

Woman celebrates 102 years

Nebraska native looks back at old days

By MARY LOU OLSON

Balloons and flowers brightly decorated the dining room at Decatur County Good Samaritan Center on Thursday when Florence Jones celebrated her 102nd birthday.

A native of Nebraska, Mrs. Jones was born on a farm near Arapahoe, the daughter of Anza and Ada Pruden, and was one of 10 children.

"We had a horse we called, 'Old Maude' who pulled the buggy for all of us kids when we went to school," she said. "My dad built a lean-to on the side of the school coal shed for Old Maude so she could be in the shade during the day while we were in school."

"After my older sisters and brothers finished country school, I drove the buggy to school with the younger children."

After graduating from Arapahoe High School as valedictorian in 1922, she taught country school first at a school near her home.

"I had all eight grades that first year, which was a real challenge. My students sat two in a desk and when it was time for each class to have their lesson, I called them up to the recitation bench. One of the things students were required to do was study and remain quiet while those classes were in session. I recall one time when a big eighth grade boy tried to give me some trouble, so I 'shook him up,'" she said.

She said she always joined the students on the playground when Andy Over, jump rope, baseball and other games were played.

"The highlight for the community," she said, "was when we presented the annual Christmas school program. The whole community turned out for the event. Literaries were also lots of fun and one of the greatest social events in those days," she added.

She drove her dad's Model T to school when she taught school near her home and when the weather was cold, she had to drain the radiator when she got to school, then fill it up when she was ready to go home to prevent it from freezing.

She also taught country school two years at Haigler, Neb., then later she met Raymond Jones when she was teaching school north of Herndon. She was working as a waitress in the Frontenac Cafe in Oberlin one summer and their court-

ship began after he walked her home one night.

They were married by Judge Kulp in Oberlin with her sister, Hattie, and his brother, Lyle Jones as witnesses on July 19, 1926.

Their first home was a small house in Oberlin, which was the first of 18 in which the family lived before purchasing their own house on South Cass. Mrs. Jones lived there until moving to Good Samaritan Center.

Their first child, Dwayne, was delivered by Dr. Tilden in 1928, and their daughter, Shirley, was the first baby born after Benton Memorial Hospital opened in September 1930. Dr. Frank Brewster was her doctor.

After the crash of 1929, she said, times were hard, but her husband found a job delivering bread for the Fleming Bakery of Oberlin to Selden. He later worked in construction before becoming a salesman and parts man for John Nitsch.

Mrs. Jones loved to sew and she said she made all the clothes for their daughter, Shirley. After taking a coat she had made for Shirley from a man's suit to Bobbitt Cleaners for pressing, she said she was hired after Mr. Bobbitt found out she was seamstress. She worked afternoons there when her children were young, then was later employed at the J. C. Penney Store, Oberlin Bakery and Decatur County Good Samaritan Center. When she was 80, she still worked part-time for Dr. Donald Harrier.

Her family includes her son and his wife, Dwayne and Betty Jones, and her daughter and husband, Shirley and Don Carlisle, and their families. She was always an active member of the United Methodist Church and United Methodist Women and was also a member of Royal Neighbors.

"We had insurance through Royal Neighbors and when I turned 98, I had the choice of taking out the money I had invested or leaving it in for interest, a choice few members ever have. I took mine out, because I needed it," she said.

She said that a highlight in recent years was when a former pupil, Don Harford, who still lives on a farm north of Haigler, stopped by to visit her.

"He told me he was in my class when he was in second grade and we still exchange Christmas cards," she said.



Mrs. Jones



FLORENCE JONES, (above) is shown in her graduation dress when she was valedictorian of the senior class at Arapahoe, Neb., High School in 1922

—Herald staff photo



A BABY PICTURE (above) shows Mrs. Jones over 100 years ago. Her family (right), included (from left) Dwayne, Shirley, Mrs. Jones and her husband, Raymond Jones, taken in the 1940 era at their home on South Cass Avenue in Oberlin.

