

Lancaster County's First 'Milkmaid' Started Tradition That Continues Today

BY SALLY BAIR

Lancaster County Correspondent
MANHEIM — Barbara Keener Longenecker was Lancaster County's first dairy princess. That was in 1960, and she was actually a "Miss Milkmaid." But whatever the name, she started a tradition that continues to play a big role in making the public more aware of the benefits of wholesome dairy products.

Because June is the 50th anniversary of June Dairy Month, the Lancaster County Milk Promotion Committee has researched Lancaster's 25 dairy princesses and is planning to recognize them during this year's pageant on June 21 at the Farm and Home Center.

Barbara, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Keener, Sr., modestly says she was asked to serve because "I was just there." In reality, she was a very active 4-H'er who was involved in working with the Holsteins on her father's farm near Manheim.

She owned about six dairy cows of her own, having started as a 4-H'er at the age of nine. She showed at many of the local shows, and recalls, "I did better with fitting and showing I won only a few

prizes for conformation."

As the first official spokesman for Lancaster County's dairy industry, Barbara found herself going to service and civic clubs, and frequently performed by playing the organ for these groups.

She recalls happy memories of the state pageant, which was held in Harrisburg. She says, "It was fun. We had a nice luncheon and were interviewed. I still have the beaded purse which was given to each contestant." The girl who won the state title was known as the Pennsylvania Dairy Princess.

A graduate of Manheim Central High School, Barbara got her bachelor's degree from Elizabethtown College, and then married Fred Longenecker. They have two children, Philip, 19, in his second year at Susquehanna University; and Kim, 17, who will graduate from Manheim Central High School this week.

While the Longeneckers are no longer connected with agriculture, Barbara said she has fond memories of growing up on a farm. "It was a healthy way to grow up. I have pleasant memories and it was fun at the time."

Her father was, of course, a well-

known dairyman in the county, and Barbara says, "He took a lot of pride in the dairy herd, and I worked closely with the dairy." Even after moving off the farm, he remained active with the Heifer International project until a few years ago.

Barbara's interests now center around her family, and she works three days a week at Longeneckers True Value Hardware, a family store in Manheim. "I like taking care of my family and home, and I enjoy cooking, needlepoint and doing counted crossstitch."

As she was concluded her reign as Miss Milkmaid, Barbara was selected Miss Lancaster County and participated in the Miss Pennsylvania contest, another thrilling experience for her. Both these "royal" opportunities gave her more self-confidence, something which is of benefit even today. As a result of the exposure on the agricultural scene she also was used in some of the photographs done by Grant Heilman of Lititz, and appeared in magazines as a result. Barbara recalls that as another beneficial experience.

William J. Deisley, formerly president of Moore Dairy and now trust officer with Fulton Bank, recalls that the dairy princess contest was an outgrowth of an advertising program known locally as "Milk for Health." Milk for Health was a joint campaign organized by local milk dealers, with money deducted from producers. Farmers were not at all sold on the benefits of promotion, but were persuaded to contribute one cent per hundredweight. This netted the local dealers about \$1,200 to \$1,500 a month of advertising, all of which was done through the local newspapers.

Statewide, the first dairy princess contests were organized under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Milk Dealers Association, and Deisley recalls the state association telling Lancaster dairymen that as the leading dairy county in the state they should follow the lead of several other areas and organize a contest.

Deisley said, "It was our first feeble attempt, but we had a find candidate. Barbara was attractive with a nice personality. We probably did not utilize her to the fullest extent, but it eventually turned out as we had hoped it would."

About the dairy princess program, Deisley said, "It is a very worthwhile program for the dairy industry. It started haltingly and not very efficiently, but we



Once a dairy princess, always a dairy princess. Here Barbara shows her strong dairy heritage by pouring a glass of milk in the kitchen of her home in Manheim.



Lancaster County's first Milkmaid was Barbara Keener, who is shown here receiving her crown from William J. Deisley.



Barbara Keener Longenecker relaxes in the garden near her Manheim home. Selected Miss Milkmaid in 1960, she went on to become a Miss Lancaster County. She recalls both experiences fondly.

eventually helped other counties to get started."

He thinks the money being spent on promotion now is a good thing. "This is the only realistic way to go. Certainly something like this is necessary, and it is more important than ever to continue to promote. The competition is out there promoting."

Shortly after the milk dealers began the program they started looking for some assistance. It was Rhelda Royer who expanded the program, fashioning it into a pageant. She remembers getting involved in 1964 and stayed with it until 1969, when she had major surgery and resigned.

She changed it to a banquet at the Host Farm, and involved the Lancaster Northeast Rotary Club, which cooperated for a few years. This provided an audience as well as much needed support. Support

was needed because some skeptics within the dairy community were not sure that this was a necessary program.

About the dairy princess, Royer says, "I thought they did a very good job. I look them to fairs and parades and to service clubs. It took an awful lot of time, but they wouldn't have gotten there otherwise."

Having enough money to finance the contest was a problem, and Royer did a lot of persuading of downtown Lancaster merchants to get them to contribute to the program.

The idea of having a get-together with contestants a few weeks prior to the contest began with Royer. During this pre-contest session, contestants received instruction on how to walk and what to wear. Royer helped the dairy princess go

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Homestead Notes

Lancaster Co. Correspondent Sally Bair

Sally B. Bair, a correspondent for 13 years, is a 1966 graduate of The Pennsylvania State University with a bachelor's degree in journalism. She serves on the Board of School Directors of the Hempfield School District in Lancaster County, is on the board of the Lancaster County Farm and Home Foundation and is a member of Farm Women Society #22.

Sally is also a 4-H leader, a tour guide with Trinity Lutheran Church where she is a member and serves on the board of the Lancaster Friendship Force Club. She organized and coordinated the volunteer program at Farmdale Elementary School for four years.

Sally grew up on a dairy farm south of Littlestown in Adams County, where she was very active in 4-H activities. After



Sally Bair

graduation, she worked for the Pennsylvania Rural Electric Association in Harrisburg.

She is married to N. Alan Bair, and they have two children, Lara, 14, and Seth, 11.