

Pennsylvania Farm Women Grapple With Change

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— "Will we grow if we do things the way we've always done them?"

That's the question many members of the Society of Farm Women of Pennsylvania ask.

The society held its annual convention on Monday and Tuesday. As usual it was a two-day convention. The day-long Monday session was held in the State Forum concluding with 370 members attending a banquet at the Penn Harris Motor Inn. On Tuesday, 232 members of the 3,611 members registered for the business session in Room E of the State Farm Show Building.

In 1914, Mrs. Frank Black founded the society to strengthen home, community and farm conditions. Then, it was one of few organizations for rural women. But today, with more and more women in careers outside the farm and with fewer farm wives, membership has been dwindling.

An organization with more than

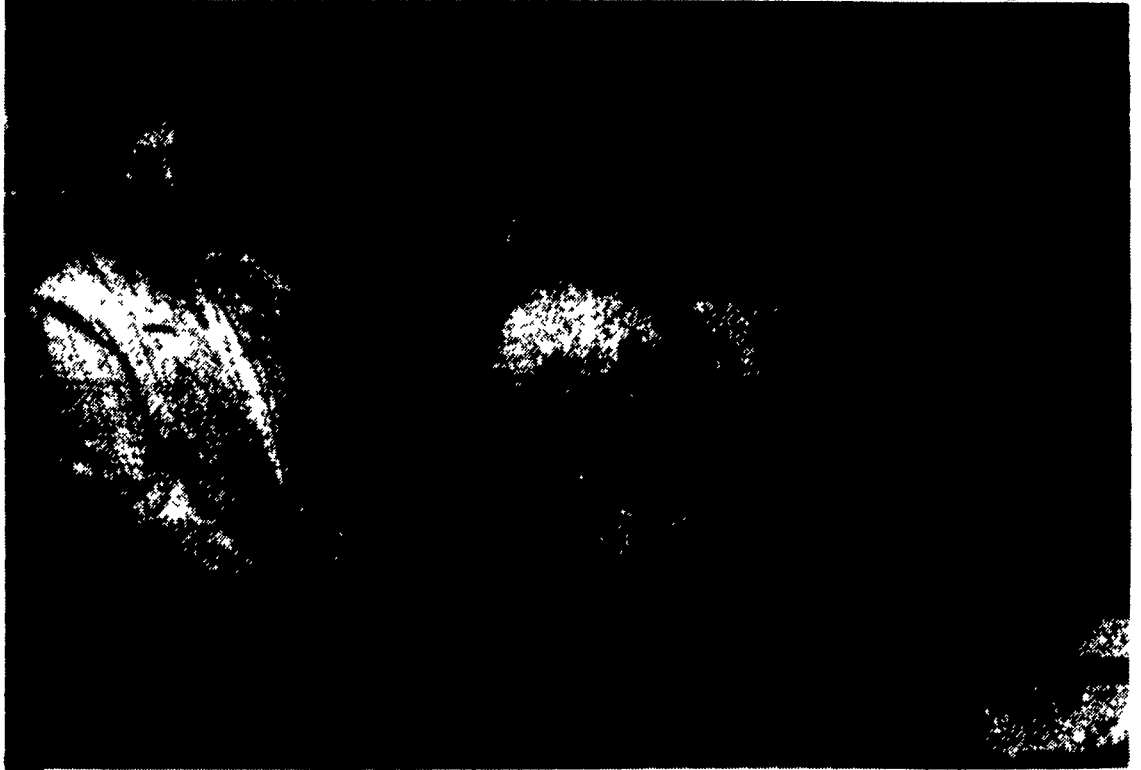
3,500 sounds like a strong base, but most members are retirement age. This past year alone, 49 members died.

Many expressed concern that the society, which they have known and loved, will continue to dwindle in membership unless changes are made.

Exactly what changes are necessary causes controversial debate.

About half of the voting members believe that the two-day convention should be changed to a one-day convention. This would allow more working women to attend.

But others, like Mary Fizz of Berks County disagree. Mary, who is one of the younger members of the society, said that as a fulltime working woman and a wife and mother, she has had no trouble getting two days off work. She believes that it is a matter of priority. She believes that women benefit from the fellowship of a two-day mini-vacation in January. She, like many others, fear a one-day convention would be too jammed with business to allow time for



Officers of the state society include from left, sitting: Catherine Schott, secretary; Arlene Whitman, first vice president. Standing, from left: Dorothy Casky, treasurer; Edith Diehl, president; and Dorothy Stricker, second vice president. At the business meeting Catherine Schott was appointed director and Becky Swallow of Somerset County was elected secretary.



Ushers for the annual Farm Women banquet included (from left): Beatrice Johnston of Franklin County, Dolores Hiltz of Lebanon County, Darlene Habecker of Lebanon County and Thelma Ommert of Franklin County.



Naomi Bupp (right) installed the following to office: Becky Swallow, secretary; Catherine Schott, director; and Mary Louise McMillen, director.

fellowship.

Some county societies, which travel from distant parts of the state, also disagreed with the proposed change. These societies stay overnight in Harrisburg to attend the two-day event. If it were a one-day affair, they said they would need to leave at 3 a.m. and wouldn't get home until 3 p.m.

The final tally showed 104 in favor of a two-day convention and 115 supporting a one day convention. To change convention by-laws a two-thirds vote is needed. Consequently the two-day convention remains intact.

Many members also desire to change the by-laws to allow county presidents to vote during executive board meetings. Presently seven directors are elected to represent the state and they form the voting body of the executive board. Many agree with Florence Vaitl of Lancaster County. She supports a by-law change that would phase out the directors and allow county presidents to vote. "It's frustrating to sit at an executive meeting, be able to express your opinion but unable to vote," she said.

But 104 other members, like former state president Naomi Bupp, voted to retain the seven directors. She and her followers believe that the directors who are



Claiming that her gift wrapping has not improved, Arlene Whitman, right, presents an appreciation gift to Catherine Schott for her three year term as secretary.

past presidents have more knowledge and maturity to make wise decisions. A large percentage of the members wished to retain the directors and also allow the presidents to vote. But this proposal could not be voted upon since members must be notified 60 days in advance of voting.

Members failed to reach a two-thirds agreement and the proposal was thrown out.

Arlene Whitman, first vice president, pointed out that although 49 members died, the net loss to the society members was 17. "So we are adding new members," she

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Mary Bartholemew (center) stitched each clothespin doll that represents a Farm Women president from Berks County. Members of her committee included Martha Klahr (left) and Dorothy Stricker (right).



Speaker Pattee Miller (right) of Reading stirred Farm Women members with her speech on "Using Our Gifts." Arlene Whitman (left) of Mount Joy, dressed as an early settler for her role as mistress of ceremonies during the Farm Women's banquet.