

Pumpkin ladies boast sunbonnets and skirts

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

EPHRATA — Grace Martin seeks out the graceful, long-necked varieties when she buys pumpkins. It's not because they make the best pies; it's that they make the most interesting characters when she puts sunbonnets, calico skirts and spectacles on them.

Grace, the wife of Earl G. Martin, Ephrata R.D.2, is an avid craftsperson, and began making her pumpkin characters about 10 years ago after she spotted one at the Ephrata Hospital where she was working as a nurse's aide.

She says, "When I see something somewhere, I revise it." She revises the pumpkins by adding glasses, a sunbonnet and often a basket of flowers or just a bouquet.

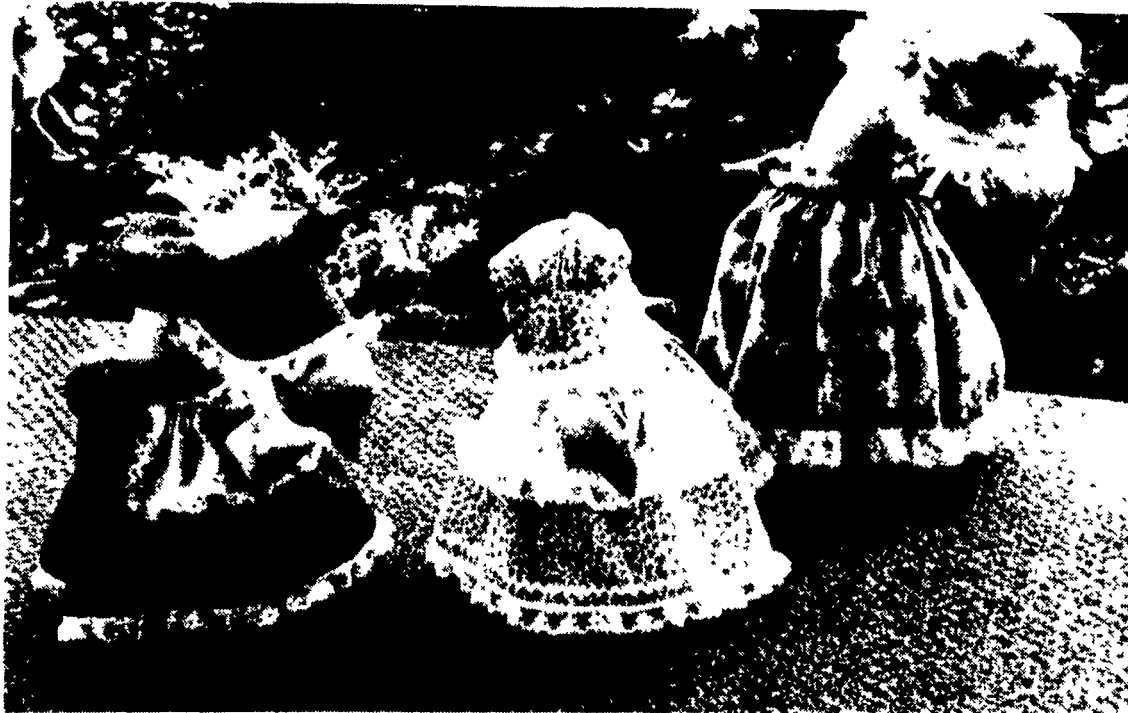
While she has kept no record of the number of pumpkin characters she has made over the years, Grace recalls that one year she

made 75 of them, and she continues to get orders for them.

The nice thing about these characters, which resemble little old ladies, is that they often last from year to year. Occasionally the pumpkin will go bad or soft, but Grace says, "Old ladies have soft bellies anyway."

If the owner of a pumpkin character should decide he would rather make a pumpkin pie than try to preserve the pumpkin, the clothing can all be removed and kept for another pumpkin. Grace points out, "Once you have it you always have it."

The base for the character is a plastic container, and Grace often takes the containers with her to search out pumpkins that fit securely in the base. She has experimented with different bases and finds that the bottom of a two-liter soda container also works well. The pumpkin gets taped



These little old ladies make a perfect fall addition to any home. The neck pumpkins are carefully selected and lovingly dressed by Grace Martin, who adds special touches to make each one unique.

securely in place, and then the character gets dressed.

Grace fashions the gathered skirt from calico, adding lace trim and a lace apron. The sunbonnet is made from matching fabric. A felt beak is glued in place and features are painted on the face with felt on the markers.

Each little old lady becomes a unique character, and Grace often makes an order to a specific color, so the pumpkin character will really become part of the home's decor.

Grace's home near Akron is filled with crafts she has made and they create a cozy atmosphere along with the many antiques which also fill the rooms of the farm house. The Martin home was open during the annual tour of the Lancaster County Farmers Association Ladies Day Out, and the many craft projects were greatly admired by visitors.

