



**JOHN AND MURIEL READY** (above) are shown when they celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary in 1984. Muriel (far right, below right) and her brothers and sisters are shown with their parents, Roy and Eva Conard, when they celebrated their 56th wedding anniversary at their farm home near Larned in 1956.

## Woman to celebrate century milestone

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A retired Oberlin teacher and business owner, Muriel Ready will reach the century milestone on Sunday, Nov. 18, and her family plans an open house from 2 to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 8, at the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center.

Mrs. Ready, a former co-owner of the Skogmos Clothing Store in Oberlin, now lives at the center.

She was born Muriel Conard on Nov. 18, 1908, at the farm of her parents, Eva and Roy Conard, in Pawnee County, about halfway between LaCrosse and Larned. She was the fifth of six children in the family, which included two brothers and three sisters.

Her parents' families all originated in Pennsylvania, she said, but her paternal grandparents went to Missouri first before coming to Kansas and her father was born in Missouri. Her mother's parents, Lanah Wagner, then 17, and John Wagner, 26, came directly to Pawnee County in 1875, riding the train as far as it would take them, then driving a covered wagon the remaining miles to their homestead.

She said she always wondered how challenging it must have been for her grandparents, who came from a nice town with nice houses, to move to Kansas as homesteaders, first living in a dugout, then a "soddy" before they were able to build a wood-frame house many years later.

Most of her family history is recorded in a book which Mrs. Ready wrote for her daughter, Esther, to record it as she remembered or as her parents told her.

She said that her father, Ross LeRoy (Roy) Conard, whose ancestors came to Germantown, Pa., in 1683 from Germany to settle under William Penn, was born in Bates County, Mo., in 1880 and moved to LaCrosse when he was 17. When he first arrived, he lived and worked for his uncle, J.J. (Bud) Conard, who owned seven businesses.

Her mother, Eva Wagner Conard, was born in 1881 in the sod house on the Wagner homestead about three miles from where Muriel grew up.

Her mother told her how hard it was to live in the soddy, where they lined the ceiling with cheese cloth to catch the bugs and snakes that came in between the sod bricks.

Mrs. Ready said her parents met in 1898 at a church party and were married in 1900. When her father died in 1975, her parents lacked just a few months of being married 75 years. With the exception of a short time when they were first married, they lived their entire lives on the same farm.

"Life on the farm was hard," she said, "but I remember that our house was always filled with fun. And, there was always music in the Conard home. All of my sisters and brothers were very musical, and we sang together at many church and community activities. I remember fondly that my father and his children spent many hours singing in the evening while mother puttered around the house."

She recalled that around 1913, when their family went to Stanton County, about 150 miles, to visit Conard relatives, her father made his own covered wagon with beds in the back for the kids. She said that her mother sat in the wagon's spring seat and the kids ran along side for the six days it took to make the trip. She said she remembers her mother working hard to get all of them in clean clothes right before they arrived at their destination.

In 1914, she said, her 10-year-old sister Elsie became quite ill with typhoid fever. At that time, they didn't take people to a hospital, but she remembers the doctor coming to the house often in his horse and buggy. Her sister died after being ill for about three weeks.

The Conards bought their first car in about 1917, a Ford touring car. Mrs. Ready said she remembers walking down the country road coming from school when her father surprised them in the car. He picked up all the kids and gave them a ride home.

"When all the girls in our farm community were starting to get their hair cut in a bob," she said, "my father didn't think that girls should cut their hair. However, while at a neighbor's house with several friends, we decided to cut my hair.

When I got home, I ran up the stairs as fast as I could, scared I was going to get in a lot of trouble, but all I can remember my father saying was, 'Well, I guess she doesn't look any worse than the rest of the girls.'"

When she was 14, she said, she started having trouble being able to talk, and then had other symptoms to the point she had to quit school. Nothing was known at that time about thyroid problems, so for more than four years she couldn't even whisper and became extremely thin before they found a doctor who treated her with iodine-soaked sponges at the area of the thyroid gland.

She was 18 when she finally went back to high school, where she then took normal training so she could start earning a living by teaching. She also took correspondence courses from Fort Hays State College.

She said her first teaching job was in a one-room schoolhouse not far from her parents' farm. Sometime later, she started teaching in Larned, where she eventually became county superintendent of schools in the late 1940s.

In 1947, John Ready from Minnesota came to Larned to work at Beckwith's Mortuary. A friend told her that she had just seen the "right" man for her but wouldn't explain. She said that since she was a friend of the Beckwiths, she just "happened" to go by to say "hello." She said she and John started dating soon after and were married on Dec. 24, 1949. In 1952, their daughter, Esther, was born.

She said that she and her husband had a strong drive to better their lives and they knew they couldn't unless they bought their own business. They looked around Kansas and Missouri and then found that Charlie Corcoran in Oberlin was looking for a partner who was also a mortician. They took the opportunity and moved to Oberlin in March 1956 to become a partner in the Corcoran-Ready Funeral Home.

Mrs. Ready started teaching fourth grade soon after they moved here and taught until the late 1960s.

"Mom was always known for her colorful and stylish clothes, many that she designed and made herself," said their daughter, "also her matching high-heeled shoes. I remember being in Denver or Minneapolis and



going to what felt like every shoe store in the city to find a pair of shoes a certain color, or that were unusual, to go with her outfits.

Their daughter Esther said that her parents started the first coin-operated laundry in western Kansas, called Giant Wash, on South Rodehaver Avenue. In about 1962, they opened Ready's Skogmos, a department store, in downtown Oberlin. The town was bustling then, and Skogmos was a popular stop for people to do their shopping for the entire family. She said her parents enjoyed boarding high school girls in their basement in the era when country students stayed in town during the school year. They sold the store in 1975, and John retired and sold the funeral home in 1977.

"My parents spent their retirement years having lots of fun, playing golf and bridge, traveling and spending time at their condo in Summit County, Colo.," their daughter said. "They often took off to visit me, and then the three of us often traveled places together. In 1986, I moved to New York from Kansas City, and Mom liked to tell people they had been to New York 28 times."

In 1991, Esther married David Chomowicz and a year later the Readys' one and only grandchild, Nick, was born.

"I'm very certain that everyone was very tired of hearing about their wonderful grandson," she said, "but Mom was in her 80s before she became a grandmother, so everyone let her talk and continue to show the zillion pictures. One of her favorite



**JOHN READY** and Muriel Conard started dating while living in Larned in 1948. They were married on Dec. 12, 1949.

stories was when Nick was small, he always told his friends in New York that he came to Oberlin every August to attend the World's Fair."

Mrs. Ready has lived at the Good Samaritan Center since 2004, with her husband joining her full-time last year.

"My parents still hold hands and give each other kisses every day," Esther said. "In December, they will celebrate their 59th wedding anniversary, and her grandson (now 16) still makes her smile."