

Female ROP tester enjoying her work on Halton farms

By Ann Hauprich-Nielsen
Some Tremaine Rd. farmers did a double take last week when a 1976 gold Duster pulled into their driveway and a dark-haired young woman got out and introduced herself as the new R.O.P. tester.

For although women broke into this traditionally "all male" occupation as long as five years ago, there are still only six female "Record of Performance" testers in all of Canada—and Sheila Armstrong is the first of them ever to work in this area.

And, for this reason, farmers are understandably caught off guard by her introduction.

Expect sales pitch
"Everyone expects me to say I'm a salesperson or a Jehovah's Witness," she laughed. "Their expressions really change when they find out what I'm there for."

(The initial assumption that she's a peddler is prevalent because she arrives with suitcase and government testing kit in tow.)

Sheila's job with the Department of Agriculture requires that she be on hand for both the morning and evening milkings at each farm she visits.

Stays overnight
And having her home in St. Paul's (near Stratford) makes daily commuting impossible, so Sheila gets to try out a new bed virtually every night.

She said she usually drops in at a government-designated farm at about 3 or 4 p.m. and gets ready to take samples from the evening milking.

When two ounces of milk are secured and labelled from each cow, she locks the samples in a metal box for the night and goes inside to have supper with the farm family and usually spends the evening with them.

In the morning, she has breakfast with the family—who were total strangers less than 24 hours before—and heads for the barn to get samples from the morning milking.

She then mixes the "a.m."

and "p.m." samples from each cow together, and tests for butterfat content after centrifuging them with some sulfuric acid.

With her work out of the way by 10 or 11 a.m., Sheila is often invited to stay at the farm for lunch before heading off on her next assignment—usually just up the road.

Bookkeeping
The afternoons are hers to enjoy, but she sometimes uses them to do the bookkeeping work that goes with the job.

(This includes recording the weights of the cows and calculating butterfat percentages on special forms to be sent to the Production and Marketing Branch of the Department of Agriculture's Livestock Division.)

She goes home to stay with her parents on their dairy farm in St. Paul's nearly every weekend, and said she is able to work weekends through when she wants to take three or four days off together during the week.

"The farmers don't care when I come," she explained. "They always tell me it's a seven day a week job and they have to be there anyway."

But the flexible hours are only one of the things Sheila likes about her job as R.O.P. tester—a position she's held for three months.

Great for travel
"It's great for travelling and meeting people," the former 4-H'er said. "You can take all sorts of back roads in the country that you'd never have a chance to see driving to work every day on the highway."

"And you never know where you're going to be two weeks apart or who is going to open the next door."

She spent July testing milk at farms in Erin, Acton, Rockwood, Moffat and Guelph and now has a list of herds in Oakville and Milton to visit.

"But I could be sent to Brampton or the other side of the 401 next week," she said. "You always have to be up and ready to move."

Get used to her
Sheila claims it's not as difficult as it sounds to have new meal partners and lodgings every day.

Most of the farm families are used to having an R.O.P. tester drop by every four or five weeks, so after a while you both just sort of learn to get along," she philosophized. And, of course, having the farm background that Sheila does is a tremendous asset when conversing over the dinner table.

While growing up on her parents' dairy farm she spent several years as a "Junior Farmer" and also belonged to 18 agricultural and 19 homemaking clubs during her years as a 4-H'er.

Ontario Furrow Queen
She was chosen Dairy Princess for her county and went on to become Ontario Furrow Queen in 1973-74.

It was Sheila who helped promote the International Plowing Match in Georgetown that year, and she said she got to know a number of people in Halton County that autumn through George Swann and Roy Downs, the match publicity chairmen.

As her general region includes the municipalities of Halton, Peel and Hamilton-Wentworth, she said she has an occasional reunion with friends she met back then.

Asked if she gets any "special treatment" at work because of her sex, Sheila laughed and said, "Oh, I still get a good razzle from milk truck drivers and the farmers always try to think of a nice neighbor for me to meet. But other than that I'm left to do my work just as any male R.O.P. tester would be."

R.O.P. tester for life
What does she see herself doing in the future?

"I plan to finish my B.A. in music through correspondence courses at the University of Waterloo in the fall," she said, but quickly stressed her singing and piano playing are more of a hobby than anything.

"I'm going to be an R.O.P. tester until I'm 92 years old," she vowed.



PRECISION is important when testing butterfat levels in milk for federal government records. This specially marked straw tube device ensures R.O.P. tester Sheila Armstrong that exactly 17.6 ml of milk are mixed with 17.5 ml of sulfuric acid—every time. When the mixture has been centrifuged for five minutes and turns black, Sheila adds hot water and watches the butterfat rise.



SHEILA ARMSTRONG has been testing local farmers' milk for butterfat in recent weeks. The 21-year-old is the first female R.O.P. tester ever to work in this area. She was the 1973-74 Ontario Furrow Queen and helped promote the International Plowing Match in Georgetown that year.



MOO-VE OVER! Elsie, Borden's famous Jersey, is caught taking a peek over the shoulder of chauffeur and companion Edgar Thompson at her own newspaper, The Elsie Moos. The tabloid is published for visitors to Elsie's Boudoir, a travelling exhibit where she presides with her twins. Over the years, Elsie has been a regular feature at the Canadian National Exhibition and has appeared at fairs and plazas across Canada. To date, the exhibit has raised more than \$500,000 in donations from visitors for various charities, and has provided thousands of children with an opportunity to see and learn about farm animals at close range. Elsie will be appearing daily at the CNE, from August 18 through September 6.

