

Add 60 boxes crushed ginger snaps and stir

United Evangelical's sour beef supper has nourished Canton for over a century

by Colleen Wolfe

The annual sour beef and dumpling suppers at United Evangelical Church in Canton could quite possibly be the oldest continuously run church supper in Baltimore, if not in the country. Every October for the last 122 years, parishioners have been serving up the traditional German meat and potatoes meal. Ten years ago, organizers decided to add a smaller, one-day supper in April to tide people over until the big, two day annual supper in the fall.

The ladies of United Evangelical started marinating the 650 pounds of beef cubes in white distilled vinegar and spices on Friday. The beef cubes are a break with tradition, said Grace Fader, 81, who has been

running the supper for 35 years. "Personally I like the sliced beef. It makes a better looking dish when you put it on the table."

The group started cooking on Monday. Each pot simmers on the stove for two and-a-half hours while the ladies crushed 60 boxes of ginger snaps into a fine powder for gravy. The cookies are used as a thickening agent for the gravy and the sweetener for the beef. "I make a sweet sour beef," said Fader.

Just about everyone who makes sour beef makes it the same way. Ginger snaps are always used for the gray and vinegar is the main ingredient in the marinade. It's the amount of sweet or sourness that makes the difference in each recipe.

The secret to making a good sour beef gravy, she added, is getting it

to come out smooth with no lumps. "Smooth as velvet," is how she describes it. "We're constantly straining it."

For the next three days the ladies made cole slaw from 10 crates (about 60 pounds each) of cabbage, and dumplings from 550 pounds of potatoes.

The women turn to technology to speed up the laborous process—a machine called a ricer mashed the potatoes and pressed out any lumps. But the flour, salt and eggs were mixed into the potatoes by hand.

The cabbage was mixed with mayonnaise, vinegar and sugar by hand.

There were also the 15 cases of white lima beans smothered in chopped tomatoes to prepare.

For dessert there were about 50

pies in several varieties, like apple, coconut, lemon meringue, chocolate meringue, cherry, French apple and blueberry. No these aren't homemade, but good just the same, said Fader. With all the beef to cook who has time to bake?

The kitchen and dining room are run like a well oiled machine by women who have been doing this job for decades. Fader commands the kitchen, and Margaret Craig and her crew of ladies have been in charge of the dining room and seating for years. "That group of women know what to do. I just leave them alone," said Fader.

Boy and Girl Scouts bused tables, filled bread baskets and ran errands. The men did a lot of lifting of heavy

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crates and opening of cans and jars for the ladies.

Fader is already teaching a younger generation the secrets of great sour beef. Last year a younger (he is in his 60s) parishioner, John Price, assisted Fader, and this year another youngster, George Finnerty, will join the ranks.

Fader was expecting a crowd of 600 to 700 people yesterday and an additional 300 to 400 carryout orders at \$9 each, about half what the two day October supper at-

tracts. "It takes an awful lot of people to feed them," said Fader. A staff of about 75 is needed to prepare and run the supper smoothly.

Despite all the preparation and hard work twice a year, Fader says she never tires of sour beef. "I love it. I never get sick of it," she said.

The aroma wafting through Canton gets the neighbors lining up with large pots to purchase enough to feed their families for several days. Fader says the more people the better. Proceeds from this April's supper will buy the church a new boiler system.



DUMPLINGS-John Price and Connie Leyh work the ricer.