Selzler reminisces of the early annual church fairs at Sts. Peter and Paul Church, Strasburg

By Terri Lang

“Many of the women who started working with me in the early 1960s are no longer here,” Lillian Selzler said. “Some have moved away, some are in nursing homes and some have passed away.”

Lillian is speaking of the St. Mary’s Society women who chaired Saints Peter and Paul’s Church Annual Church Fair.

It took a lot of planning and a lot of work. “But we always had a lot of cooperation, people worked together and that made it a little easier,” she said.

Lillian said the officers of the church would chair the event and would make up a workers list. Once the list was made, the parishioners were told what food item they should bring.

There were many duties to cover – admissions, kitchen work, clean-up, setting up and taking down and running the “Fancy” stand and the games. Each parish member was assigned to provide the food.

“The farm women were asked to bring three chickens and a quart of cream, and the town women brought ketchup, soup noodles, a pound of butter and $3,” Lillian said.

She remembers the required town women food items because “they would take them to the church basement for her grandmother.”

The women would gather on the Fridays prior to the supper and would wash all the utensils and kettles. Saturday mornings, they would peel the potatoes and onions and wash the chicken meat. On Sunday mornings, the chicken was fried. And they would begin cooking the carrots and the rice dressing, and preparing all the dishes to be served.

Ladies would bring their own roasters and would also take home some of the meat to cook since there were not enough kettles or roasters at the church.

“We used to have just one wood stove and the ladies would be filling wood blocks all day in that stove,” she said. “People would also bring kerosene stoves that we set up in the furnace room behind the kitchen,” she said.

Families would help out the women who did all the cooking, and their older daughters would wait tables. The men and their older sons would do the set-up and take-down, and the clean-up work. The men would also sell theingo tickets.

“Ten years ago, they would still hit the 900 number, but the past five-six years it has slowed down some. Last year, they served about 580, and the year before, 620.

“Of course, we count plates, and some may take two plates,” Lillian added. “But we also have carry-outs and those are put in containers and are not counted into the plate number.”

The meal was just a part of the church fair activities. They also had a fancy stand, carnival, Bingo and a raffle. Being an officer for 18 years can bring back many good memories of the fancy stand.

“Parish families would bring in all sorts of homemade items. Pillow cases, aprons and dish towels were plentiful.

“The fudge, divinity and caramel candies were good sellers,” she said. “Oh, they were so good!”

The ladies would cut up all the pums of candies and would divide them into filled plates to sell.

“We also sold horseradish,” she said. “I remember Theresa Wolf would make such good horseradish and that sold like hotcakes!”

Grab boxes on the fancy stand were also available for sale and contained many items that were not home-made – groceries, school supplies, hankies, salt and pepper shakers and even money for the kids. For the kids, every year in either the St. Ben’s or Emmons Central School gym, there was a carnival.

“For many years, I was the chair lady and so was Yvonne Gruczynk. Oh, how those kids loved the carnival!” Lillian said.

Games were set up all around the gym, and the gym was packed with children all day long.

In the church basement, there was a stage that had a new living room chair on it that would be raffled off.

“Beside that chair, they would have a table, and people would pick their number,” Lillian said. “They would spin the wheel. Whatever number was called, the person who had it, was the winner.”

Lillian also remembers a fishing pond for the kids to win prizes. “And I can’t forget about the mouse game!” she added. “On a table was a platform with little holes in it. Each hole had a number assigned to it that a person could choose.

“They then let the mouse loose and whichever numbered hole he went in to, that hole would be the prize winner.” Lillian said. “We would laugh so hard at that little mouse!”

On the west side of the church basement there was a stand built for the Bingo games run by the men.

“People would sit around a table with prizes in the middle and play Bingo,” she said. “We used corn kernels to cover the numbers for Bingo.

Through the years, Lillian said some things have changed, others have not. “There is no longer a carnival as they really have no place to put it. They didn’t have a chair they raffle off, nor do they have a mouse looking for his house.”

They still have the fancy stand, the grab boxes and Bingo. They have a raffle drawing with many prizes that businesses, organizations and families donate for. And they still have a wonderful meal that they prepare for people who come from far and near.

“And even though our parish may be smaller, we always have good people who come together and help to put on our church fair,” Lillian said with pride.

The past presidents of St. Mary’s Society are, back row, left to right, Regina Lauinger, Kathryn Borr, Jean Reits, Margaret Gaige, Helen Dobsch and Anna Schlosser; front row, Cecelia Reinbold, Mary Wagner, Katy Wagner, Rosalie Mattern, Margaret Volk, Elizabeth Fischer, Magdalena Schwab and Eugenia Kiefer. (Photo taken from the Sts. Peter and Paul’s Parish Centennial book 1889-1989, Strasburg.)

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