

FISHERMEN'S VOICE

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News & Comment for and by the Fishermen of Maine

FREE

Church Supper

“Now we don’t ask what the dish is,” she said as AJ inquired. “We just help ourselves and pass it on.”

Guess we didn’t fit the profile for church supper patrons, me being overdressed in polo shirt, pair of shorts and topsiders. Needed advice in protocol.

We’d settled on this weekend to be in Campobello with this particular church supper in mind. Hadn’t attended one in years. Heard it was quite good and worth every penny of the six dollar cover. Ad in the paper said serving commenced at 5, “get there early”. Folks we talked with said the same.

By 4:30 pm Saturday after a hard workday we were crossing the Lubec Bridge, washed, coifed and carrying major appetites. 4:40 we pulled up to park. Church lot was packed and road filled. Uh oh. Perhaps “early” meant more than twenty minutes.

Through the front door. Down the basement stairs. Room was full. Four seats left. We snared two after paying the \$12 for tickets. *Note:* these are placed on the table. I guess to make sure of payment and to be re-used. The last two seats were immediately taken by a couple from Massachusetts.

An air of expectancy filled the warming room along with a patter of muted conversation. Crowd was mixed. Few younger than we (60ish). Others much older. We introduced ourselves across the table for some conversation and were surprised to learn that several of the ladies had come from over 50 miles away and often drove as far for others.

“Yes,” one of our dining companions said, “We find a supper somewhere every Saturday.”

With this, she and others reeled off which churches or organizations fed the best, spoke of who did the best beans, rhapsodized over various desserts and described the virtues of yeast rolls vs. biscuits or brown bread.

Couldn’t stand it, I snitched a pickle from an overflowing bowl to disappointing glances. Lady to Arletta’s left said it was “okay” she’d taken one too.

Covered dishes were beginning to pile up in the kitchen window as the temperature and expectation level rose. Makeshift fans appeared as waiters began pouring coffee or water. As the minutes counted down I noticed more than a few covert glances at watches. The kitchen crew could stand it no longer and as the big clock hit 4:55, they sent the minister out for grace. Two waiters held a placard aloft with the words while, in a less than gusty manner we sang three repetitions.

First came heaping plates of white and fluffy, melt in your mouth, yeast rolls and homemade brown bread. I hadn't had brown bread for years. Then a casserole. Then beans. The first yellow-eyed were a bit bland. Soon followed by red kidneys with more molasses and flavor. Wicked. Bowls of potato salad and cole slaw were unveiled, followed by mac and cheese, jello salads, more casseroles. Dishes came by in a dizzy array. Worse than a buffet with a plate large enough for no more than a dab of each. "Bean Supper" connoisseur across the table allowed she came just for the beans and brown bread as calls went up for "more Texas Hash."

Food disappeared at logging camp speed as platters and bowls traveled around the long bench tables. Huge tray of meatloaf, slices bearing caps of bright red catsup appeared to groans of filling stomachs. "Oh perhaps one piece," "Maybe I should try some," as the pieces disappeared.

Calls for coffee, more beans, butter, intermingled with "You must try this" and "so and so outdid herself tonight" filled the air as ladies spoke quickly of ingredients and recipes. AJ went for seconds on mac and cheese. I had another piece of brown bread, a few beans and potato salad. What fun. Maybe the 70's and 80's Saturday nights will be okay after all.

I glanced up at the clock. 5:15. No! Seemed like we'd been eating for an hour. Then the desserts appeared. Cake. Chocolate, carrot, white, spice, pumpkin, all with whipped cream icing. I lifted carrot while AJ opted for slice of chocolate with an inch of frosting atop. Obvious that good old home cooking was alive and well in Lubec, Maine.

By 5:20 amply fed and watered, we rose to leave. After all there were people in line for the second setting and they'd been waiting. As my good friend Don Seabury would say, "wicked good vegetables."

One dish of special mention among the many was a layered jello salad which would be neat and festive for the holidays. Made up with 1/8" to 5/16" layers of red, green, and orange jello and cream cheese mixtures to about 3" high it looked a bit technical and moderately time consuming but was certainly a topic of conversation as it passed around the table.

From "The Yankee Cookbook" by Imogene Wolcott, 1939.

Brown Bread
(a recipe in rhyme)

"One cup of sweet milk,
One cup of sour,
One cup of corn meal,
One cup of flour,
Teaspoon of soda,
Molasses one cup,
Steam for three hours,
Then eat it all up."

(A half teaspoon of salt should be added even though it doesn't rhyme).

Note: Mix and sift dry ingredients, add molasses and milk. Stir until well mixed. Turn into a well-buttered mold and steam for 3 to 3 1/2 hours. Cover should be buttered before being placed on the mold then tied down with string, otherwise bread in rising may force off cover. Mold should never be filled more than 2/3 full. A 1 lb. tin can with lid makes a good mold. For steaming place mold on a trivet in kettle containing boiling water. Allow water to come half way up around mold, cover closely and steam allowing more boiling water as needed. Add 1 cup raisins if desired for a sweeter and moister bread. Sounds time consuming but really not—Saturdays you need to tend the beans anyhow.

Fair winds and good roads.

Lee S. Wilbur