

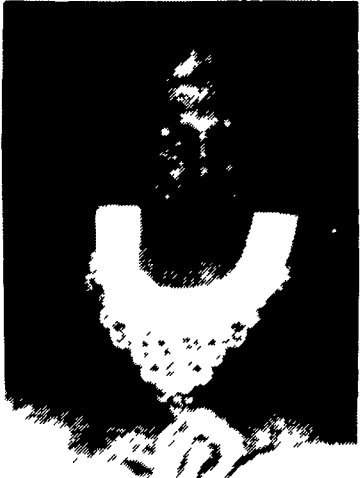
# Dauphin County Farm Women Reminisce So Many Rich Memories . . .

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DAUPHIN (Dauphin Co.) —  
"Remember when Lois got lost on her way to a Somerset County Farm Women's and stopped to ask directions?"

"That was time when she was dressed in a gown and children pelleted ears of shelled corn at her," someone answered above the din of voices as Farm Women reminisced.

These memories and many more were fondly retold during a recent gathering of the Dauphin County Farm Women's Past President's Club.

The club is an informal gathering of previous members who have served as president of the Dauphin County Society of Farm Women. This close-knit group of friends share an affinity for the Society of Farm Women of Pennsylvania, which was founded in 1914 in Somerset County. It wasn't until 1931 that the first group was



Margaret Zimmerman recalls the time her husband tried to eat a towel cake.



Twins Mary Pankake and Martha Reed not only dress alike but share a dedication to Farm Women.



Former presidents of Dauphin County Farm Women include, seated from left, Margaret Zimmerman, Ethel Cline, Pat Baum, and Darlene Schmeltz. Standing are Betty Shireman, Darlee Straub, Lois Erb, Martha Reed and Mary Pankake.

formed in Dauphin County, which now has 14 societies with 233 members.

Through the years, changes in health, moving to another residence, and death have caused the group to fluctuate in size. But regardless of how far away these past presidents are spread, all make it a priority to attend the scheduled gatherings.

Lois comes the farthest. Four years ago, she and her husband moved to the state of Virginia to be closer to their children.

"But I come back to the area six times a year for Farm Women meetings. I have many dear friends all over the state," Lois said.

She added that being pelted with corn wasn't the only time that she and her traveling companion had trouble trying to locate a Farm Women's convention in a distant county. One time, she and Ethel Cline traveled for hours trying to follow a hand-drawn map. Much later, to their chagrin, they discovered they had the map turned upside.

Most of the members joined the Society of Farm Women after a friend or a neighbor invited them to a meeting.

Members take turns holding the monthly meetings in their homes. The agenda often includes an educational program or making a craft project together.

Margaret Zimmerman remembers the time members made towel cakes and decorated them with whipped waxy soap. The ornamental cake looked so authentic that her husband tried to slice a piece.

But her husband was supportive when it came to Farm Women.

One time after he designed a patio at their home, he remarked that it would be a great place for a wedding. Farm Women members planned a mock wedding on the patio. The bride and groom (both females) looked so realistic and the evening was so much fun, that the bridal pair decided to have a cup of coffee at a local restaurant. That was in the days before such shenanigans were suspect.

"Remember the time when we had a Come as you are party? I was dressed in the worst clothes because I was helping my husband sow wheat," lamented Martha Reed of Halifax.

"Some people showed up in housecoats," someone else recalled.

Showing up in worn-out clothing was considered disgraceful in the era before torn jeans and oversized clothing became vogue.

"Those were the days when women didn't leave the house unless dressed in their Sunday best. We always wore gowns to the conventions," said Lois. In fact, she hand knit a whole gown to wear to one of the conventions.

While the individual societies have their own projects and meetings, they do work together on joint projects from time to time.

"Hosting the Spring Rally in 1975 was the greatest fun in the world," said Pat Baum.

About 1,400 women from across the state showed up at the annual event which rotates among counties with Farm Women Societies.

Most of the women have mementoes of the years associated with Farm Women. Doralee Straub of Millersburg has a quilt with a patch completed by each society in the county. She purchased it after giving the highest bid at a silent auction.

Farm Women are known for quietly meeting community needs. For years Dauphin County societies have made grooming kits for the patients at Harrisburg State Hospital four times a year. They also bake cupcakes and donate clothing to the hospital.

They have held bake sales and fundraisers to purchase a sound system, tables, chairs, and other items needed for the Dauphin County Agriculture and Natural Resource Center.

The group also has hospital equipment that they loan to those in need.

Darlene Schmeltz said, "Farm



Darlene Schmeltz's bouncy, vibrant personality spreads a contagious enthusiasm for life among her Farm Women friends.

Women band together whenever a need arises. We take a collection whenever a need arises and sometimes we dig a little deeper."

Caring is evident among the close-knit group.

Lois said, "We have so many rich memories with lots of business and fun."

While the camaraderie that exists among members is an incentive to keeping in touch, the reasons are much deeper than fun and games.

Darlene Schmeltz said that the caring members showed toward her during tough times has forever cemented a bond among them.

Their concern coupled with her faith in God brought her through the distress of losing two babies, a long recuperation from an accident that resulted in a shattered back, when both her parents died within eight days, and the trauma of having her only son diagnosed with a brain tumor.

"Other than a loss of hearing in the left ear, Bryan is doing pretty well," said Darlene of her son's recovery from brain surgery in 1991.

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Ethel Cline served as president from 1975-1976.



Since Betty Shireman served as president in 1969, she has seen membership dwindle but sisterhood remain strong among members.



Lois Erb collects spoons from countries around the world, but her favorite is a spoon that was formed from a Farm Women's pin.

## Homestead Notes