

## Thurman's Old Fashioned Sugar Party

By Jean R. Reynolds

(Reprinted from the Quarterly, March 2000)

Once upon a time, many years ago, sugar parties, also called "Jack Wax Parties," were common springtime maple-country events.

It was a yearly fund-raiser for the little Athol Methodist Episcopal Church during its active time. Every family brought a dish to pass and homemade bread and butter pickles, strong coffee and fresh milk. Dessert was the delicious maple treat drizzled onto fresh, clean snow. All you could eat of everything was the rule. A basket was passed for donations.

Not much has changed over a century. When the little church disbanded, the next spring's party was still put on and the one hundred dollars raised was given to Tommy Beadnell, a handsome nine-year-old neighbor boy who had leukemia. Tommy passed away in February, 1960, before the next party, so that year we gave the money to the Warren County American Cancer Society in his memory; that tradition has become the town's major fund-raiser for the Cancer Society.

Thurman ladies, who would be great-great-grandmothers today, were faithful workers and waitresses. Pauline Parker, Ruth Burch and Alice Parker boiled down the syrup.

Alice continued for several years, and when she retired, I started boiling. Mrs. Burch and Mrs. Pauline Parker stayed with me all day, teaching me how to handle the hot syrup. Maple syrup has a personality of its own; it is fickle and fiercely independent, full of surprises. It will boil over if you turn your back for a minute. I learned that the hard way. It has happened to me three times. What a mess cleaning up the stove!



Photo courtesy of Maria Logon

Jean R. Reynolds

Every year the syrup is different—the sugar content, flavor, color, availability, just to name a few of the variables. "Boiling in" starts at 8:30 a.m. and I never know ahead of time when it will be at the "jack wax" stage. It may be 12 noon or 4 p.m. In fact, the Old Fashioned Sugar Party is the most "iffy" fundraiser I have ever worked on. We never know the date until about three weeks before, depending upon the availability of the first run syrup and good packing snow, but we developed a way of saving the right kind of snow for up to a month. We never know what the weather will be, and can't possibly postpone the event if weather is bad. We've had blizzards, ice storms, floods, roads closed, detours and

have even lost electric power. We don't know how many people will attend. We don't know how much food will come in. But you know, every year things work out, and it's a success.



Photo courtesy of Maria Logon

One of many volunteers Craig Steve

From one gallon of syrup boiled in years ago, we are now using eight or more, and the 1999 party cleared \$2040 by collecting a suggested donation from each person. From 40 people we are now serving up to 300, plus "the help."

Just what happens at the Old Fashioned Sugar Party? Each family in town is phoned and asked to send to the town hall on the day of the party a food dish they might make for their own family—a casserole, salad, fancy Jell-O, baked beans, macaroni and cheese, scalloped potatoes or pasta. We add sliced ham and turkey, beverages, pickles and homemade bread. It's an all-you-can-eat buffet, over 20 feet long, continuously replenished. The dessert is sugar on snow, also called "jack wax." Fresh, clean snow is packed into cardboard containers, and jack wax (the boiled down maple syrup) is drizzled on top. The delicious liquid sets up on top of the snow and is eaten with a fork. You can have as many refills as you can eat.

What a happy change when the town hall addition was finished and we got out of the basement and into the large, sunny room. Now we could use another addition, the way the town has grown!



Music by the Maple Sugar Band

Many volunteers have worked on parties over 40 years. We now have country western music, dancing and cloggers to help entertain waiting diners, as we can seat only 65 at a time. Some of the volunteers are men, a great help, and we're always looking for new young volunteers as we "oldies" slow up.



Photo courtesy of Maria Logon

A guest savors pure maple jack wax at the Annual Maple Sugar Party

It's almost impossible to thank everyone who helps—all those who send the delicious food and those who attend, plus

our entertainers. It's equally impossible to know how many people have benefited from the money the volunteers helped raise. All proceeds are donated to the American Cancer Society.

Photo courtesy of Maria Logon



Guests at the Annual Maple Sugar Party

It takes a whole town to put on an Old Fashioned Sugar Party—Thurman.

Photo courtesy of Maria Logon



One of many volunteers helping prepare food

(Jean Reynolds served as organizer of the Sugar Party for many years until illness required her to step down. She left big shoes to fill, but the tradition is still carried on every March in our community.)