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Princess competes

Halton's Dairy Princess Miss Beth Laidlaw will compete in the Ontario Dairy Princess competition at the Canadian National Exhibition Aug. 30 at 6 p.m.

Beth is a University of Guelph student and has been employed by Bell Canada during the summer in Brampton. She lives at R.R. 2, Norval.

Beth was named Halton Dairy Princess last December.

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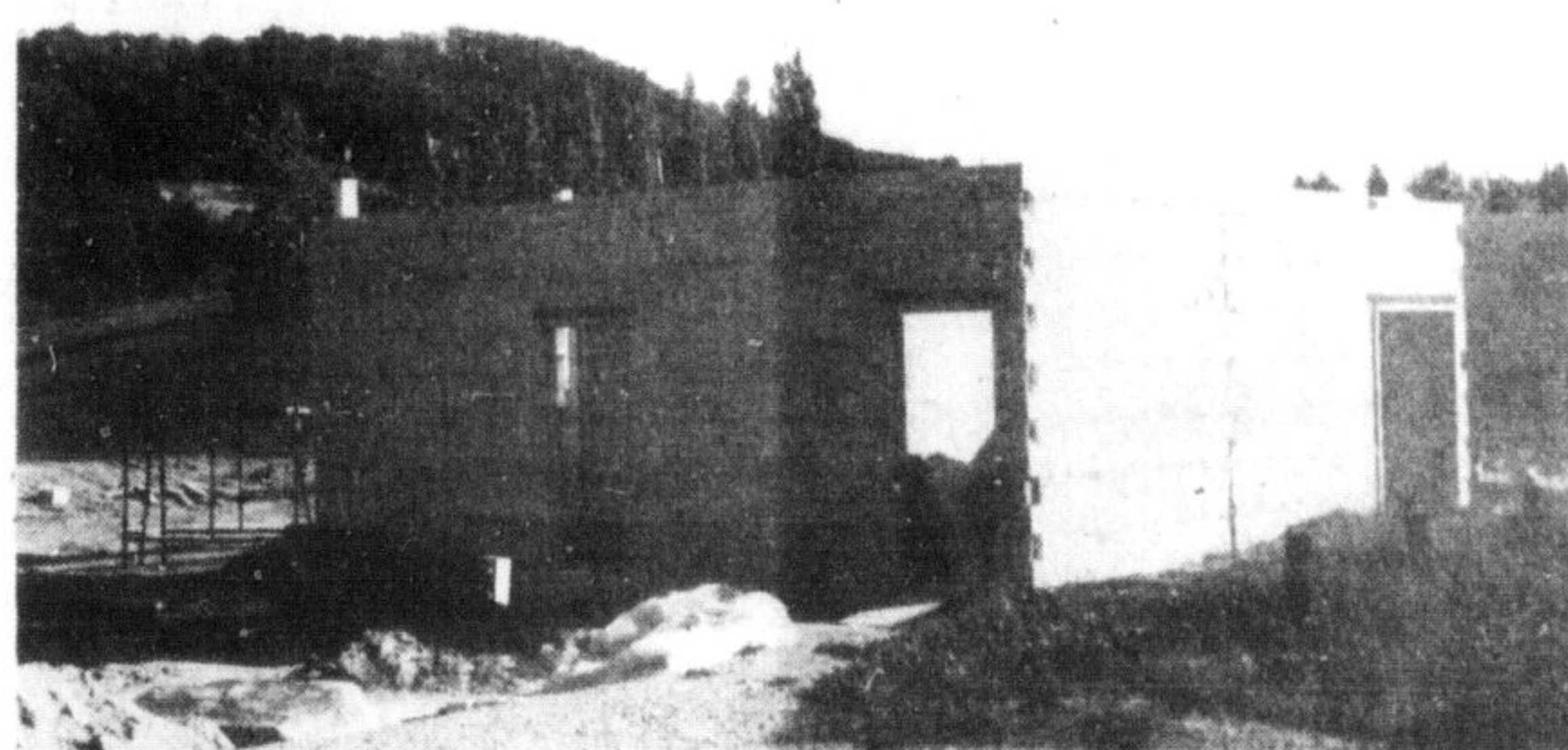
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Police insurance

Halton Police Commission wants to take a close look at its car insurance policy after Commissioner Harry Barrett said Thursday the force has a \$10,000 deductible clause every time a cruiser is smashed up.

Commission chairman Glenn Magnuson, Georgetown, said he found that unbelievable and suggested the deductible clause was more likely \$1,000.

"We pay all costs of damages. That is ridiculous. What car is worth \$10,000?" Chief Ken Skerrett said.

Deputy Chief Fred Oliver said he has discussed the subject with Barrett and differed with the Oakville mayor's opinion. He said he thinks the force has a \$1,000 deductible clause in its insurance.

Barrett explained his interpretation of the insurance clause is that if the force had three cars in a garage and there was a fire and damage amounted to \$15,000 then the force would have to spend \$10,000 and the insurance would pay off \$5,000.

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