

March 29, 1989.

## Sweet festival is labour of love

# Maple Syrup flows in Purple Valley

by Lindsay Eaglesham

Rain didn't dampen the crowd's enthusiasm nor did muddy grounds prevent long line-ups for pancakes at Purple Valley's 22nd annual Maple Syrup Festival on Saturday.

Undeterred by the morning drizzle a good turnout of about 1200 trod the mushy grounds of the Community Centre determined to enjoy themselves regardless. The festival is billed as a family fun day with events including pony rides, log sawing contests, turkey shoot, clog dancing, fiddle and bagpipe playing, baking and craft sale and more.

Then of course there are the pancakes.

If the grounds outside were mushy the condition of the kitchen at pancake central was a good match. Great goopy globs of pancake batter were being mixed, poured, grilled, flipped (and some inevitably spilled) by a legion of splattered volunteers frantically hustling to feed the damp masses outside.

About 360 kg of pancake mix (that's near 800 lbs. to oldtimers and the stubborn) and 40 gallons of that golden liquid the festival honours were served up with little left over.

Organizer Wilda Gilbert was confident the day didn't fall far short of expectation because of the poor weather. She said they pretty well "know by now how much to order." Sylvia Masters, who also handled sales at the bake table, looks after supplies and past experience has been a good measure.

"We were hoping the sun would shine," said Wilda. (In fact it did near the end.) But numbers were still up. "They maybe didn't stay as long (as previous years) but they were all here."

Anyway, as usual, leftovers will be used by the Community Centre's fish fry later in the year, she added, and unsold baking will be gobbled up at the 'country style' dance that wrapped up the Festival Saturday night.

A sampling of the fair goers showed that for many the Purple Valley festival is an annual Easter ritual. Bill Glassford, supplies the syrup from his 650 tree maple bush just north of the village and the idea started with his in-laws, Lloyd and Olive Burt in 1967.

"My father-in-law owned the bush before me... he and Olive, along with the Women's Institute, got the idea to start the festival," said Bill.

Since the beginning it has been a labour of love for countless volunteers. Edna Cook has been chief pancake flipper since way back, and Audrey Hepburn a stalwart organizer.

Last year Audrey was the batter queen, looking like she was painted with the goop, thanks to a faulty mixer that decided the walls needed plastering. This year she and self-described "batter boy" Darren McKone were laughing. They had the loan of a giant commercial mixer courtesy of Eleanor Gilbert, and it actually kept the pancake mix in its tank.

"It freed us up a bit. It mixes four times as much as the old one," said Audrey.

Other selfless trojans included Ed Elliott and his gang at the pork sausage booth. Over 200 pounds, garlic and plain, are cooked up. What do they do with the leftovers there?

Sausage cook Al Clark turns from the grill and points to his ample frontage.

"They go in there," he quipped.

And what fair would be complete without a festival queen? At the Maple Syrup Festival the tradition is to honour the elders, in keeping with its theme 'Memories Make History'. This year's Queen was Lillian Hawke and first Matron was Elda Hepburn, both of Hillside apartments in Wiarton. Second Matron was Margaret Brough.

The day wound up with a packed hall for country dancing to the music of the Troupadors.

