

## Gather Up Your Picnic Baskets: by Carol (Klenk) Heck

Winter is ending and Spring is approaching. Soon, thoughts will be turning to the outdoors. Fun in the warming sun and spending time with family in the parks is not a new idea or feeling. It seems to just come about as the birds chirp and the flowers poke up their blooms.

In the early 1900's, Madeira used to have a large German-style picnic grounds on Camargo Road. It was called Valley View Picnic Grounds and was the dream of Henry Wehrmann. Henry was from Germany and wanted to bring the festive activities of a German picnic center that he remembered and enjoyed from his native land, to Madeira. Henry and Elizabeth Wedig Wehrmann, his wife, along with his extended family helped run and maintain the grounds as well as the farm.

They lived on Shawnee Run Road, seen here in this 1920's picture, with their twelve children. Their farmhouse sat slightly back off the road, and in the foreground, you can see the B. & O. railroad tracks. You are looking toward the east. As far as I can figure out, the picnic grounds were approximately where the Indoor Tennis Club is today, close to the intersection of Shawnee Run and Camargo which is to the left in the foreground. See the railroad tracks?



Actually, the Wehrmann's property was a large truck farm off of Kenwood Road that sprawled down to Shawnee Run Road and Camargo and then over to their house. They had many greenhouses and sold their vegetables and fruits downtown at the Sixth Street Market on Saturdays. Later, they sold at Findlay Market. Elizabeth was in charge of packing up the horse-drawn produce wagon and traveling to market. As the story goes, she would leave on Friday evening, and must have spent the night somewhere in order to be ready bright and early to sell the produce on Saturday morning.



The picnic grounds were also a very profitable business. They were open to the public and offered quite a splendid afternoon of music, dancing, food, pony rides, beer, picnic tables and a few slot machines. In addition, The Wehrmann's rented out the picnic grove to private parties, churches, and businesses. The parking lot was in front with an entrance gate, where fees

could be collected. Then came the concession stands. The pony track was visible from the entrance to entice the kids. There was a dance hall that had a nickelodeon where polkas were very popular selections.

There was a lower field down by the train tracks that was mostly flat and a great place to have three-legged races, potato sack races, and baseball games. Prizes were given to the winners. This all reminds me of going to Coney Island. What wonderful fun-filled days were spent there in my youth! The Wehrmann's picnic area also had to be a highlight for the families who would take a day off and go relax and have some fun. The kids must have had to think it was a special treat considering the lifestyle of the era.

Regina Villiers, long standing resident of Madeira and columnist for *Suburban Life*, interviewed two granddaughters of the Wehrmann's, Evelyn Krimmer and June Schrichten. (Without Regina's articles on The Madeira Historical Society's web page and in our archives, I would not know most of this story. If you want to read Regina's works, please view, "When Life was One Giant Picnic" 1996 and "Old Picnic Grounds Now but a Memory", 1999.)

Evelyn didn't live in Madeira as a child, but she stayed with her Aunt Minnie Wehrmann Oser during the summers of 1931-1942. Aunt Minnie lived right across the street from the Valley View Picnic Grounds in the 1839 "Old Stone Schoolhouse" which was turned into a residence by then. Evelyn and her cousins worked at the picnic grounds cleaning up after big parties and weekends. They thought of it as a hunt and seek adventure, finding coins and trinkets that were dropped or lost by mistake. Cousins June and Evelyn treasured those memories well-on into their years.

One of Henry and Elizabeth's sons, Harry W., farmed the land as his father aged. Harry married Elizabeth Wardlow and lived in a house on the farm at 6464 Kenwood Road. Harry and Elizabeth had eight children. According to one of the descendants, the farmland even included what is now the street called Apache Circle.

This last picture shows the Kenwood Road house in the background. The back porch is prominent in this view and the front of the house, that faced Kenwood Road, is obscured by the unknown lady's head on the right. The mother and small boy on the left are Elsie Martin Wehrmann, married to Harry's brother, Frederich, and Fred "Charles" Jr., their son. I am venturing a guess that the date is approximately 1937, because Charles was born in 1933.



I wish I knew when The Valley View Picnic Grounds were closed. I know that neither the house on Shawnee Run nor the house on Kenwood are still standing. We can still see the "Old Stone Schoolhouse" even though it is no longer a residence. The farm is gone; the land is subdivided and new streets and homes take its place. That doesn't stop the Spring from rolling in.

Nor does it stop the need for family fun times. I hope this step back into history has been a delightful trip and your Spring plans include a picnic or two.

Now it is time to look forward and try to preserve some of the past in stories and memories and bring some of that knowledge to your own family's lives. I would like to reach out and ask if anyone has old pictures of the picnic grove. It would be really interesting to get some copies to add to the historical society's files and expand more on the Wehrmann family.

**DON'T MISS IT: "Madeira's Diamond in the Rough"**. It's all about the **1839 Old Stone Schoolhouse on Shawnee Run**. It's a free program at the Madeira Branch Library on **March 16, 2024** from 1:00-2:00 pm. Presenting will be property owner, Ken Cummings in partnership of the Madeira Historical Society. Come hear the history as told by the person who knows more than anyone else. Please join us and bring a friend.

Credits go to Regina Villiers articles from *Suburban Life*, August 14, 1996 and November 24, 1999.  
Photos courtesy of The Madeira Historical Society [www.madeirahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.madeirahistoricalsociety.org)  
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