Tens of thousands of roses for Mother's Day May 11

(Photo by Hogg)

Harold Mills, the third generation to bear that name and to be involved in the family business, is seen above inspecting a rose bush which will flower in time for Mother's Day, the second Sunday in May.

By Denise Romberg

It may be true that no one ever promised Harold J. Mills a rose garden. But he's got one anyway.

It is the largest one in Canada and it's right in his own backyard.

The new greenhouses of Mills Roses, which are almost half planted, are located on Bayview Avenue about a mile north of Elgin Mills Road in Richmond Hill. There are over 70,000 rose plants of six varieties growing there now.

With these new plants to tend, this year's planting will still leave a little over one-third of the greenhouse space to plant next March.

4 million roses

At that time there will be 172,000 rose plants in close to 200,000 square feet of greenhouse space. These plants are expected to produce over 4 million roses.

The roses are of two basic types, — the Hybrid Tea and the Polyanthis or "sweetheart".

Ninety percent of the roses grown are red.

But pink or cream, yellow, white, orange, and yellow and red stripe are among the other color varieties.

Dream come true

The five-acre greenhouse, an aluminium structure that holds 100,000 panes of glass, represents a dream come true for Mr. Mills Sr. 52, owner and president of H.J. Mills Ltd.

The slight, gentleman farmer is pleased not only by the quantities that can be grown, but also with the equipment that has been installed.

The project, designed and constructed by a Burlington firm, Ickes-Braun Glasshouses Ltd., is equipped with an efficiently automated and controlled system to create the ideal growing atmosphere for its plants.

Hot water heating, climate controlled zones and automatic watering are intended to facilitate the operation.

The controls can be watched easily and manoeuvred quickly to maintain the required 70-72 degree day range. In the evening, temperatures are adjusted downward 10 degrees.

Use rain water

Even the possibility of a water shortage has been considered. A 3½-million gallon reservoir has been constructed near the greenhouse.

When it rains or snows, the six-inch slope in the roof gutters causes the water to collect in a huge pipe.

This pipe runs the entire 800 foot length, on the south side of the building. The water is then channelled directly into the reservoir.

"In the old operation at Dunlop Street, we used 25 million gallons of town water per year. Now we can collect our own, which I think is the right thing to do.

"From one inch of rain, we get 85,000 gallons of water," Mills explained.

Bloom in May

The portion of the greenhouse now planted, is expected to come into bloom by the beginning of May.

Most of the 400,000 roses required to fill Mother's Day orders will be grown here.

These plants arrived in January from nurseries in California. On arrival, the plants are already two years old.

At this point they look more like large three-pronged forks than a bush that will produce the legendary flower of romance.

The legend of the rose tells that Cybele, in a moment of anger with Venus, created the rose. The intention was to create something more beautiful than the Goddess of Beauty herself.

The flower has acquired an extensive and remarkable written history. It has been the beloved of poets since the days of minstrels.

Tricky business

The growing of roses is actually a pretty tricky business.

"You've got to know the soil, the watering, the pinching, the stage to cut the bloom, and how to control the bugs", Mills said.

"Growing roses is a tedious process. It takes about five years to learn, but even then you really have to know what you're doing".

The roses are planted in what are called benches. Each bench, which is four feet wide and 104 feet long, is actually an open box.

Built of cement transite board, it holds 500 plants of a single variety.

The benches are supported below by concrete blocks turned on end, permitting the air to circulate.

Plants cut back

Prior to peak events, like Mother's Day, the plants are cut back to strengthen their stems and to control the time of the bloom.

"Generally the plants will bloom anywhere from 42 to 55 days after they are pinched, depending on the variety", Mills said.

When the blooms are cut, they must be graded. Those of the Hybrid type are arranged from a select grade through number one to six.

The sweethearts are separated into grades one and two only.

It is the length of the stem that determines the grade of a rose.

A select grade rose, for example, will have a stem 42 inches long while the stem of a grade 5 rose is 12 inches long.