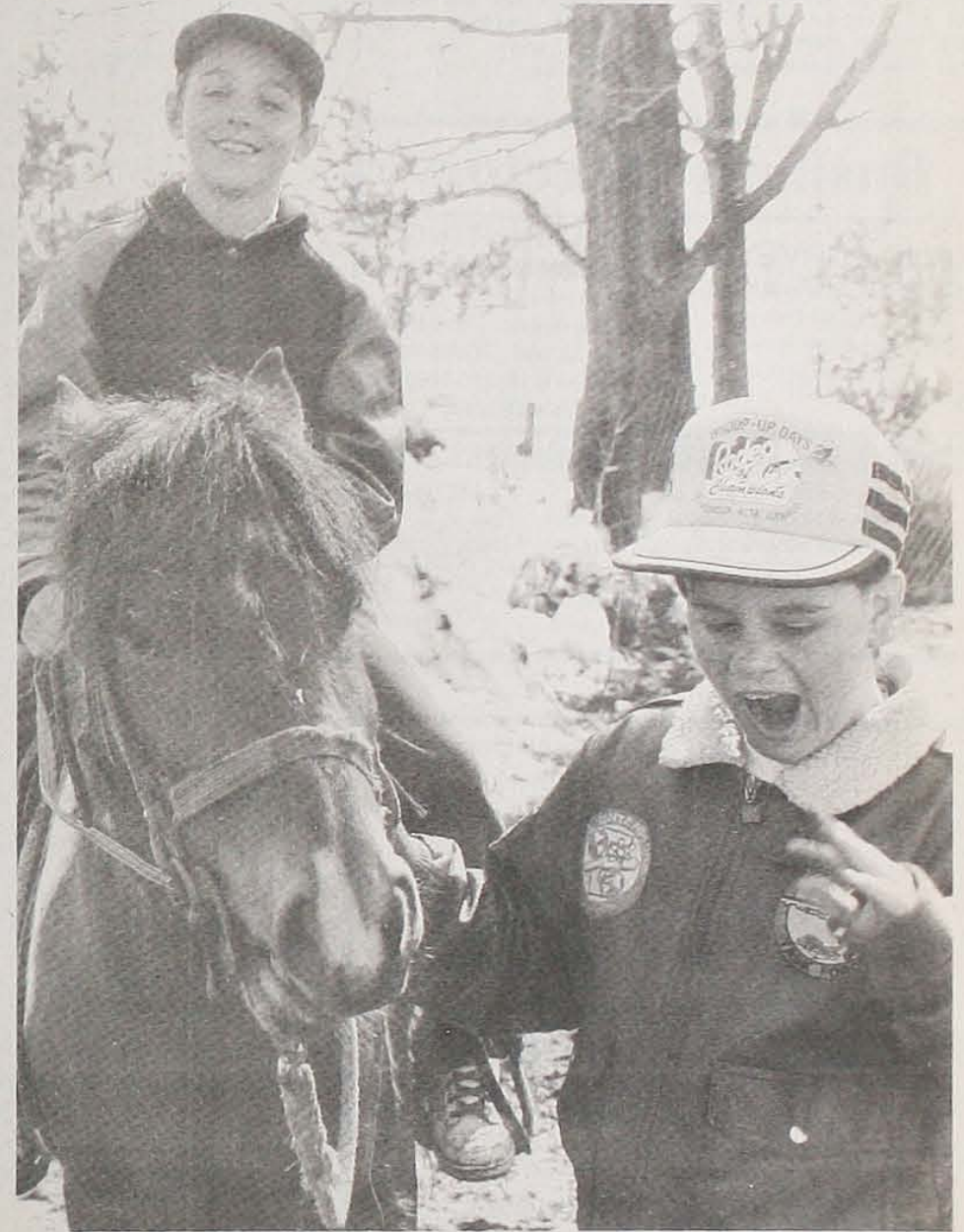
"We used to go dancing every year," 79-year-old Elda said earlier. "But not this time." She's just getting over a recent illness.

She and Lillian, who's 80, were driving back to Wiarton.

