

# Mary Shellenberger embarks on two-year stint as Lancaster County Farm Women president

BY SALLY BAIR  
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COLUMBIA — Today Mary Shellenberger takes over the reigns of the Lancaster County Society of Farm Women, a position she has been anticipating for four years, as second and then first vice-president of the organization.

Representative of many of the women whom she will lead, Mary grew up with Farm Women and when she completes her two-year term it will mark 40 years since she first became a member of Society #4.

Mary believes it is natural that she joined Farm Women because she was "associated" with Society #8 as a young child when her mother was a member. Growing up on a farmette between Marietta and Donegal, she recalls participating in a Farm Women-sponsored flower show at the Elizabethtown Hospital when she was young. Actually she was born on Brunswick Farms, a general farm in Manheim Township.

When she married Charles, she was invited by her mother-in-law to join Society #4. Along with her sister-in-law, the three would go to meetings together. Mary recalls, "I loved the idea of joining, since I had known something about it." She said the children would either stay with their fathers or with a maiden aunt when the Saturday afternoon meetings were held. Mary and her husband have three children, all married, and five grandchildren.

Mary was active in Society #4, serving as secretary and publicity chairman, but she said, "I never felt I could take the presidency while I was teaching, because I couldn't attend county board meetings." She retired in 1979 as a high school librarian, having taught in Penn Manor High School for 22 years.

It was actually in her first year as president of the society that she

was asked to run for county second vice-president, and she was elected.

Taking over the position of president at a time of declining membership, Mary is concerned that Farm Women "continue with strength." Although Lancaster County continues to have the largest membership in the state, membership in the county has fallen from a high of just over 1,000 to about 985.

Mary states, "At the time that Mrs. Black (from Somerset County) formed the society in 1917, ladies were getting together and having fellowship. Today Farm Women is not as important to many."

Of course, as the farm population continues to decline, the number of members actually living on farms becomes even smaller. This in itself is not a problem, because as Mary notes, any woman who shares their philosophy of valuing rural and family life, is welcome to become a member. Indeed, a large percentage of members now do not live on farms.

Mary continues to live on their Century Farm in Manor Township, although it has now been sold to the eighth generation of the family. The families have the original sheepskin deed from William Penn's sons, and are proud of the family tradition of farming. Both Mary's and Charles' ancestors came to this country in 1792 from Switzerland, arriving at the port of Philadelphia within months of each other.

What are the advantages of Farm Women membership? Mary responds, "Farm Women Societies are very definitely putting forth efforts for the community. One society gave over 2,000 volunteer hours to the American Heart Association. That was really dedication."

Mary noted that many of the

organizations have fund-raisers so they can "do" in their community.

In addition to the community contributions, Mary notes that the meetings themselves are for the most part inspirational and educational. "The meetings are interesting and they have fun." From that standpoint, any member must benefit.

"Farm Women is unique. We strike everything in the way of interests," Mary notes.

A new direction for many societies has been focusing one program on legislation each year. This was instigated at the suggestion of some of the newer members who believe Farm Women members can make a contribution to the total farm picture if they are informed of legislative efforts. Mary states, "These legislative meetings are getting us involved and keeping us aware of what is going on."

Each society is also encouraged to hold at least one health or safety meeting in the course of the year.

Mary likes to point out that the organizations are really autonomous as far as planning their programs and detailing their own interests. There are modest dues to the county and state organizations, and the only "dictation" is that they hold a safety program once a year. "We decide as a society what we do and what programs we have," she states.

And of course, one of the very strong benefits of belonging is making lasting and deep friendships. Mary believes this is one of the most important reasons for belonging. "The friendships are just marvelous. I have friends who go to the same church and are involved in other organizations and are also members of my Farm Women Society."

Most women also have the opportunity for personal growth as Farm Women members. Mary says, "If they are interested, they will hopefully take a turn entertaining, doing devotions and serving as an officer. Most people are very willing to cooperate."

A personal advantage to Mary will be the opportunity to visit not only Lancaster County's 35 societies, but members in other counties as well. County officers are invited to other county's conventions, and in Mary's words are "royally entertained." She adds, "The members are so gracious; they are as nice as they can be."

Another obligation as county president will be to travel to state board meetings held four times annually, and to attend and participate in the state convention.

Pennsylvania is unique, in that it is the only state which has Farm Women Societies. And within the state there are just 16 counties with the groups. Although Mary is heavily committed to Farm Women over the next two years, it is not her sole interest. She is a member of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Mountville where she serves on the Administrative Board, sings in the choir and is president of the UMW Mission Commission.

She is also active in the Mountwaybia Club, a literary group which takes its name from Mountville and Columbia, connected by the Lincoln Highway. This group meets bi-weekly from October to April and members give a book review or paper on something of literary interest. Mary says she has always loved to read, and became a librarian because a librarian for whom she worked as an aide encouraged her. Her love of reading is enhanced



Making mints and candy is a favorite pastime for Lancaster County Farm Women president Mary Shellenberger. Here she uses molds to create mints that are not only beautiful, but also delicious.



Mary Shellenberger looks over reports from Lancaster County's 35 Farm Women Societies as she prepares to speak on their behalf at the county conventions.

and broadened as a member of Mountwaybia.

Mary also belongs to the Mountville Lioness Club and Columbia Chapter No. 366, Order of the Eastern Star.

She assists her husband with his insurance business. Mary credits her husband with being "very supportive," of her many activities and her present commitment to Farm Women.

Although there is little spare time, Mary also enjoys candy making, including making delicious mints and molded chocolate which she makes as gifts, for entertaining, and for bazaars. She likes to cook, sew and do needlepoint, and enjoys

arranging flowers. In the summer she has a "small garden."

Together she and her husband enjoy traveling, something they did often with their three children. They also enjoy some of the cultural benefits offered by Lancaster County, including the plays at the Fulton Opera House.

About her presidency, Mary says, "I'm excited. I'm looking forward to having good years and to the fellowship with the other ladies, I look forward to it with lots of anticipation."

Committed to the advantages of being a member of a Farm Women Society, Mary concludes, "We are very diverse. We have something for everyone."

# Homestead Notes



Mary arranges fresh flowers for the coffee table in her living room. Although her work with Farm Women leaves little spare time, she enjoys flower arranging, sewing and cooking.