

A Brief History of the Pleasant Valley United Methodist Church Bean Hole Bean Suppers

In the early 1930s the “Bean Hole Bean” suppers were started with only ten pounds of beans. Eleanor Moss, home demonstrator agent of the Litchfield County Extension Service, made the suggestion to have such an event and the Men’s Club of the then Methodist Episcopal Church in Pleasant Valley followed through on the idea. Mrs. Frank J. church prepared the first pot of beans and her son, Russell, built the first bean hole fire. The bean hole was on the river bank opposite the church and the supper was put on in the church’s community room. When the next supper came around, Kenneth Church took over for his brother and so for over sixty years he had a major role in lighting the bean hole fire. John Ullman, until his death in 1973, saw to it for many years that the pots, with wired on lids, were properly placed in the stone lined hole.

The Pleasant Valley Methodist Church Men’s Club minutes of September 13, 1935, mention plans for a September 27th supper. The supper committee was made up of Horace Dunbar, Sherwood Rogers, and George Slater. Richard Church was put in charge of the beans. The menu then included:

- Pork and beans
- Salads
- Rolls and Butter
- Coffee and Milk
- Pickles
- Apple Pie

Today the menu remains basically the same with the addition of honey baked ham, and seasonal desserts.

Bob Moore was in charge of advertising. Pastor Fred Allen, John Reitemeyer, and Seth Warner were on the entertainment committee. Howard Eggleston, Frank Bouteiller, Walter Frazer, and Richard Church were on the committee for the June 25, 1937 supper.

On April 22, 1938, it was passed that the Men’s Club president confer with the Ladies’ Aid Society president about the two groups combining their efforts in putting on the bean hole bean suppers.

The Men’s Club reported on May 27th, 1938, that “\$47 was realized for the church on the recent bean hole bean supper”. On November 29, 1938, the net proceeds were \$27, “plus or minus”.

In 1939 the Methodist Episcopal Church became the Methodist Church and as a result the Ladies’ Aid Society became the Women’s Society of Christian Service (WSCS). In the early 1940s the suppers became more and more a project of the local WSCS, but with the men still pitching in. The suppers were held in the church’s community room until 1955 when the basement was remodeled and could function as a dining area.

The first bean hole was across from the church on the bank of the river. However, the 1955 flood washed it away and a new site had to be found. A spot was chosen a few yards from the northwest corner of the church, and in 1956 a new bean hole was made by Richard Church and Bud Jones. In 1991, because of the new addition, the bean hole had to be moved again. It is located across the driveway, and is now enclosed by a wire fence.

When the Pleasant Valley General Store moved down the road to the corner, the old store building was bought by the church and became the church’s Parish House. Only a few suppers were held there. A June supper was tried on the lawn between the newly acquired Parish House and the church, but so many passing motorists stopped, causing confusion that the experiment was not repeated.

In the fall of 1960, because of space problems, the suppers were held at the Barkhamsted School. When the suppers could no longer be held at the school, they were moved down to the elementary school in Pine Meadow. Finally, when our new addition was completed in 1991, the bean hole bean suppers came home for good. We have been enjoying using our own facilities ever since.

It is quite a process to put on a supper. First, early on a Saturday morning (4 AM), a couple hardy souls will build a fire in a large hole in the ground. They will use about two and a half cords of wood to

create a bed of coals in what has become known as the “bean hole”. In four hours another team of men will rake out half of the coals and lower nine large pots, each containing 21 pounds of specially prepared beans, into the hole. They check to make sure that the lids are wired on properly. The men will then cover the pots with the extra coals and the beans will simmer in their outside oven for eight and half hours. The beans will then be transported by truck from the bean hole to the church where several hundred people are waiting to enjoy another bean hole bean supper.

It takes dozens of people of all ages in the community to put on the three suppers each year. A general manager oversees everything. There is a publicity committee, as well as bean sorters, fire builders, bean masters, set-up people, morning food preparers, kitchen servers, waiters and waitresses from our youth group, cake bakers, dessert servers, ticket sellers, bean sellers, hostesses, live entertainment for waiting guests, and finally a clean-up crew.

Hundreds of people from around the state, as well as from out of state, come to enjoy a meal. Reservations are needed now and have been needed since 1969.

The folks at the Pleasant Valley United Methodist Church would like to thank everyone for their help over the years. We would also like to thank the public for supporting our efforts to do God’s work in and beyond our community.



First the beans are sorted and soaked in water. The next morning, very early, the secret ingredients are place into the pots and lids are wired on. The pots are then lowered into the bean pit to cook for 8 hours.



Meanwhile, the tables are set, the salads are prepared, and the desserts are brought in by volunteers from the congregation. The musicians arrive to set up their music in the Sanctuary to entertain the guests as they wait for their table assignments to be called. Then finally it’s time to enjoy a hardy, home-style New England meal with family and friends. Why not make it a point to join us at one of the three suppers during the year.