These classifications are set by the rose growing associations.

Few are selects

At Mills Roses, 10 percent of the production is select grade, but the bulk of the production is grade 4 and 5.

Approximately 15 percent of the roses grown are not saleable.

"Culls" or "Bullheads" as they are called, have some defect in the flower.

Other's fall victim to mildew, spiders or worms that the 70 percent humidity level seems to attract.

"We spend up to $20,000 a year in pesticides alone", Mills explained.

"Diseased plants that go undetected for any length of time, will quickly destroy the entire crop".

Baker's dozen

Most of the succesful crop is packaged, 13 to the dozen, and delivered in refrigerated trucks directly to retailers as far east as Belleville and west to the outskirts of Toronto.

The rest are transported in refrigerated containers on air or rail service to some destination as far away as Manitoba or Nova Scotia.

According to the schedule, the planting should be completed by next March.

A new rose type called "Samantha", a bright red rose, is to be included.

"You don't know what the bloom will look like until you grow the rose. We have ordered 25,000 of these plants for next January and I can't say for sure how well they'll grow.

"That's one of the problems of the business", Mills admitted.

No Love Affairs

Oddly enough, two types that have been tried unsuccessfully and will not be included in the new operation are called, "Tonight" and "Love Affair".

The operation doesn't really lend itself to experimentation or research, but one new method that is being tried is electroculture.

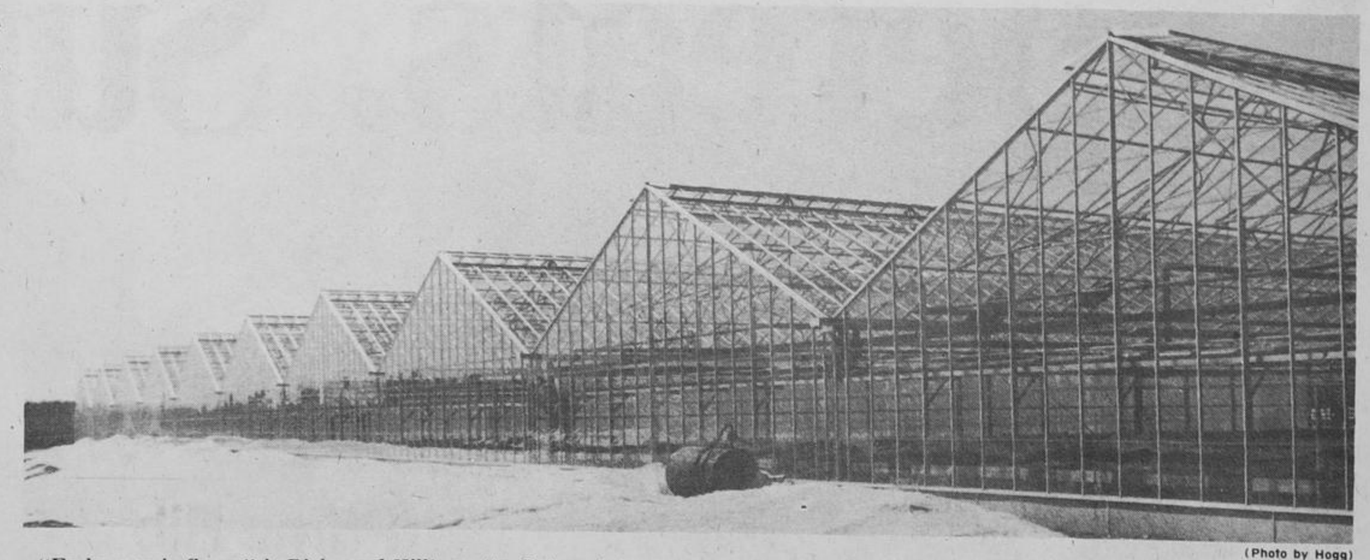
Copper lengths make up a pyramid that is supposedly an exact scale model of the pyramids of Egypt and Mexico.

