

JUNE/JULY 2024

Kentucky Monthly

with Kentucky Explorer

**Kentucky State
Parks' 100th
Anniversary**

**Olympian
Mary T.
Meagher**

**Josh and Jared
Ravenscraft's Bold**

**Harrodsburg
Celebrates
250 Years**

NEW FRONTIER

**75 Years
of Pioneer
Playhouse**

DISPLAY UNTIL 8/13/2024
\$4.99



www.kentuckymonthly.com

Fourth of July Picnic

by Bobbie S. Bryant, Jefferson County

—1963 Ford Fairlane smells like fried chicken as our picnic crams in everything we'll need for the Fourth of July picnic at Uncle Tommy's house. The windows are down to let in the sweltering hot summer breeze. My parents, brother and I are off to the annual family reunion on my momma's side.

My daddy has five brothers and six sisters. Each of them has at least two children, but most have 10 or 12.

Uncle Tommy's wife is our Aunt Cora. Her house is located close to the old place where all 12 Chilcutt

children grew up before leaving home to start families of their own.

When we arrive, the yard is full of people varying in age from newly born to ancient geezer. My brother and I know a few of our cousins by name, but nearly all of them live in other towns, so we're all a bit like strangers.

Everyone has brought a picnic basket or box full of food. No one wants to be embarrassed by not bringing a lot of good things to eat. Momma and I carry our offering over to the flatbed wagons to arrange with all the others. The wagons are covered in tablecloths and quilts of every hue, some faded and worn, yet still colorful and festive. There are three wagons. One is for the beverages, bread and condiments, another for meats and vegetables, and the last for an amazing assortment of desserts.

We nestle Momma's fried chicken in with two other platters full. Her deviled eggs are distinctive among the other trays, as she sprinkles paprika on the silky yellow yolks. Then we bring out the corn on the cob soaked in butter, homemade sweet pickles, and a big pot of green beans, cooked with onions and ham hock.

I fish out Momma's chocolate pie that her momma taught her how to make. It's got a graham cracker crust, and the chocolate is smooth and creamy. The best part is the topping made with toasted meringue.

After I put our basket away, I run toward the house to find my girl cousins to play with. Aunt Cora's house always looks the same to me. It is an old farmhouse, two stories tall with a wraparound porch. There are hot pink crepe myrtles in spectacular bloom on either side. Chickens run rampant, fluffing their feathers and pecking about the yard. Inside, the wallpaper is patterned in faded blue cornflowers with pale white trim that's still waiting for a coat of paint.

Each bedroom has a wooden or iron headboard with bolster pillows and quilt coverlets. With windows open and fans blowing, the house remains surprisingly cool on hot summer days. The kitchen is bright and has a long plantation table that Aunt Cora, Uncle Tommy, their daughter Addie, and sons Cloys and Robert use every day.

I love Cloys. He's enormous; really a big old Teddy bear and gentle as a garden rabbit. Both he and Robert are school bus drivers. I wouldn't recognize them if they weren't dressed in bibbed overalls and plow boots. Neither ever married, but their hearts are as big as the moon, and all of us kids adore them.

I finally find three of my girl cousins in one of the back bedrooms playing house. One of the smaller girls is the baby. When I arrive, I get to be the babysitter.

In the meantime, my daddy and brother find their way out into the backyard, where every size and type of ladder-back, cane-bottomed chair has been arranged under shady white oak, locust and hickory trees. Everyone must watch where they step so they don't trip over spit buckets that have been strategically placed about.

The older men sit in clusters around nail kegs or pickle barrels. Others are on the ground, sprawled on a blanket or an army-green pallet. They argue about politics while they play pitch. Some shake their heads and look the other way as a few of the men saunter down to the creek bed for a little nip.

The middle-aged men discuss their crops and the latest high school ballgame scores, while tossing washers in heated competitions. The young men and boys pile around one cousin's brand-new 1966 Corvette. In reverent tones, they marvel at the fancy leather interior and shiny

chrome trim. They all brag about how fast they can go and tell one another where the best places to drag are located.

As the heat of the day bears down, someone finally decides it's lunchtime. Somebody leads a prayer that gets caught in the wind. We kids are called first to get our plates, then the men. The women are always the last to eat. They often stand around one of the wagons and use it as their table.

Late in the afternoon, the wooden ice cream buckets and cranks are brought forth. The children cluster around to help turn the crank as the adults pack in the ice. Fresh peaches or strawberries are added to some, while other options include chocolate morsels and vanilla flavoring. Watermelon is sliced, and everyone enjoys a cold, crisp bite of summertime heaven.

As the shadows grow long, Daddy rounds us up to head home. Momma always tears up when we leave Uncle Tommy and Aunt Cora's. She hugs all the old ladies and tells them she'll call, reminding them to be in touch when they find the time.

We pile into the car for the long drive home. Fireflies blink against the evening sky. My eyes soon close as the crickets chirp a sweet summer lullaby.

An excerpt from an article that ran on July 9, 2020, in the Murray Ledger & Times.



Top: Job Chilcutt (center, facing the camera), the great-grandfather of the author, at the Chilcutt family reunion, circa 1950; above, the maternal great-aunts of the author prepare the food.