insurance’ each year. They were insured for 100 dollars so regardless of the weather they would realize some income.⁵

No one remembers just how many years the parishioners froze the ice cream – usually on the picnic grounds, but in some cases it was frozen at home and brought to the picnic. Later on they cooked the custard in their homes and took it to Trowbridges to be frozen. Marie Langer Mabry remembers her Mama cooking custard at home – it took a long time to cook it – then someone would come around and pick it up and take to Trowbridges. Katherine Grossheim Kiasmeier remembers when her mother cooked two or three gallons of custard, they always picked up the custard Mrs. Henken cooked and took it to Kempers store – someone would take it to Trowbridges. They always wondered how Trowbridges got so much ice cream out of the amount of custard they sent in.³⁶

They eventually changed to commercial ice cream. Health Department regulations dictated the change⁶ – and, too, their supply of ice cream was no longer able to meet the demand.¹⁰ The first commercial supplier was Trowbridges.

At some point in this sequence of events ice cream ‘cones’ became available – still today you can occasionally hear someone jokingly ask for a HORN of cream.

It didn’t take the parishioners long to recognize the need for a dance floor. The one they constructed was made in sections. Putting the floor down was a big operation – care had to be taken not to damage the edges – and it had to be level.⁹ The first years it was stored in Stumpe’s barn, later in the Rasch barn because Henry Beumer was instrumental in handling it. When the picnic was moved to the Church grounds it was stored under the school.

Mr. Lawrence Buffler assumed the task of making and selling lemonade. Cornelius Langer remembered Uncle Lawrence and his lemonade stand – he always wore a white apron. When asked about her memories of the picnic Marjorie Davis Gish said it was always a “fun time”, and she recalled the tubs of cold drinks. Some of the drinks they sold were Coca Cola, Nu Grape, Nehi Orange – later Dr. Pepper and other flavors were added. Drinks were kept in washtubs filled with ice water. By the end of the day the water was so cold you could hardly put your hand in it to get a drink out to sell. Cost of a drink was 5¢.⁹

The first game was a doll-throw. A local craftsman constructed several wooden dolls hinged to a board. A prize was given for each one you could knock over with a ball.⁶

The year Julia Buffler and Kate Bernauer were in charge they had a dance promotion – Marvin Walker performed the “Blackbottom”, and Angela Shell the “Charleston”. They drew a large crowd.¹¹

Besides making all the local preparations for the picnic, the ladies in charge solicited donations from the merchants in Florence. They were always received cordially and the merchants were generous with their donations of cash or bingo prizes.

Julius Rasch remembers it being a big deal the year they got up to \$200 – they felt like they were ready to expand. Mary Buffler remembers this post-picnic incident – her mother, Julia Buffler, and Mrs. Annie Eckl, the ladies in charge that year, were sitting at the dining room table counting the picnic money. When they finished Mrs. Eckl sighed and said, “Three hundred dollars. Lady, I just can’t believe it!”

Move to the Church Grounds

The Spring Lot was getting too small – the crowds were getting larger while automobiles replaced wagons and buggies. There was not enough room for the vehicles – on one occasion a young man’s car was hemmed in, he was going to make his own path through the brush and ended up in the pit the people had dug years before to cool their dairy products.

It took a drenching rain to implement the move from the Spring lot to the Church Grounds. That picnic day they had a steady downpour – cars made deep ruts in the ground, and many people could not even get their vehicles out.¹² They moved everything possible to the school house (located to the left of the gym drive, close to the road). They carried on business as best they could for the remainder of the day. From that time on the picnic has been held on the Church Grounds.

They met with many difficulties that first year at the new location. They set up the stew pot by the little schoolhouse, but soon discovered this was a mistake because there was so much dust from the road. They also had difficulty setting up the dance floor due to the slope of the land – they had to keep adding 2 by 4’s and 2 by 6’s on one end to level it. Soon the picnic was moved to the present location. The first year there, they still used the wooden floor – but by the second year the tennis court had been built.⁷

St. Michael’s parishioners had thought about having a Labor Day picnic but were afraid the picnics would be too close together. Joe Stumpe remembers going with his family to the Labor Day picnic in Loretto, Tennessee in a ‘26 Model T. There were many people from St. Florian there. After that they decided to have a Labor Day picnic in our parish.