Suspended above a dozen plants or so, the instrument is used to collect polar and atmospheric energy to stimulate growth.

Not wanting to appear old fashioned, Mills has installed the pyramid in his greenhouse.

Nevertheless, he still has his doubts about its success.

"When I see something like that, all I can say is I'm from Missouri", was his parting comment.



(Photo by Hogg)

"En la rose je fleure" is Richmond Hill's motto. It translates to "In the rose I flower" and for 64 years the roses grown here have carried Richmond Hill's name and fame throughout Canada. It was in 1911 the firm of H. J. Mills Florists established their greenhouses on Dufferin Lane. Through the years the firm has grown and shipped roses throughout the country. The plant has now been moved from the middle of the town to a site on Bayview Avenue north of Elgin Mills Sideroad. Pictured above is only half of the new greenhouse complex. In all there are 20 houses which at this time are not all in production.

Central paperback service for libraries of 3 regions

Hundreds of popular paperback books are now available to public library patrons in the Regions of Peel, York and Durham.

Starting last month the Central Ontario Regional Library system (CORL), Richmond Hill, has been offering a large inventory of fiction and non-fiction paperbacks which libraries can buy to supplement their regular collections.

"Paperbacks are inexpensive enough that even small libraries can buy several copies cheaply," said CORL Director Colin Robertson, "and this really helps them keep pace with popular demand for current titles".

CORL coordinates public library service in the three regional municipalities.

Central purchasing

Mr. Robertson said the CORL program was designed to support each library's present purchasing program.

"Paperbacks can't take the wear and tear of library use, and for this reason they're seldom a number one priority for libraries.

"But this program will give libraries the chance to purchase paperbacks centrally and keep right up to date with current trends," he said.

Fourteen libraries are presently buying books through CORL, and Mr. Robertson hopes many more will soon join in.

Library staffs can visit CORL regularly, select their titles and have them purchased and delivered by CORL.

Constant expansion

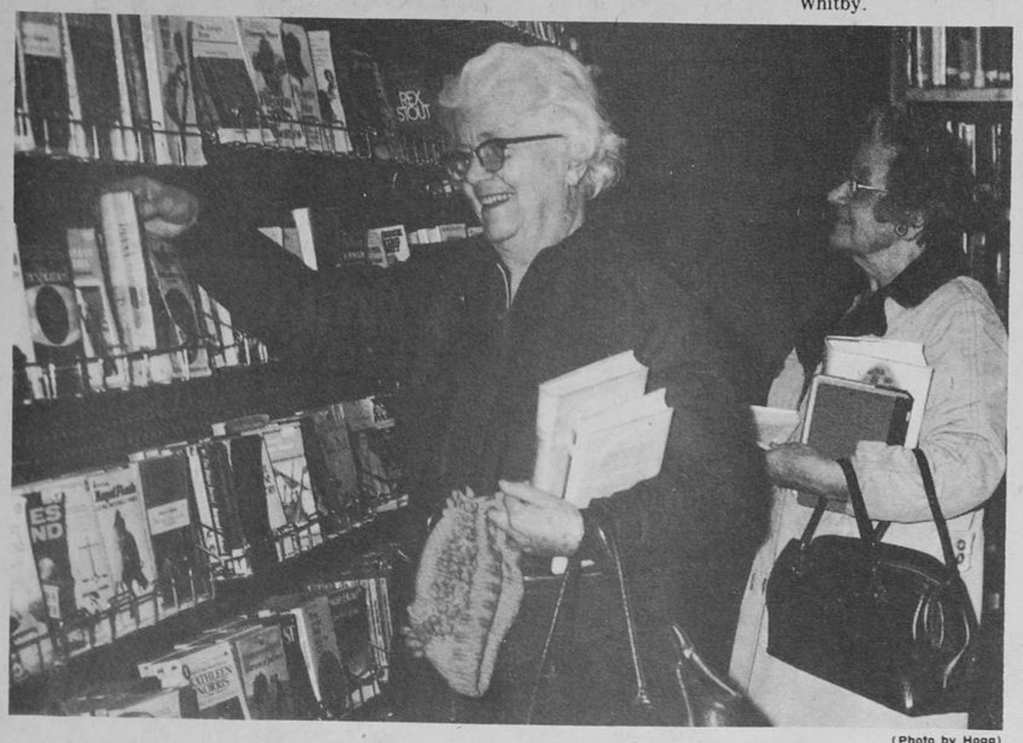
"We'll be reviewing and expanding our titles constantly," said Mr. Robertson, "and we're encouraging libraries to visit us often".

