

Holidays Sparkle With Tradition For New Holland Family

BY LOU ANN GOOD

NEW HOLLAND — Home-maker and craft enthusiast Rose Sharp advocates creating family holiday traditions because "they're one of the things that hold families together by giving them a sense of security and happy memories."

This rural New Holland mother with husband Norman and four daughters Tina, 18; Tonya, 17; Diana, 11 and Nellie, 9; draws from childhood memories and establishes some new traditions to create family togetherness.

She said, "There were 12 children in my mother's family and they were always close and had so much fun together." Rose comes from a family of eight siblings and lamented that as the family size grew larger and more spread out, it became harder to stay in contact. Not one to sit back and let extended family togetherness die, Rose and her aunt Mabel Stoltzfus of Hatville came up with some unique activities to create family togetherness.

For example, one Christmas, ten

family members hosted a family Holiday Trail by opening their homes for family viewing. "It gave us a chance to visit each other's homes and see the way each family celebrates the holiday," Rose said.

Every year Rose hosts a candy-making day for aunts, cousins and sisters. Each one leaves with boxes of chocolate candy from recipes handed down through the years.

Decorating traditions are a part of creating family enjoyment. The Sharp's live in a log cabin nestled in the Welsh Mountains east of Lancaster. Evergreen branches with hugh red bows decorate the outside windowsills, the woodpile and a tree stump. Inside, a tall Christmas tree reaches towards the rafters of the A-frame living room. Stuffed teddy bears and a various assortment of other animals line the stair steps. An antique coverlet drapes the loft railing. Visitors often remark over the cozy atmosphere that creates a warm, inviting feeling. Rose said, "That's what I strive for—to have visitors feel welcome."

Rose prefers using natural materials for her holiday decorations. She intergrates her year-round accessories with Christmas greenery and bows. "I don't like to put everything away," she said, "I just like to add holiday touches."

To give those touches, Rose incorporates her daughters' belongings like dolls and wooden blocks to invoke an old-fashioned country Christmas. Her kitchen and dining room windows boast gingerbread cutouts hung from ribbons attached to grapevine valances.

The Sharp's carry the Yuletide message throughout their house with charming arrangements, fragrant greenery and plaid ribbons by the yard. Rose likes creating original ideas using things she already owns. For example she punched holes in a can decorated with a country scene where the windows, a lamppost and moon appear. A lighted candle nestled inside the can brings the scene alive with light that twinkles in the windows, lamppost and moon.

The whole family gets into the act of trimming the Christmas tree with handmade ornaments from friends and family members. Rose said, "Every year I make or buy each of the children a special ornament so that by the time they have their own homes, they'll have a nice collection to decorate their tree."

Traditions don't stop with holiday preparation. Part of the Christmas Eve ritual always includes Rose reading aloud "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever." On Christmas day, Rose's husband reads the Biblical account of the first Christmas. And when the story is finished, her youngest daughter Nellie will place the nativity Christ child in the manger.

Then the family sings "Silent Night" with verses in both German and English. After that, everyone wishes each other a Merry Christmas and gifts are distributed.

Even in gift giving, traditions are observed. In keeping with the family's Swiss German ancestry, children are given five symbolic gifts: Both a food and a clothing item signify essentials for life. The third gift is a coin to save for the future, the fourth is a gift to be used for pleasure, and the fifth shows



Trimming the Christmas tree evokes memories as Rose recalls the special occasions when the ornaments were made or purchased.

the value of education.

"Traditions are often lost along the way," Rose admits. She recalls that her mother's family always received a plate with one orange and some candy on it. Rose would like to return that tradition to her own family to remind them of past relatives who felt fortunate in receiving what most children of today would snub.

Rose credits her aunt Mabel Stoltzfus with ideas and organization to keep family togetherness alive among the aunts, uncles and cousins. Last year, 150 Stoltzfus family members gathered to celebrate an old-fashioned holiday by eating hand-breaded fried oysters, ham, potatoes, filling, gravy and other traditional dishes. To keep the tables laden with food, two assembly lines of relatives served as cooks. Mabel, a staunch defender

