

A Day To Be Remembered: Train Ride, Deviled Clams And 'Pickled Beet' Eggs

(In Edwardian times picnics were elaborate affairs. The best linen tablecloths, and napkins, crystal and silver were included in the wicker picnic hampers with the food that had taken days of preparation. Daintily befrilled and beribboned ladies carefully shaded their complexions from the sun.

A yellowed clipping from an old women's magazine gives explicit instructions on how to comport oneself in a ladylike manner at a picnic outing. Young ladies of the day were admonished to be as inconspicuous as possible. Also, "If riding on a streetcar, place your shoe box of salmon sandwiches under your seat until arrival at the picnic area."

We asked our roving editor, Eddie Edgar, to do a little reminiscing about picnicking back in Pennsylvania. As with many of us, his first recollections were of Sunday School picnics.)

By W. W. EDGAR

Ordinarily you wouldn't associate the opening of a new bridge and a railroad train ride through a tunnel -- of all places -- with an old fashioned Sunday School picnic.

But this was no ordinary day back at the turn of the century when all the religious groups in the old home town of Catasauqua, Pa. got together to sponsor a "union" Sunday School picnic.

The idea had been discussed for some time, as a successor to the small individual ice cream socials held each year on the lawns of the various churches.

Then came word that the bridge was to be completed in spring and it would provide access to the Lehigh Valley Railroad station. At the time one of the popular picnicking spots was Bellewood Park across the state line in New Jersey -- about 35 miles away.

Now this was no ordinary bridge either, as it spanned the Lehigh Canal, the Lehigh River, the Central Railroad of New Jersey and Lehigh Valley -- and the mecca for hundreds of travelers.

NEVER HAVE the various groups in any town been brought together as quickly as the neighbors back home -- and there scarcely was a soul left to guard the old home town on the day of the railroad train ride through a tunnel to Bellewood for the first picnic many of us ever had attended.

The picnic itself was something to be remembered. Unlike most picnic grounds today that provide little outdoor stoves, Bellewood Park had a "stove house" containing regular kitchen stoves.

What a center of activity it turned out to be when the women folks started preparing the picnic feasts!

Through the years I still can hear my mother tell the neighbors -- "I'm not going to bother with dishes (there were no paper plates). I'm going to prepare some deviled clams and we can eat right out of the shells."

And what a feast!

WHILE MOST of the other tables were decorated with all sorts of sandwiches -- ham, cheese, pickled tongue, minced ham, and tuna fish salads -- Mother served the deviled clams, a delicacy even in the restaurants of those days.

But the dish that caught the eye of everyone, including those at our table, were hard boiled eggs that had a reddish tint to them.

"These are 'red beet' eggs," Mother answered all those who asked. "You just shell them very carefully and put them in a jar and cover them with juice from the red beets."

It was the first time many of us ever had seen these funny colored eggs. But they were strictly a Pennsylvania Dutch dish. Through the years that followed everybody back home was featuring "red beet" eggs and you can spot them occasionally on the picnic tables in Hines Park even today.

Other than the food there were many other sights that have lived through the years.

There were things such as the three-legged races -- women in the egg race running with an egg on a tablespoon and being forced to drop out if the egg and the spoon parted company.

OH, WHAT A DAY, that first picnic provided.

If there were any honors to be won, the German Lutherans and the Dutch Reformed Church women (most Pennsylvania Dutch) won the cooking prizes and the leaner, more athletic type Presbyterians and the Episcopalians baseball game and most of the running races.

And as dusk came over the picnic grounds, we all gathered at the small Bellewood Park railroad station for the return ride home through the tunnel.

The picnic baskets were empty.

But the minds of the youngsters were filled with memories that have lived through the years and never will be forgotten.



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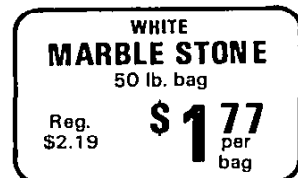


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