Paperback display racks are also available from CORL.

Participating libraries are: Ajax, Aurora, Caledon, Georgina Township, Brock Township, King Township, Markham, Mississauga, Newcastle, Newmarket, Pickering, Scugog, Uxbridge and Whitby.

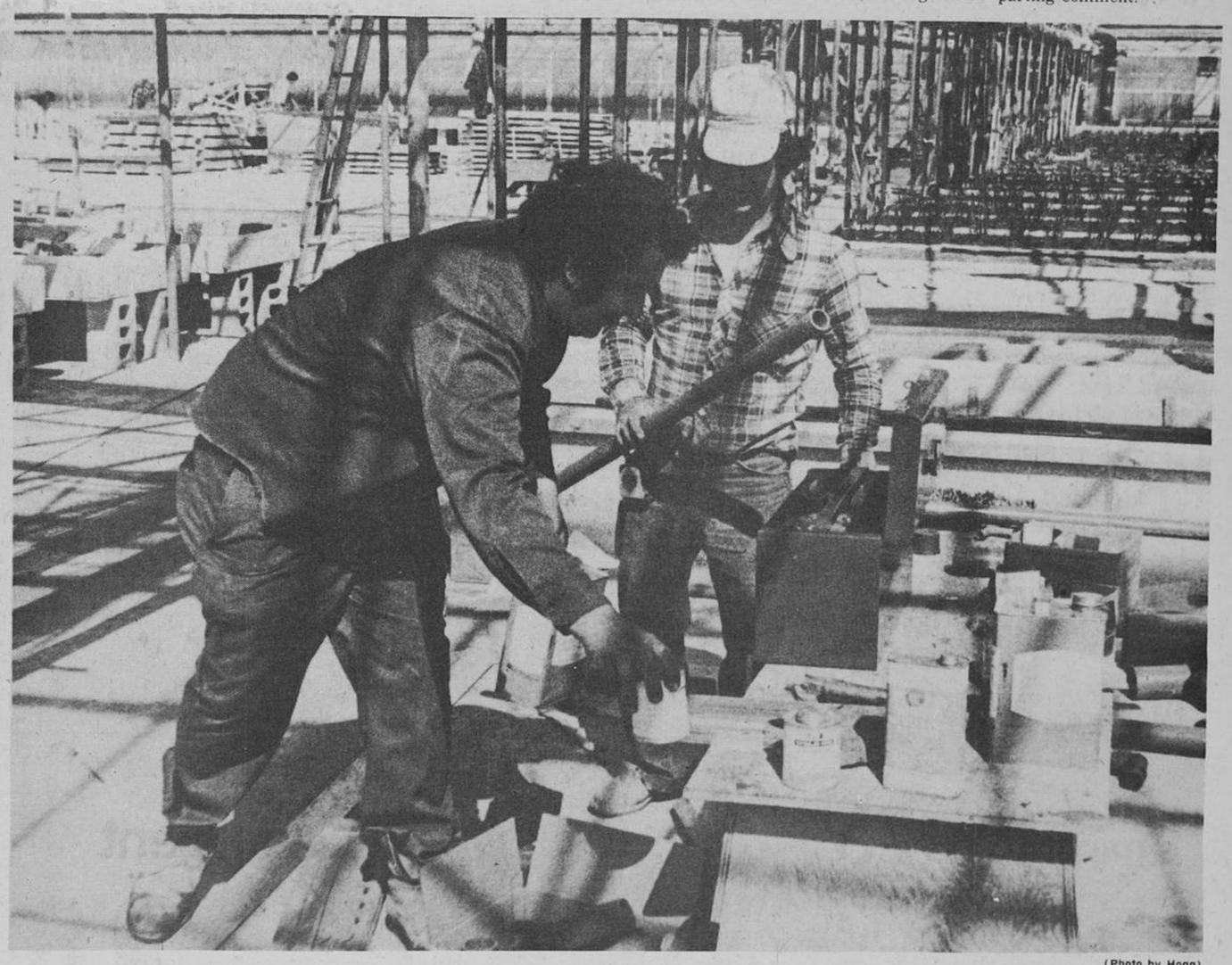
(Photo by Hogg)

