

What Did You Do On Summer Vacation

by Lynne Belluscio

We're hoping that the kids that came over to LeRoy House this summer will have a lasting memory of some good times. For the first time in several years, with some help from the Vic Blood Foundation, we were able to offer some Hands-On-History programs.

It started off with a small but determined group of kids who participated in the Jell-O Olympics. And then it was on to an open hearth cooking class for boys. A very enthusiastic group stuffed sausages which were cooked in cider. They made



homemade biscuits and hand churned butter and for dessert -- it was 1234 cake, homemade vanilla ice cream with strawberries and whipped cream. The plates were all licked clean.

There were so many girls that signed up for the open hearth cooking class, that we had to divide them into a morning and afternoon class. Whether they knew it or not, it was a class that also taught them how to stay cool in front of the fireplace on one of the hottest days of the summer!!! The girls made chicken



soup with homemade noodles, biscuits and hand-churned butter and the ever favorite, 1234 cake, homemade ice cream, strawberries and whipped cream.

At the end of last week, we offered a carpentry class, and thanks to Chuck Dusen who pre-cut all the wood, everyone went home with a wooden tool box. As I posted on the Facebook page, it was an exercise in patience, using a ruler, and learning how to hit the nail on the head. I guess it was successful, because there were no smashed fingers. This week it's been basket weaving.

Whoever made a joke about taking basket weaving in college, obviously never made a basket. It's not as easy as some people think. Eight kids had an opportunity to try their hand at weaving a basket and in two hours there were some beautiful baskets. I'm not sure what the baskets will be used for. They are just the right size for a few eggs, or some strawberries but I don't suspect that's what they will be used for.

At one time baskets were very important. If you were making cheese, you needed a big cheese basket to drain the cheese curd from the whey. A basket with a handle was great for collecting eggs, or carrying your lunch to school. A basket with a cover might be a sewing basket. Baskets were used to measure wheat, apples and potatoes -- a bushel or a peck. Pack baskets are still being made, although expensive. Some of the biggest baskets are used with hot air balloons. Some baskets were used as sieves and strainers.

The baskets that were made at LeRoy House

were from splint that is grown in China. It resembles the wood splint that could be made from oak or ash. Oak splint is made from white oak. Ash splint is made from black ash. The ash tree is cut and kept wet until it can be pounded with a mallet which separates the various growth layers. It is a laborious process. Unfortunately the recent appearance of the ash borer will kill the black ash trees.

The Iroquois Indians have traditionally used black ash for their baskets and an unusual effort is being made to preserve some trees and seeds so that in the future, if the threat of the ash borer disappears, the trees can be planted again. This project is part of the Akwasasne Museum in Horgansville, New York, near the Canadian border.

The other class this week is candle dipping and making a punched tin lantern. I think we have twelve kids signed up for that. And next week we finish out



the summer with an afternoon exploring Machpelah Cemetery and Thursday, learning about LeRoy's Statue of Liberty and about the immigrants who came to the United States.

The only reason we were able to offer the summer programs was because the Vic Blood Foundation gave us some money and we were able to hire Laura Williams to work with the kids. It's not every teacher who knows how to do open hearth cooking, and basket weaving and tin punching. She comes well recommended -- she's my daughter.

