

# First York County "Farm Women" Organized in Emigsville

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## The Early Days of The Society of Farm Women in York County

As recorded by Mrs. Mabel Rishel

"This is how it happened - - - -

January, 1930, the Pennsylvania Society of Farm Women held the annual convention in the Senate Caucus room of the State Capitol Building in Harrisburg.

Mary Myers and myself attended. I do not remember why we chose or happened to be there.

We listened to Farm Women reporting. We were amazed at their composure, thrilled by the many good deeds they were doing and at the same time getting acquainted with those with whom we had much in common.

When the session ended, Mrs. Mabel Frey Gingerich, formerly of Emigsville, now living in Lancaster, came to me. In the course of the conversation, we told her how much we enjoyed the meeting and skeptically said 'It would be good for us to have a society!'

No sooner said than done, and we were on our way. We were introduced to the state secretary, Mrs. Harrison Nolt, who in turn, introduced us to the state president, Mrs. John Cassel.

By this time we were moving too fast to stop and I'm glad we didn't.

Mrs. Cassel gladly gave us the information about how to organize. She suggested we keep in touch and that she would do all she could to help us. On our way out of the meeting, we met Mrs. Chester Gross who had also attended the meeting. We didn't know she was there. We told Carrie our plan and she said "you can count on me". Now we were there.

After I made several phone calls and visits to Mrs. Cassel we agreed we were ready to organize. On March 6, 1930, twenty three ladies gathered at my home. These ladies came from a large area.

Mrs. Cassel and Mrs. Nolt chaired the meeting. The history of the organization which was founded by Mrs. Flora Black in Somerset County in 1914 was given.

Officers were elected and I became the first president. It was not because of my ability, I did the best I could and all the members helped me. We had twenty-six charter members.

At our first regular meeting, Mr. Guy leader gave a talk on chick raising. At the next meeting, Mr. Martz showed us pictures of Cinderella.

No one received any expenses paid, phone calls, travel expenses, not even postage. I remember as a token of appreciation to a prominent speaker, we gave a large chip basket filled with the choicest vegetables and a chicken.

We had our first annual meeting June, 1930 with about 200 in attendance (husbands and children

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included). We held annual meetings every year thereafter.

Ten years later, 5 new societies were organized. Groups 2, 3, and 4 were formed April 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. This mass organization was in order to save expenses. August 5<sup>th</sup>, group 5 was formed and on November 6<sup>th</sup>, group 6 was organized.

This, then, is a resume of the organizing and early days of the Society of Farm Women in York County. The credit does not belong to those who saw an opportunity for new friends and fellowship, but to the many members who so faithfully assisted and have kept it growing so that others may share.”



“There is no end to the good that can be done if you care not who gets the credit.”

**MRS. MABEL RISHEL**  
**First President of Group #1**

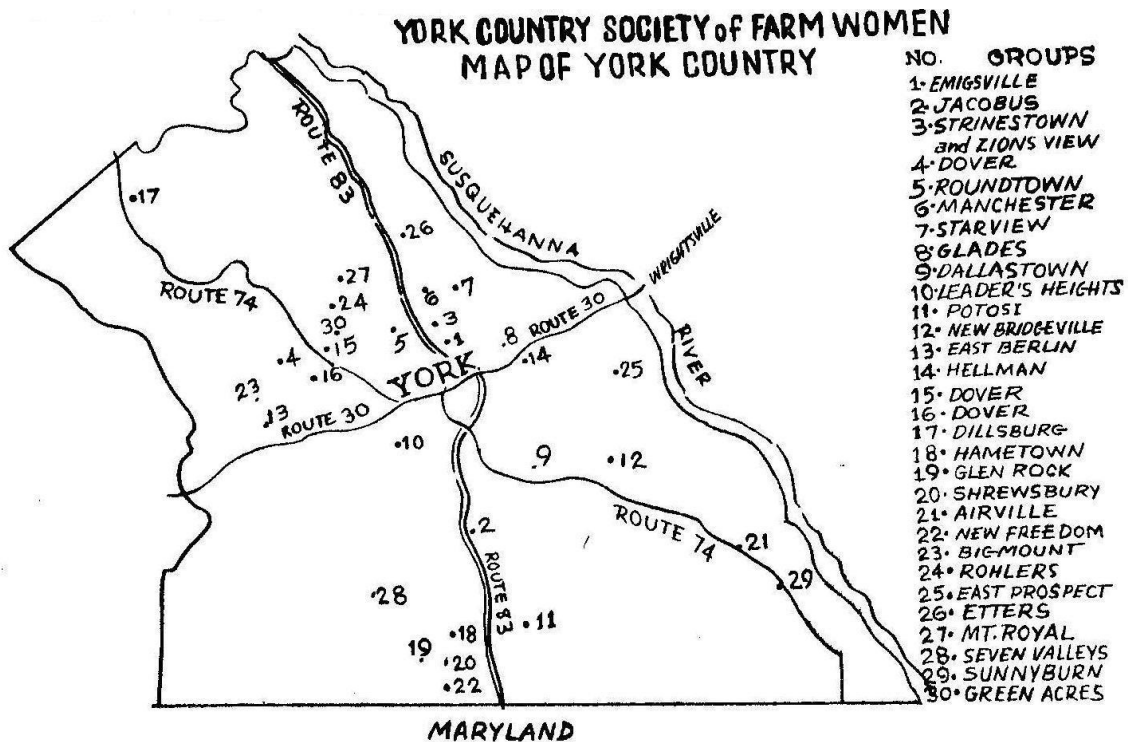
**She also served as County and State President through the years. The York County Society of Farm Women proudly dedicates its Cook Book to this noble woman.**

Today we number 30 groups in York County with a membership exceeding 600.

