



**FEELING RIGHT AT HOME** while playing the piano, Edla Olson (above) has given much to those who have enjoyed her music over the years. She and her daughter, Arian Arnold, (below) entertained for several years with their "Me and Ma" hat show throughout the area.

# Woman entertains kids, seniors and more with her music talent

By MARY LOU OLSON  
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Music has been an important part of life for Edla Olson, probably since the day of her birth, she said. Now 93 and living at the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center, she's entertained clubs, students at her country school, 4-H groups, parents and judges in school music contests, the public and her fellow residents at the nursing home, among others.

The last of six children, she was born May 14, 1915, at her parents' farm south of Midway in Rawlins County. She said that she was so tiny, her Aunt Johanna declared she was too small to live.

"I showed them," she said with a smile. "I was little but mighty, and developed a voice that was later to sing the songs of the Old West and later to the praise of the Lord."

Her parents, Franz Nelson and Mary Christina (Henningson) Nelson, were both immigrants from Sweden, and as a child she remembers her father singing while her mother played the old pump organ on Sunday afternoons after family dinners at their home.

"Our family of six children included Florence Nelson, whose mother (the former Sally Norgren) died when she was born; Vivian, Edna and Fred Peterson, whose father, Fred Peterson, also died at a young age, and my own brother, Ernest Nelson. After losing their mates, my dad married the widow of Mr. Peterson, so it was 'Ma's kids, Dad's kids, and their kids,'" she said. "My father was always very strict, however, about treating all of their children the same."

The family rode to the Enne Lutheran Church in an old surrey,



Edla Nelson, 1932

Mrs. Olson said she didn't know how they all crammed into it. She recalled that her parents spoke Swedish to the children, but they usually answered in English.

There were three cousins in the family named Edla after their grandmother, she recalled, and she was "Little Edla." She said her first big trip was with her parents and Grandpa Nelson, who lived with them after her grandmother died.

"We took the train from Oakley to sunny California to see my uncle, Pete Nelson, and his family, Aunt Anna, Mons and "Middle Edla." It was during that visit that I got to watch "Middle Edla" practice her piano lessons," she recalled. "That piano held a special interest for me, since we only had the pump organ. After listening to her practice, when I was alone in the living room, I would plink out the melody that she played.

When they were in California

her grandfather took ill and died in a hospital there, which made the return home a sad trip for the family.

She started her education at the White Cloud School, and since she had already learned to read the Primer, she was put into second grade. She and her brother Ernie went to school in a buggy pulled by their horse, Old Dick. Sometimes Alva, Clea and Elaine Artery would ride with them as far as their mailbox.

Later, when her father bought a player piano, she said, she was fascinated by the keys as they played and soon learned to play some of those songs from memory.

She said she accompanied the choir and other groups and also directed the choir at their country church. She spent her summers helping her dad keep up fences around the farm, bringing in the cows, and helping her sister Edna with the milking, separating cream and feeding the calves.

"After completing eighth grade, I started to high school in Oberlin, and that was really a turning point in my life," she said. "I had taken a summer of piano lessons from Mildred Arian Nibert on the first floor of the high school, and I thought that was the biggest building I had ever been in.

"I stayed with Vergie Anderson (Nygren), Ella Johnson (Peterson) and Birdie Marcuson (Cloverbergstrom).

"I tried out for the glee club and mixed chorus and made both. I had never sung in a group before. True heaven! Then after a few weeks, Mr. Hincee asked me if I would sing in the girls quartet. . . I was taking voice lessons at the time. I was the first freshman in DCHS history that



made girls quartet."

The other members were Gladys Griffith, Mary Benton and Vergie Anderson, she said.

"Vergie and I brought our guitars to town and practiced singing

together. Before we knew it, we were singing for school assemblies, Rotary and Commercial Club, Odd Fellows Lodge, banquets, box suppers, church socials and anyplace they wanted a couple of gals.

"I think the night we dressed as an Hawaiian couple for a Girl Reserve 'Around the World' tour, and sang in the Otis L. Benton home was the frosting on the cake. The sun room (See MUSIC on Page 4B)