

Mennonite Bonnets Handmade, Few Continue The Art

Black bonnets, a symbol of their faith, at one time set apart the women of the Mennonite sects in the Stouffville-Markham area. Their head coverings exemplified their plain way of living. However, in late years, the practice has almost died out in the United Missionary Churches in Stouffville, Mt. Joy, Dickson's Hill and Gormley but is still carried on extensively in the Wideman Mennonite Church, the Heise Hill Church and others in Markham Township below No. 7 Highway.

Greatest concentration of Mennonite folks is in the Kitchener-Waterloo district where practices have not changed greatly particularly among the adult generation.

While no ladies in this area make a business of manufacturing the bonnets, the work is done in the homes, and the art is handed down from one generation to another. We have learned that there are some ten styles in the black bonnets, worn by the old order Mennonites and none can be bought in the stores.

Two of the ladies in the Waterloo area who make a business of manufacturing the bonnets are, Miss Judith Horst of St. Jacobs and Mrs. Menno Horst of Floradale. Miss Horst has been making bonnets for 50 years.

On a shelf behind the stove in Miss Horst's home are three hat forms with bonnets on them. The three forms represent the head sizes which Miss Horst needs in her work. Individual variations are taken care of in fittings.

The making of the forms is a skill in itself. The basis of the form is a block of wood which has been rounded at the top and carefully covered with a mixture of paper, rags and paste. This is smoothed expertly by hand.

The hat form is made of cardboard which is shaped on the wooden blocks. The cardboard is painted on both sides to resist the weather. Wire is inserted in the front, back and at the side while it is still on the form.

When the hat is shaped she begins the work of covering it with fine-black taffeta. She uses satin for the lining and edging. Some of the bonnets are made of crepe and satin. She buys her material from a salesman from Toronto.

Frequently pressing has to be done with a stove-heated iron as her home doesn't have hydro. The work often tires her eyes, she said.

"It takes patience," she said summing up in a few words the fine needlework required. When she is busiest she completes two in a week. Her record year was recently when she made 80. She works at them winter and summer.

The bonnets may seem plain to the observer who has never carefully examined one. Fine needlework, smooth tucks and even ruffles combine to make the bonnets works of art.

Mennonite girls begin to wear black bonnets when they are about 14. Their hats are distinguished by a knot at the top and a bow at the back. Young girls may also have two ruffles. The hair must not show under the bonnet.

Mennonite bonnets are not exchanged for new ones as the seasons change. Miss Horst has worn her own bonnet for 30 years, and many of the women in the community have done the same. It is rarely

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING TROUT STREAMS

Next May 1 may seem a long way off for devotees of the speckled trout, but in the winter interim D.R. Curtis, manager of the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests fish hatchery here has evolved some suggestions for improving Ontario's trout streams.

"It is impossible and not desirable," he says "that the country revert to conditions of 100 years ago, but many things can be done to improve conditions now."

Succinctly, he contrasts conditions, past and present:

"Trout streams many years ago: Few fishermen, big catches, baskets of trout. Poor conveyances, wagons, buggies or long distances on foot.

"Conditions many years ago: Heavy bush and swamps, few floods, low water temperature, no mud, no pollution, clean waters, good gravel spawning beds, plenty of natural food, little cannibalism and disease.

"Today's conditions: Cars full of fishermen, distance means nothing. Small or scanty forests and swamps, heavy floods, high water temperatures, polluted waters, springs drying up, little natural food from the forest floor.

"Results: Poor fishing, depleted streams, cannibalism, birds, animals and disease. Many streams are totally unfit for speckled trout and fishermen are dissatisfied."

Remedies suggested are these:

1. Practise conservation farming such as leaving hillsides in grass and having grassed waterways where there is likely to be erosion.

2. Cultivate on the contour rather than up and down the slope.

3. Fence stock out of woodland so rainfall and melting snow will soak into the soil rather than run off by surface routes.

4. Reforest all land not suitable for crops.

5. Fill in open ditches in low land which has not proved satisfactory for agricultural crops thus increasing the springs that tend to keep a steady flow of water in the streams.

6. Fence the streams from livestock and plant trees along the banks to stabilize them, produce shade and help to maintain a lower summer temperature.

7. Do stream improvement such as building low stone dams, deflectors and placing obstructions such as old logs and stumps in the stream bed."

The rewards, obviously, would extend far beyond the particular interests of the angler.

that a Mennonite girl gets a new bonnet for her marriage.

The bonnets worn by the Amish women are much plainer. Another St. Jacobs woman who made these hats for 40 years said that she was able to make 100 a year.

Screening is used for the form and the material is sewn over this. She said that many of the younger women now prefer soft bonnets which can be carried in their purses.

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