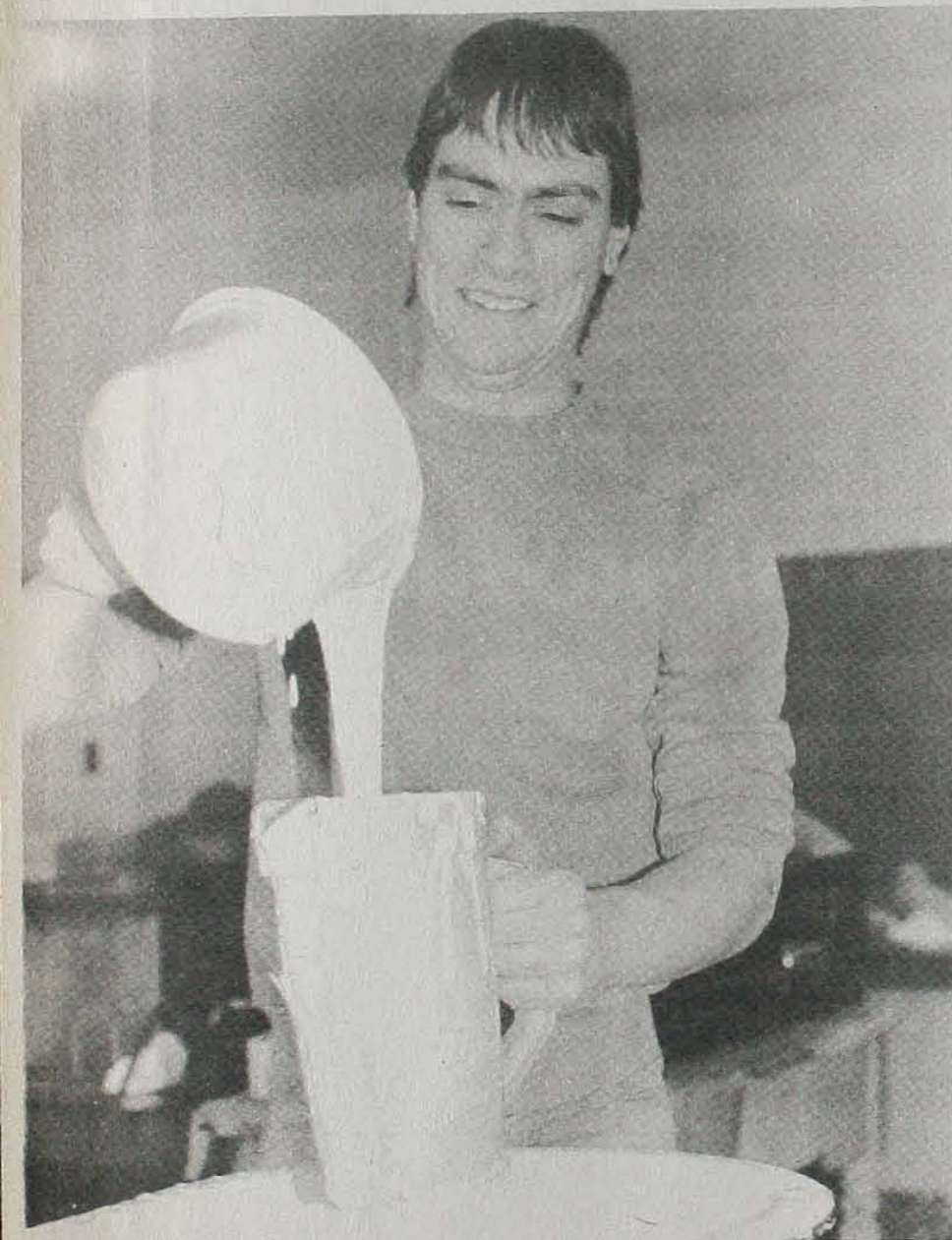
"It's the old time dancing we like. Remember the schottische? We've had lots of fun here."

## Draw winner

The Purple Valley W.I. held a successful raffle at the Maple Syrup festival over the weekend. First prize winner was Sandy Thompson of R.R. 6 Wiarton. Second was Mary Smith of Toronto and third was May McCoy of R.R. 3 Wiarton.



Brian Moser, on horseback, watches brother Terry react after his fingers were nipped while feeding the horse a carrot. Otherwise, the kids really enjoyed themselves at Saturday's Maple Syrup Festival in Purple Valley.



Darren McKone, "batter boy" at the Maple Valley Syrup Festival, pours the messy mix. He's been a volunteer for years and loves it.

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