Only once was the 4th of July picnic canceled. During World War I this little German community was viewed with suspicion by some of the neighboring settlements. Consequently those in charge deemed it prudent to cancel the picnic. Elizabeth Rasch wrote in her diary on July 2, 1919, “There is to be no picnic here on the ‘fourth’, and we are all disappointed. I imagine all of us will stay home.”

Here is a potpourri of memories about the picnics:

Angie Czermak remembers the magic hour on picnic mornings – 9 o’clock – when her grandmother, Mrs. Mary Peters, started selling balloons and ‘grab-bag’. This was the center of attraction for all the children.

Helen Schell remembers another promotion – the ball games – then you had to feed all the players. She also recalled she and her sisters always got new dresses for the picnic.

Mary Buffler remembers how upset her mother was when Mary's little sister, Angela, got lost at the picnic (Spring Lot). It all ended happily, Angela was found in an adjoining field.

Jerome Bernauer remembers the rude awakening he had at a Spring Lot picnic when he learned that all cold drinks are not called "Coke". He wanted a Nu Grape, but asked for and got a Coke – it was so bitter he just poured it out.

Henry Stumpe remembers the mornings after the picnics when he, his sister and brothers hurried to the Spring Lot to look for nickels.

Leonard Eckl remembers his parents coming home from a rainy-day picnic at the Spring Lot and putting the money in the oven to dry it out.

Marjorie Davis Gish remembers Mrs. Meyer's delicious slaw – and Mrs. Meyer remembers making the slaw. Mrs. Anna Meyer said she would get up early and go to the picnic grounds to help with the slaw. Her job was to season it. She did not use a recipe – she just put some seasoning in it – taste it – and when it tasted right it was ready to go. She always washed her hands real good and mixed it with her hands – "You can't mix it with a fork and spoon and make it taste good". She said she gave each of her children a dollar to spend – they would come back for more when she had her hands in the slaw – she just let them fuss around a little while and then they went on off to play. She said it was tiring but she enjoyed it. She was always ready to go home.

PICNICS FROM 1909 TO 1991

The growth of the picnics has been phenomenal. The net proceeds from the 1991 4th of July picnic was \$8,444.80.

Instead of one pot of chicken stew they now prepare 15 pots (three 20 gallon, five 30 gallon and seven 40 gallon) using over 1,000 pounds of chicken. The single shoat has been replaced by over 1,700 pounds of Boston Butts. They no longer barbecue a goat or lamb but have added barbecued chicken to the menu; fifty are prepared.

Binge is played in the afternoon and again in the evening. There is always a lot of interest in the raffle. Tickets are sold several weeks prior to the picnic. Games are enjoyed during the day – the Catholic youth Organization assumes this responsibility) they also help with the clean-up). The "Country Store" is the outlet for baked goods and craft items. The refreshment stand makes cold drinks, ice cream, and a variety of snacks available at all times.

The St. Florian Picnic Ground is a "busy place" and a "fun place" each 4th of July and Labor Day.

The first picnics were managed by a group of parishioners – then the Catholic Knights took charge. Later the ladies Altar Society assisted the Knights, and eventually they assumed the responsibility.⁴

The first efforts were for the Church building fund – other needs have been a school building, rectory, convent, and a gym building. In the 1970's the need changed again. We no longer had our own parochial school so our children were bussed to St. Joseph School in Florence. Eventually the subsidy for the children in parochial school, and the expense of our growing parish Religious Education program became a prime financial responsibility. At this time families with children at St. Joseph and in our parish religious program assumed responsibility for the picnics. Although the parents are in charge, the picnics are still a parish effort – with everyone working together under the leadership of our Pastor, Father David Morehouse, O.S.B.

Many things have changed over the years, but the deep love for our Catholic faith, and our desire to pass that faith on to future generations is the force that keeps St. Michael's going. The same spirit of cooperation and dedication, so evident in the early years is alive in our parish today. Deo Gratias.

INTERVIEWS

- 1 - Mr. Lawrence Buffler, from conversation with Joe Stumpe
- 2 - Henry Stumpe
- 3 - Katherine Kasmeier
- 4 - Martha Tate
- 5 - Mamie Rasch
- 6 - Joe Stumpe
- 7 - Joe Eck
- 8 - Katherine Turner, from conversations with Frances Peters
- 9 - Julius Rasch
- 10 - Cleo Rasch
- 11 - Cecilia Lamprecht
- 12 - Frances Peters