

“Dutch Picnic Centennial in 1951”

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by Jay A. Graybeal

This summer marked the 125th Annual Dutch Picnic Festival at Trinity Lutheran Church on Deer Park Road near Smallwood. Traditionally held on the first Saturday in August, the event featured an old fashioned picnic with outdoor activities. Fifty years ago the event was described in the August 9th issue of this newspaper:

“The ‘Dutch’ picnic, long noted for the good weather with which it is favored, enjoyed last Saturday one of the most pleasant days it has known in the 75 years of its continuous existence. It was again attended by large throngs, the attendance being estimated at five thousand people. This picnic, one of the oldest in this part of Maryland, is held annually the first Saturday in August by Trinity Lutheran Church in the grove adjoining the church near Smallwood, Carroll County. It has been rained out three times only since its beginning in 1877.

Many were again in the crowd who has an unbroken record of attendance covering fifty to seventy years. Three were present at the picnic for the 75th time: Charles H. Niner, 86, of Bird Hill; his brother, Joseph Niner, 89, of Smallwood; and Mrs. Louisa Mengel, 80, of Bird Hill.

Mrs. Louisa Mengel, who gave a recitation at the first picnic in 1877, recalled on Saturday that the attendance on that occasion was limited to a dozen or so families. Charles H. Niner, who helped clear the woods for the first picnic as a small boy, gave this information on Saturday regarding the origin of the first picnic. The prime mover was George Bitzel; a ‘corner stone’ of the congregation, who gathered a handful of men and boys to clear the grove and who took the lead in planning the first picnic. George Bitzel was a native of Leutershausen, Germany, and was ‘a good man’ and ‘strove to keep peace in the congregation,’ according to Mr. Niner. His wife was remembered as the possessor of an exceptionally good singing voice, ‘one that could be heard above a thousand.’ Not only did the German born George Bitzel, who lived nearby, give the ground for the church and cemetery, but left a provision in his will, when he died in 1902, that the three acres on which the picnic is now held come into possession of the congregation. Eight grandchildren of George Bitzel were present at Saturday’s picnic, including Harvey Bitzel, who was one of the judges of the riding tournament, and Clarence and Charles Bitzel who were among those who presided at the refreshment stand.

Two riding tournaments in the afternoon featured the 75th picnic, when twenty-one riders competed in an excellent exhibition of the sport. In the professional tournament, four knights and two maids made perfect scores on the first three charges, lancing all the one-inch rings. They were Patrick Brady, Knight of Little Bird; David Gates, Knight of Broadcreek; George Ditman, Knight of Sunset View; Lawrence Gates, Knight of Accakeek; Mary Lou Bartram, Maid of Bartram Manor, and Shirley Kurtz, Maid of St. Ann. In running off the tie, Mary Lou Bartram, Maid of Bartram Manor, took all the three-quarter inch rings on the first tilt, winning first place, while Lawrence Gates, Knight of Accakeek, emerged in second place on the next tilt, and Patrick Brady, Knight of Little Bird, in third place.

The Maid of Bartram Manor, who is a social worker for the Baltimore County Welfare Board, and resides in Sparrows Point, has been riding in tournaments since a girl of ten years and has become one of the best professional riders in the State. She won first place in the professional class at the Libertytown Tournament on the preceding Wednesday, and also was winner of first place among the professional riders at the Piscataway Tournament, near Washington, D.C., on the previous Saturday.

In the amateur tournament, two knights and one maid took all the one and one-quarter inch rings on the first three tilts. They were Carroll Ford, Jr., Knight of Morgan Run; Raymond Owings, Knight of Little Dixie; and Shirley Kurtz, Maid of St. Ann. In the two elimination tilts with three-quarter inch rings, Raymond Owings, Knight of Little Dixie took first place; Shirley Kurtz, Maid of St. Ann, won second place; and Carroll Ford, Jr., Knight of Morgan Run, took third honors. Vernon Garver, 76, of Sykesville, Knight of Locust Grove, also rode in the amateur tournament. He is the oldest rider in Maryland and has engaged in the jousting competition for some 50 years. He was in good form, forging ahead of a number of the contestants on the first three charges.

At the crowning ceremonies following the tournament, David H. Taylor, attorney of Westminster, made the coronation address. Mary Lou Bartram, Maid of Bartram Manor, crowned seven-year-old Donald Barnes as Prince Charming, and Raymond Owings crowned Doris Owings Barnes as the Queen of Love and Beauty. Bremen A. Trail acted as marshal of the tournament, and Rezin H. Hobbs, Charles V. Dell, and Harvey Bitzel were judges.

The Westminster Municipal Band played in good form afternoon and night. The Lazy H Ranch Boys held the crowd with a diversified program to a late hour. Much attention was attracted by Mr. and Mrs. Charles D. Roop, who arrived at the grounds during the afternoon in a smart carriage with horse. They had driven from New Windsor in a carriage made in Littlestown, Pa., in 1909, by T. S. Blocker's Sons. The original price of the carriage was \$150. Mr. Roop is an auctioneer and real estate man in Westminster. One hundred eighteen gallons of ice cream, 119 cases of soft drinks, and 165 pounds of frankfurters were consumed at the picnic. Nine hundred suppers were served in the Social Hall."

As noted in the article, Dutch Picnic has grown from a neighborhood outing for a dozen families in 1877 to a major event attracting thousands of people from around and outside of the county.



*Several members of Trinity Lutheran Church, host of Dutch Picnic, near Smallwood participated in groundbreaking for a new church on April 17, 1955. From left to right: Rev. W. Harold Redcay, Harvey Bitzel and Charles Niner. Mr. Niner was one of three 1951 Dutch Picnic attendees who had attended every event since 1877. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Gladys Wimert, 1955.*