

The Fasnacht Tradition Continues with the Musser Family

BY SALLY BAIR
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This Tuesday will be Fasnacht

Day for most Lancaster Countians, a tradition observed as the start of the Lenten season which officially

begins on Ash Wednesday. Fasnachts, delicious little balls of dough either with a hole in them like doughnuts or cut in squares with no holes, are the traditional means by which Pennsylvania German hausfraus used up the last of the fat in the house before beginning the Lenten season and its tradition of fasting.

There are few treats to compare with a freshly made fasnacht, still hot from the deep fat in which it is fried. Although it is no longer used as a method for using up the old fat, it is small wonder that the custom continues from the sheer delight of it.

Ken and Dottie Musser, Columbia, and Ken's daughter, Pat Zeamer, carry on the tradition which is not just a family affair, but for a while became a community affair for the town of Mountville.

The recipe they use originated with a friend of Mrs. Alvin Musser, Aunt Clara, who joins in the rolling and frying of the fasnachts, but it practically became community property when members of the Mountville Church of the Brethren began selling fasnachts as a fundraiser for a new church building.

Aunt Clara got the recipe from a friend, Lizzie Lockard Smith. "She convinced me to make them with her and use her recipe. She used to make them for market. We sold some and we cooled them on the back porch," Clara recalls.

Making them in Clara's home was a forerunner to actually baking them in the basement of the old church. "It got too big to do at home," Clara says. Ken recalls that he used to help fry them in the big iron kettles with wood fires under them. "With wood you have to be on the ball," he points out. "We would make 2 1/2 to 3 dozen in each kettle." Pat still has a newspaper clipping with his picture, as he cooked the fasnachts.

Clara laughs, "We got the men on that job. We had fun. I was one of the pushers. Sometimes I worked through the night from Monday morning until Tuesday dinner when we would be done."

Ken and Dottie recall making the fasnachts for several weeks prior to Lent, and Pat says, "I remember doing it when I was a kid." Ken adds, "I bought tons of flour." They would sell the doughnuts for \$.50 to \$.60 a dozen, and it slowly moved up to \$1.20. The number of doughnuts sold ran into the thousands.

Since it was a church project, the work began at midnight on Sunday, they couldn't after all, work on Sunday, even to mix up the

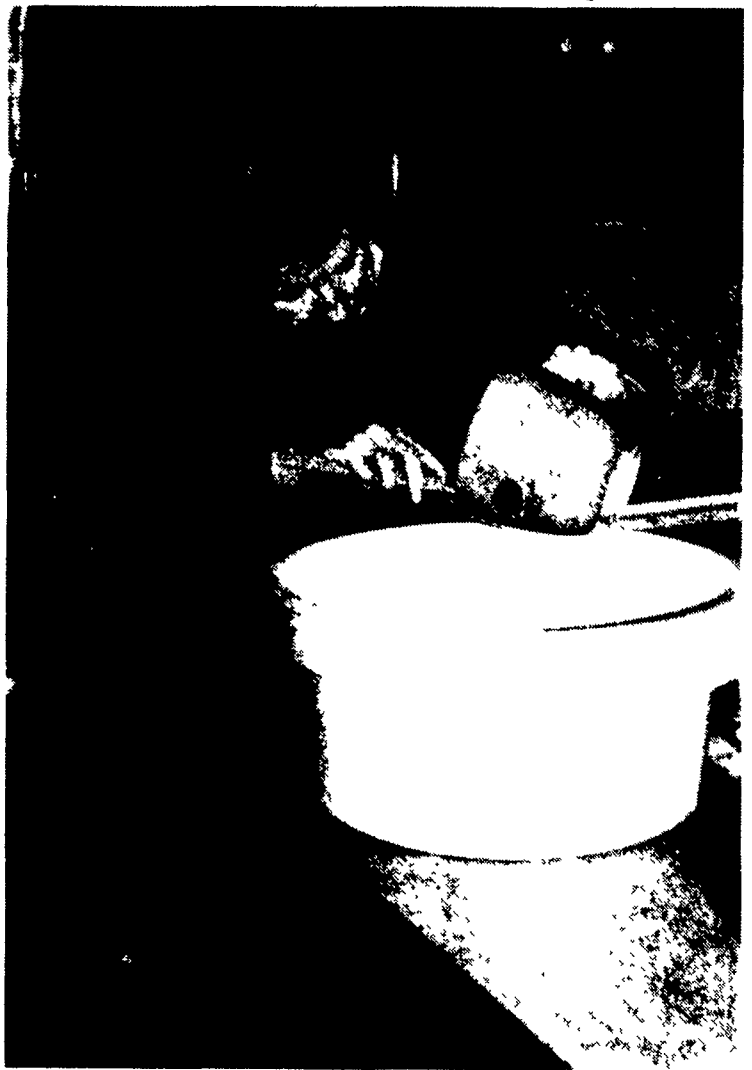
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The Musser family recommends eating fasnachts warm, with butter and King's syrup. This does look irresistible, doesn't it? Imagine being in a room with 20 dozen fasnachts!



Pat Zeamer has begun the mixing job which is quickly taken over by her father, Ken Musser. This tub holds one half batch of the total, which will yield about 20 dozen delicious fasnachts.



Dottie Musser pours yeast mixture into one of the two tubs that will be used to mix the fasnachts.



Ken Musser is responsible for mixing the two tubs of ingredients that will make the fasnachts. He carefully kneads and works the 20 pounds of flour into the dough. It will rise for about nine hours, with one kneading down after about five hours.



This is the good part! Dottie (left) and Aunt Clara work together in spreading out the finished product on paper toweling to soak up the excess fat. Now they are ready to eat.

Homestead Notes