Again, let us say, we are proud to dedicate this book to Mrs. Rishel who has given so many hours to our organization. She is just as much interested in it today as she was 41 years ago. She celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in September, 1971.

The Committee

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Mabel Rishel’s memoir and accompanying map above appeared in the first cook book published by the York County Farm Women in 1971.

## Founding of the State Organization

*Summarized from ExplorePAHistory.com Historical Markers*

Founder – Flora (Snyder) Black (1870-1951) was born in Somerset Count, PA. After attending Maryland College for Women she married Frank Black in 1893 and raised four children. Having **experienced social networks in college she felt farm women should have the opportunity to gather for “fun and learning”**.

In 1914 Flora and a dozen neighbors founded an organization “to contribute to the power and influence of farm women; to contribute to the community activity of farm women; to develop leadership and promote better living and working conditions in farm homes of Pennsylvania”. The organization name became the “Society of Farm Women” in 1917.

Members of the Society of Farm Women participated in local, state and national campaigns during World War I to conserve resources and provide relief to people in need. Flora Black worked with the Emergency Aid Society of Pennsylvania Red Cross, the National Food Administration and was a member of the Council of National Defense and Belgian Relief.

Eight Pennsylvania counties had formed chapters of the organization by 1918. In 1919 their first state convention was held and Flora was elected president of the new state organization. They have met

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annually ever since in Harrisburg. She was deeply interested in family and state history and served on the Pennsylvania Historical Commission.

## **The First Local Group evolved into a county level organization**

The 23 ladies who met at Mabel Rishel's Emigsville home in March of 1930 became group #1. A later brief history of the group cites that at that time, each member have a garden and chickens. Usually a member was a farmer's wife. Rules later became more flexible. In 1940, Group #1 had 70 members and was still growing. 5 new local societies were spun off from that group. A county level organization had evolved into the York County Farm Women. Annual conventions thereafter celebrated the 1939 founding.

In Jan 1956 at the **State** level there were 17 counties with chapters, and a total 3,000 members. In 1959, at the **York County** level, here were 17 groups and 407 members.

Later newspaper articles reported on dates and locations of the annual York County Farm Women conventions. The 32<sup>nd</sup> annual convention was held November 4, 1971 at Quickel's Lutheran Church pavilion in Zion View. As shown above, the first cook book published by the York County Farm Women was dedicated and presented to Mabel Rishel. The society inaugurated the sale of 5,000 cook books.

The 1971 cook book was reprinted in the fall of 1975 and the winter of 1980. 600 recipes, tried and tested by the **Farm Women of York County**, were printed along with the name and group number of each donor. The book inside cover states "The recipes in this book may not have been laboratory tested, but their merit has been established by civic and women's groups everywhere and the most critical group---- husbands!" There were 218 pages of recipes indexed into 16 categories. In 1981 the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary cook book was offered and contained 71 more pages of recipes. They were created partly as local fund raisers for any needed purpose. All of the books are out of print and today can be found only at yard sales or flea markets.

There is a very large 400 page cook book published in 1991 and is still available. Its sole purpose is to support the Flora Black 1960 Scholarship program administered at the **State** level. The scholarships are for students who are descendants of members, living or deceased, and are entering fields of study related to agriculture. *To order the 1991 cook book, contact Treva Stiles, Glen Rock, PA: phone 717-235-1132.*

## **A Peek at Some Local Group Activities**

An interview with the president of Group #30, Carolyn Graffius, revealed the vast types of activities in which local groups may participate. She was very gracious while showing many photos of her group in action, and lots of paperwork a president is responsible for. Group #30 is located probably as close to Manchester Township as any other. There are 17 active groups and 1 group at large in York County with a total of 225 members. Presently a group number indicates its number identity only and not its location, such as group #35. Some have faded while others were added. There were 30 groups in 1971. Unfortunately, founding Group #1 of Emigsville no longer exists.

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Each group elects its own officers. There are both fun and serious activities, (some related to holidays, picnics, playhouse plays, parade floats, etc.); tours (maple sugar camp, Washington DC, broom factory, glass blower, etc.); volunteer activities (pie day for nursing home, eyeglass cases for hospital, food bank, town decorations, etc.); educational programs (CPR, leader dog program, program about scams, Heart Assoc., book review, etc.); fundraisers (farm sales, Funnel Cakes at Fair, election day food stands, bake sales, sub sales, etc.) A member of one group noted their fundraiser makes and sells 850 lbs of peanut brittle every year. There was a photo of fun at the food bank assembly with competition of stack height of cans and boxes.

Local Group #30 has a list of 8 different recipients of funds from its fund raising activities. The York County Area Down Syndrome Assoc. is one of its favorites. There is a big “Buddy Walk” where the group sells hot dogs, hamburgers, chicken corn soup, etc. Other fund recipients are American Heart, York Cancer Center, Kidney Foundation of Central PA, Sight Vision Assoc. York, New Hope Ministries Dover Center, Mental Health Center, Emergency Fund, York. These ladies are very busy.

Each group president submits an activities report to the county and the state organizations. There are 54 different Educational Programs; 36 different Social Events; and 20 different Tours. A group can participate in any activity for any reason.

The **York County** groups maintain a relationship with each other by taking turns once a year hosting and entertaining a group whose number is pulled at the County Board meetings held every 4 months. Other annual York County Farm Women events open to any member are: the York County Family Event (big picnic) at the 4-H Center; Spring Rally (hosted by different county each year); County Convention (York Fair @Expo Center); State Convention (Radisson Penn Harrisburg).

The **State** organization invites you, “**The Society of Farm Women of Pennsylvania is looking for you!** All around the state there are goals being set to get more women involved in becoming **Farm Women**. You don’t need to live on a farm, just be interested in promoting rural living and enjoying the fellowship and good times **Farm Women** have together.”

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