

1977

## PANORAMA

by Mary Hastings ©LFP

Lucky girls! What a wonderful chance rural girls have to receive training in just about any aspect of homemaking that interests them.

This is far from a new opportunity. In fact, rural youth club work began in Ontario before any other area in North America. The amazing thing is that after all these years, the opportunities are still available. And perhaps even more surprising, despite the pull of urban interests and other activities the girls' response remains just as great, or even slightly increased.

We have always had a city person's vague awareness of the good things offered rural girls and boys by 4-H through homemaking and agriculture clubs. The scope of involvement in club projects came to us forcefully a few days ago as we trailed around the Birr-Bryanston district in the wake of Carol Crerar, Ontario ministry of agriculture and food home economist for Middlesex County.

Our guide for the day was Carol Nunns, with Marian White leader of a home beautification project which about 20 members of the Birr 4-H Homemaking Club have been working on since April. This was the girls' day of truth, the day on which Mrs. Crerar would visit their farms, inspect their projects, and discuss any problems they might have encountered.

The map held by Mrs. Nunns led us to farms on a dozen roads. At each place the family dog raced out the laneway to greet us, and escorted us to the backyard where we were turned over to a gentler greeting from kittens which emerged from tractors and bushes, baskets and milk houses.

Then it was time for the 4-H member to show the two Carols her work. The homemaking club garden project has three phases: home beautification, preservation, and use of vegetables. Each county selects one phase. This summer the 28 clubs in Middlesex are doing the first phase, so the membership — about 250 girls — is working to meet two requirements: Plant a garden of 10 different vegetables (including one variety new to you), and undertake two home beautification projects. Before beginning her garden, each girl had to draw a chart of what she was planning. Complete records are being kept by each girl.

The meticulous care lavished on the gardens put this city-dweller to shame. At each place the two Carols and the 4-Her held lengthy discussions about rain (far too much, slowing growth), weeds, insects, sprays. Everywhere people tried to describe the hail which has fallen in two recent storms. Somebody said the first storm hurled down hail "big as ice cubes." At one farm the storm piled up a bank of hail "just like a snowbank."

The variety of vegetables chosen by the girls seemed limitless. We were especially interested in the varieties selected to meet the "something new" requirement: celery, kohlrabi, eggplant, new strains of tomatoes.

While for some girls this is their first garden, nearly

all have had lots of experience with hoe and cultivator as their mothers' unpaid help.

Beautification projects leaned heavily towards painting and planting. New picnic tables sat on nearly every patio or lawn. Flowers brightened tree stumps, hanging baskets, a spivved-up pig trough. Other girls reported having put down sod, planted trees, helped grade new lawn.

Personally, we privately gave each project an unofficial 100, and prayed the judge would never descend on our own garden unannounced.

In August, the girls will attend a day-long Achievement Day program. Each girl who has completed the course satisfactorily will receive a silver spoon.

The spoons are the gift of the Ontario ministry of agriculture and food, sponsor of these wonderful programs intended to help prepare rural young people for their lives at home and in their communities.

Roots of the program stretch back to 1913, when the department began its rural youth club work, according to Dick Heard, area co-ordinator for the ministry in the counties of Middlesex, Elgin, Lambton, Kent and Essex. Local organizations, such as agriculture societies and the women's institute, have always been deeply involved, and contributed countless project leaders and other support. The rural youth club work program adopted the name 4-H in 1952, at a time when this nomenclature was being taken up on a worldwide basis. The 4-H refers to members' pledge to use their head for clearer thinking, heart for greater loyalty, hands for service, and health for better living.

The club attracts most of its members when they are in their early teens, although many stay on to complete as many projects as possible. Department people estimate that about three-quarters of rural girls at some time take a part in 4-H. In the case of boys, for which 4-H must vie with sports and a greater number of other activities, the fraction is somewhat lower, with perhaps half participating in 4-H agriculture clubs.

We appreciate that there are many considerations, some of them almost impossibly complicated, between growing 10 vegetables and shipping tons of wheat to China or balancing supplies of milk and eggs with current demand.

But as we met these eager rural youngsters last week, in their spacious, healthful, stimulating home settings, and thought of the investment of time, interest and money in their development, we felt a sense of urgency that answers must be found to assure they will find it economically attractive to stay on the land.

*You may phone a letter to Mary Hastings by calling 679-0230 in the London area and 1-800-265-4105 in all other areas. There is no toll charge. You also may, of course, still write to Mary Hastings by addressing your letter to Panorama by Mary Hastings, c/o The London Free Press, P.O. Box 2337, London, Ontario, N6A 4G3.*



By Mike Jordan of The Free Press  
Nancy and Richard Guy show their children Jordan, 5, and Elissa, 3, the route of the Shunpiker tour held Sunday. The 15th annual tour was organized by The London Free Press.