

# Lost art of redecorating old chairs explained

By LAUREL SCHAEFFER  
Staff correspondent  
SHARTLESVILLE  
"Repainting and decorating old chairs is becoming a lost art," stated Grace Ebbert, proprietor of the Heritage Chair Shop, Wernersville. Ms. Ebbert was the featured speaker to over 140 women attending the Berks County Farmers Association "Ladies Day Out" held at the Shartlesville Grange on March 15.

Reproducing designs on old chairs and restoring old designs which need "touching up" are Ms. Ebbert's specialties. While speaking before the large audience, the speaker explained the many steps involved in the long process. Replacing missing parts of old designs is very hard, she explained, because the paint has to be matched exactly. If the design is in poor condition, it is better to strip the chair and paint a whole new design.

The original patterns are

first reproduced on cardboard and stencils. Presently, Ms. Ebbert has 30 authentic patterns to choose from, and is always looking for others to add to her collection. Many of the original patterns which were painted on these old Pennsylvania chairs have been lost forever, the speaker continued. For a time, many chairs were stripped and redone in their natural wood because there was virtually no one to paint them, and also because it was a fad at the time.

Ebbert tries to use the same techniques which were used by the original artist when redoing a chair. "But," she commented, "no two artists paint alike so the designs can't be duplicated exactly." The speaker also said she signs and dates her work so that there is no doubt that it isn't an original.

There are three different types of designs which are used stenciled designs, free hand designs, and free

bronzing designs. To begin, a chair it is first stripped and smoothed. Ebbert stressed that the chairs should not be dipped, however, because dipping can damage them. Once they are very smooth the painting process begins.

After the background is applied, the chair is coated with a high gloss varnish. When the varnish is almost dry but still tacky, the first stencil is applied. Then comes the color, which is in the form of a powder. This is done by rubbing the powder over the stencil. It sticks to the tacky varnish and is left alone in a dust free area for approximately 24 hours.

Stressing the dust free area, Ebbert said that dust is the worst enemy to the decorating. After the varnish and powder has set, the excess powder is removed and the edges are sharpened where the dust may have gotten under the stencil. Another coat of varnish is then applied and let to sit for another 24 hours. This



Berks County Women's Committee chairmen line up with county Farmers Association President William Myers. From left they are: Mrs. Rae M. Hix, chairman of the Women's Committee; Mrs. Roger L. Wagner, vice chairman of the committee; Myers; and Mrs. Ray S. Burgert, state chairman for Berks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery Counties.

process is repeated as many times as needed to reproduce the pattern. Some patterns have as many as 10 different stencils.

If free hand painting is done on the design, it is done over the stenciled pattern and the final coat of varnish is applied. This time it is a satin finish which gives the complete chair a hand-rubbed appearance.

The painting is done with French quills and all of the stripping is also done free hand with a stripping quill. Ebbert explained how different techniques are used to get varying effects when she does the free hand work, and

also explained how she paints on tin.

She discourages painting on old tin explaining that it is usually more valuable if left alone. There are also many steps to this process as well.

"No paint coming from a can is thin enough for this work," she stated. It should be thinned down until it is like ink, explaining that it is better to add an extra coat then use paint which is too thick. After each coat is applied and allowed to dry, it is then sanded with fine wet sand paper and varnished.

Ms. Ebbert teaches a course on tin painting one day each week in her shop.

Addressing the group also, during the day long affair was William Myers, county president. Myers discussed his recent visit to Washington D.C. where he and several other members of PFA met with legislators. The county president told the women that the farmers association is fighting to keep sulfa drugs and other antibiotics on the market.

During the afternoon, Gary Rothermel discussed F.M.B.A.S. which is one of the many services available through the Farmer's Association. Lorraine Reinert, Laureldale, then led a craft session where everyone made a holly hobbie doll.



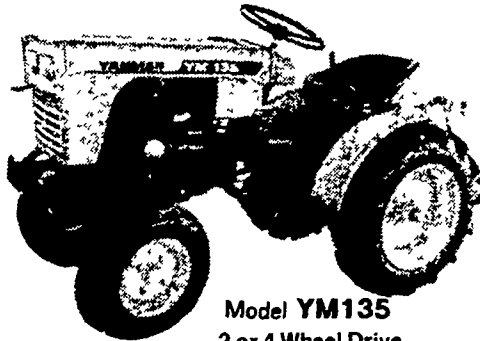
Grace Ebbert, guest speaker at the Berks County Farmers Association Ladies Day Out, points to a redecorated chair, the subject of her talk.



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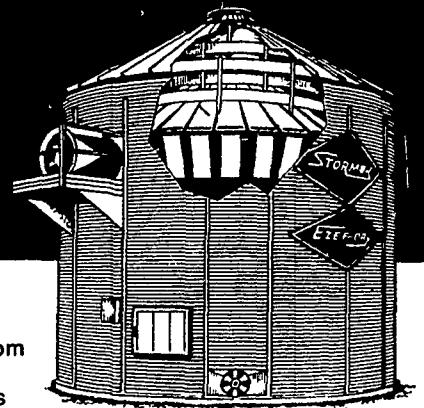
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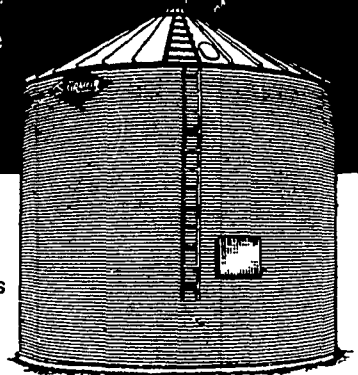
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