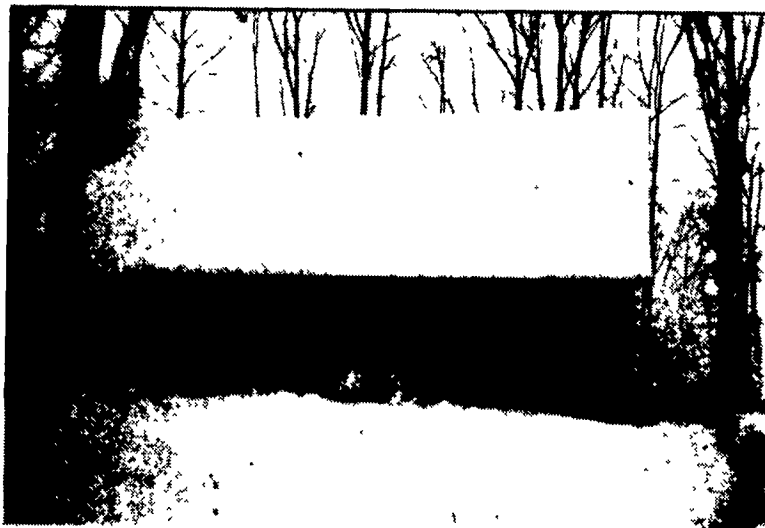
of family togetherness, finds satisfaction and upbuilding family relations resulting from family gatherings. She said, "Traditions pass on faith and a spirit of togetherness. It makes good memories."

In this generation, when psychologists report that many people suffer from holiday stress, Mabel and Rose offer their method of dealing with stress. They said, "People who try to please others with expensive gifts are bothered with stress. But if you concentrate on bringing happiness to others by sharing part of yourself, that brings joy and contentment without stress."

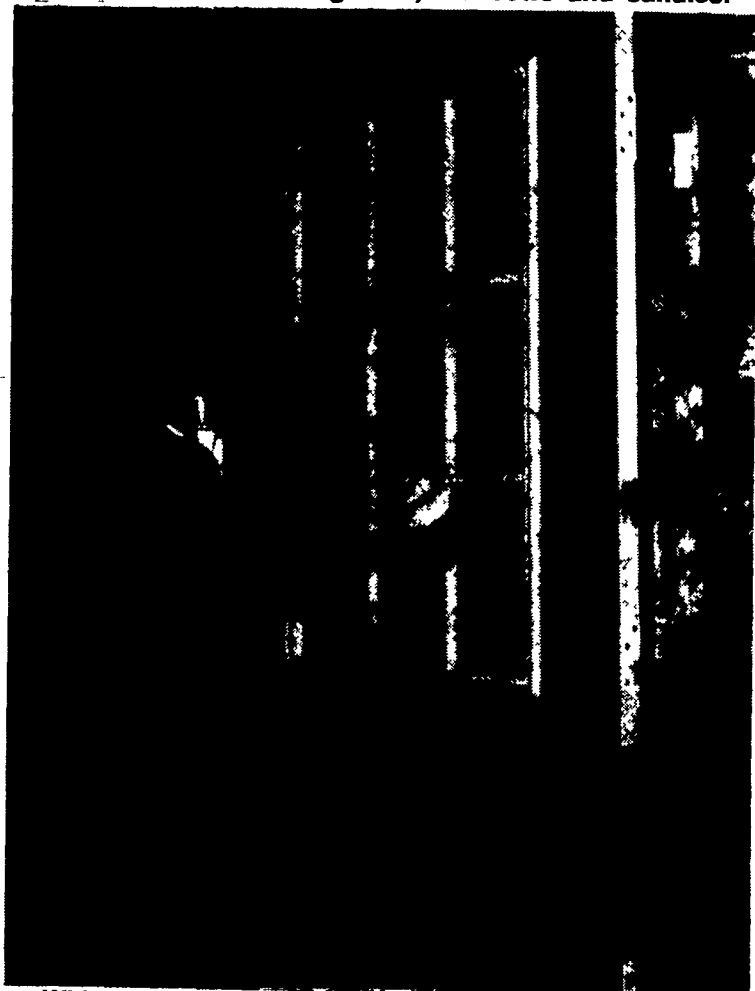
While the Sharp's holiday observations reflect the past, the present, and the future, Rose said, "Most of all, we try to instill in each of our children that Jesus is the reason for the season. That's what Christmas is all about."



Rose enjoys working in her country kitchen that overlooks acres of woodlands and several ponds. Typical of Rose's decorating touches are the homespun fabric hearts and swans that line the window.



Snow blankets the Sharp's log cabin home adding to the holiday touches of evergreens, red bows and candles.



With a welcoming smile, Rose greets visitors to her rural New Holland log cabin.



Candy making is no miniature operation for Rose's extended family clan. Here trays of candy are set on the balcony to cool before distributing to candy making participants.