Although she does not go to craft fairs, Grace says she enjoys going to craft shops. "Whatever I see I like to try," she says. "I enjoy crafts, but not too much of one thing. I like to go on to the next thing. I make something for so long, and then I get sick and tired of it." She admits that even though she may have given up a particular craft, she will make it again if someone requests it.

She does not place her many crafts in the popular consignment shops because she has her own market for them. Her most recent job as nurse's aide took her to Maple Farms Nursing Home, and she says, "If I take crafts there, it doesn't take long for them to sell. It spreads by word of mouth. People want them for gifts."

Grace says she works on her crafts in her spare time. "Some



Grace works on one of her pumpkin creations in her sewing room. The colorfully-dressed pumpkins make a nice addition to any decor and the clothing can be removed and used on another pumpkin year after year.

days I spend a lot of time on them and some days I don't do any. I work on them whenever I'm not busy."

The Martin family raises about 750 head of beef, plus corn and tobacco, and Grace could once be found in the fields much of the time. Now that the couple's two sons are older, she does not work outside as much, though she did take time off from her nursing duties this summer to help paint the barn. The hired men helped her as they had time, but she did the bulk of the work.

Sewing plays a large part in many of Grace's quilts, and

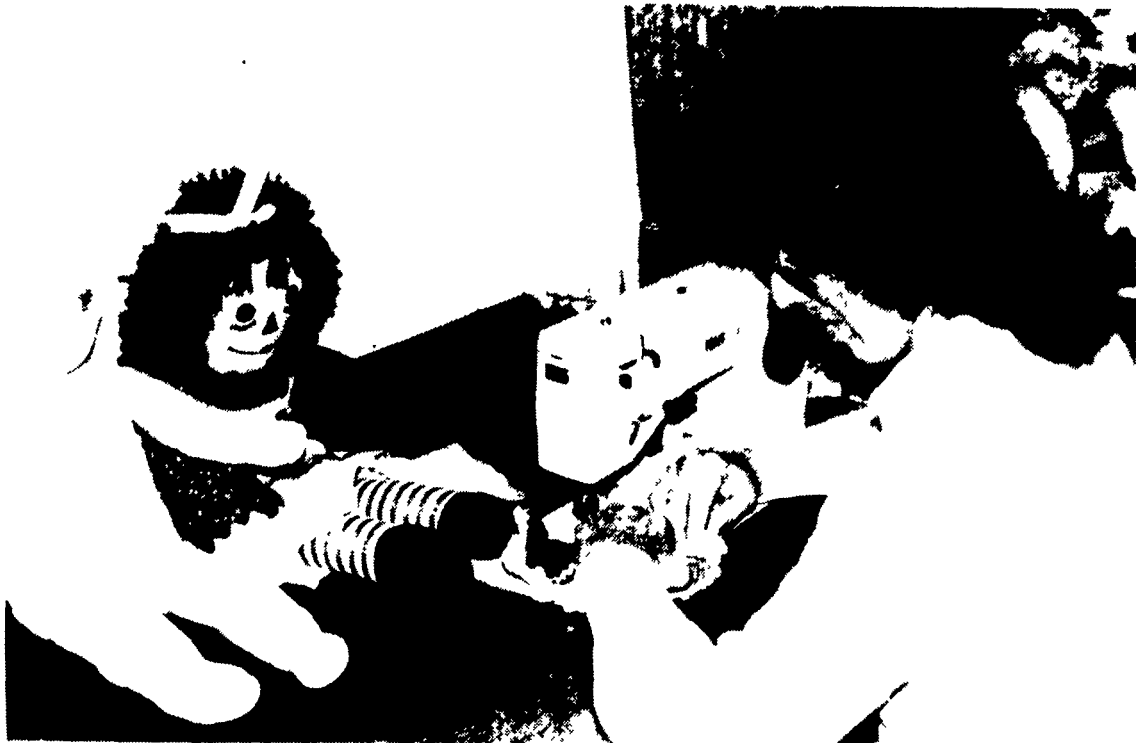
although she says she used to do a lot of sewing for herself and her two boys, she says, "I don't sew anymore. I don't feel like it." In recent years, however, she has made fleece-lined denim jackets for the three men in her family.

In addition to sewing the clothing for the pumpkin characters, Grace also sews for the picture she makes of a little girl on a swing. This framed silhouette of a girl clutching the rope, sitting on a block of wood is a real eye-catcher, and Grace won a second place ribbon for one she made specially for the Ephrata Fair this year. She has

(Turn to Page B4)



The little girl swinging captures the attention of all who pass through the hallway in Grace's home. With real rope, real wood for the seat, and delicate touches, the little girl comes to life in the frame.



With her built in sewing machine and cabinets, Grace can comfortably keep working on her craft projects, many of which involve sewing as a basic step.

Homestead Notes