At work in CORL headquarters, Markham Road at Church Street, Richmond Hill, is Marg Wadeson of 30 Turcedia Court, Scarboro, with a section of the paperback rack, showing the large variety of material available to local libraries.



(Photo by Hogg)

The libraries in King Township are among the 14 making use of CORL service at the present time. The photographer caught Mrs. Birdie Walker, 105 King Street, King City and Mrs. John Maginn of Clefton Farm, Kettleby, in the King City Library making a selection of reading matter from the well stocked paperback shelves.



(Photo by Hogg)

Rose bushes are thirsty plants. Garry Brown of 373 South Taylor Mills Drive (left) and Bob Brunette of 98 Bensen Avenue, Richmond Hill, are hard at work in the above photo on the installation of the first overhead irrigation system to be used in a greenhouse in Canada in the new H. J. Mills roses plant on Bayview Avenue.

King Township home to be heated by sun

A new house to be heated entirely by solar energy will be built in King Township within the next four months, according to an announcement made last week by federal Urban Affairs Minister Barney Danson.

The house will contain a hot water tank the size of three large swimming pools and $90,000 has been requested from the federal government for the project.

Additional money will come from the Province of Ontario for a total of $184,000.

The house will have almost 1,300 square feet of living space.

The heating system designed by Dr. Frank Hooper of the University of Toronto's Department of Mechanical Engineering and Toronto Architect John Hix, will cost $44,000.

The main components of the heating system are flat, double-glazed aluminum plates to cover a 750 square foot area of the steeply-sloping roof; circulating water to deliver the heat, collected by the plates; a 60,000-gallon heat storage tank full of water and surrounded by 425 cubic feet of thermal insulation; and a heat-exchange unit to take heat from the water and transfer it to the air which will be blown throughout the home.

A small, wind-powered turbine will provide the electricity to run the water pumps and the fan that forces the hot air through the house.

Provident House

This house, bears the name of Provident House.

Its immediate objective is to determine whether solar energy can provide all the heat needed throughout the year by a standard-size, single-family house, and if so, whether the system is economically practical.

Some housing officials suggest it could be practical if mass produced in quantities of 100 to 200 units and used in villages or subdivisions of more than 100 homes by having common water supplies, waste disposal systems and wind-powered electric generators.

The system to be installed in King near Keele Street and Aurora Sideroad hopes to take advantage of the long hours of summer sunshine in this area.

Although there is only 80 hours of bright sunlight here in January on the average, there is more than 300 hours of sunlight in July.

The system will store enough of the summer solar heat to have 60,000 gallons of water reach 71 degrees Celsius by the beginning of autumn.

During winter, enough heat will be extracted to lower the tank temperature to 38 degrees Celsius by the end of March.

This temperature is still high enough to provide the house with adequate heat.

It is believed this system could also work in cooler parts of Canada if the solar-collector size, inclination and tank size were increased.

A computer program has been designed to help extrapolate the data collected by this housing experiment for settlements in all parts of the country.