

A day as a colonial woman

BY MARGARET MILLER

For Observerland women whose lives are bounded by today's suburban pursuits, it's just a short drive to the 18th century and colonial America.

They can spend a day learning, with a mother and daughter who have devoted a lot of study to the period, what it was like to be a pioneer woman.

And by sundown our local women, like their colonial counterparts, will have dyed wool for a warm garment, dipped beeswax candles, made soap from lye and fat and cooked Brussels stew, spoon bread and boiled pudding with hard sauce.

The colonial day workshop is the project of Mrs. Peg Harding of Farmington and her daughter, Mrs. Lois Mitchell of Plymouth.

On many Saturdays — the schedule is flexible to accommodate those interested — they work with a group of six to 10 local residents, supervising them in the colonial woman — work and providing a wealth of information about life in those times.

On a recent Saturday there

was plenty of colonial-type activity in Mrs. Mitchell's antique-filled home.

Mrs. Edna Grainer had come from Farmington with her daughter, Jackie, a student at Harrison High School. Mrs. Meriam Gardner had driven in from Dundee, and Mrs. Marie Harrison of Farmington joined two daughters — in-law, Joan Harrison of Livonia and Lee Harrison of Ann Arbor.

They carefully tied some of the wool Lois had spun and used cochineal to dye it red and marigold flowers for a pretty yellow. They dipped candles and sore arm muscles told them it's not all that easy to plunge the wicks into hot wax 45 or more times, and then wind up with short candles because you are limited by the depth of the iron pot.

In the intricate process of soap-making, they realized that for women in colonial times cleanliness had to be next to hard work. They experienced an old-time cooking failure in their attempt at spoon bread, but the stew and boiled pudding were delicious.

Peg Harding and Lois Mitchell came to their colonial days programs through different paths of interest in that period of history.

An avid collector of antiques for 25 years, Mrs. Harding has in recent years been lecturing on "Women and their Heritage" before church and club groups and in schools.

Her daughter, wife of an architectural student and mother of two small boys, had grown up with a love of antiques and developed an interest in weaving, which in turn led to learning about various methods of spinning and dyeing wool.

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WOMAN'S WORK in colonial days is the theme of workshops conducted by Mrs. Peg Harding (above, left) and her daughter, Mrs. Lois Mitchell, shown with some of the spinning and weaving tools of that earlier time. At the right, above, Mrs. Joan Harrison of Livonia dips beeswax candles, and below, her mother-in-law, Mrs. Marie Harrison of Farmington, helps Mrs. Mitchell stir soap in a heavy kettle. (Photos by Doug Johnson)

to 10 at a time, and six is an ideal number. The two leaders each take half the group and direct the activities, supplying extra tidbits of colonial information while the work goes on.

"We wanted to do it well, so it took a lot of research to put together," Mrs. Mitchell said. "We tried to pick things that could be worked into a day's time and would give a good representation of the work colonial women had to do."

"That let out spinning and weaving because it takes too long, but the candlemaking was ideal and the dyeing the wool could be managed."

Mrs. Harding said the classes were limited in size

Women interested in participating in one of the colonial days may call Mrs. Mitchell at 264 Ann, Plymouth.

"Everyone has been very enthusiastic," she reported. "They really get into the spirit of the thing and work hard to learn and get everything done."

"But, you know, a lot of the women say they've changed their mind about the good old days. It's fun to spend a day doing such work, they tell me, but they are glad they don't have to function that way all the time. They're glad to get back to their modern conveniences."



m. m. memos

After 10 years of having girl scouts in the family, I thought I had had every mother's eye view of the program.

I was wrong. It wasn't until this month that I found out how it feels when it's your daughter taking the responsibility — well, half of it, anyway — for a bunch of junior girl scouts on a camping trip.

We've been involved in lots of winter camp weekends, but I don't ever remember such preparational on of them.

And I felt mighty close to the operation, though I didn't pack a pair of socks or drive a mile.

Our new adult and her co-leader, an almost-as-new adult, probably were as excited as any of their young charges. "We never realized before how much there was to do to get ready," they explained.

Besides the inevitable Girl Scout caper charts, they

made food charts and driver-charts and time charts. "Have to keep them busy," they said.

And I went back to my old tricks of worrying about the driving. The prospect of their driving to camp, each with a carful of little scouts, was a bit unnerving.

As it turned out, they went up on a gloriously sunny winter day, but came home in a Sunday snowstorm.

I must admit I had seldom been happier to see a car pull into the drive, and she even was home in time to play in a scheduled Sunday afternoon concert.

All reports indicated a most successful weekend.

But the leader in our family came home with a terrible cold, and when the next meeting day rolled around it turned out that half her troop shared the ailment.

Par for the course for winter camp, I guess. Some day I may learn what to expect.

— Margaret Miller



Livonia father, son help drive to aid crippled

A Livonia father and son are in the forefront of the current Crippled Children's Seal fund drive in western Wayne County.

Warren T. Strong, a systems engineer, an active member of the parents group in the Metropolitan Society for Crippled Children and a cubmaster in his spare time, is chairman of the drive in this area.

His nine-year-old son, Devin, is one of three children picked to represent western Wayne County for the Metropolitan Society drive.

Devin has been attending the society's special classes at 1730 Schaefer, Detroit, to receive physical and occupational therapy for seven years. He is in the third grade at Botsford School in the Clarenceville district where he and his father are active in Cub Pack 287.

The other children representing the area are six-year-old Mark Argue of Westland, who goes to kindergarten at Stottmeyer in the Wayne-Wermland district and has been receiving developmental therapy at the Metropolitan Society's board of directors.

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WARREN AND DEVIN STRONG were on hand for the press conference that launched the 1974 "Gift of Therapy" drive for the Metropolitan Society for Crippled Children and Adults in western Wayne County. (Observer photo by Harry Mauthe)