



EMBROIDERING QUILT BLOCKS is a favorite pastime of Mrs. Eckhart, and she can still thread her own needles.

— Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCamp



THE SHIRLEY FAMILY (above) included parents Frank and "Sade" and children, Fay, Bernice and Juanita. Little brother Mike was born later. As a young woman (below), Juanita (Shirley) Eckhart wore a fashionable hat of the day.



Woman to be honored on 100th

By MARYLOU OLSON

Though she has seen many changes during the past century, Juanita Eckhart, who will celebrate her 100th birthday on Feb. 24, said she has had a good life and remains active.

She is a resident at the Cedar Living Center, and her family plans to honor her with an open house from 2 to 4 p.m. in the dining room there on Sunday, Feb. 24.

Though she is reaching a milestone, she still keeps busy embroidering, watching television and taking part in activities at the nursing home. Right now, she is busy embroidering on blocks for a quilt, one of many she has completed over the years.

She was born on Feb. 24, 1913, on a farm eight miles northwest of Norcatgur to Frank and Sarah "Sade" (Hoppas) Shirley.

"I had an older brother, Fay, and a sister, Bernice," she said. "My little brother Mike came along four years after I was born. I will always remember the day that Mike was born. A neighbor, Adda Bell, came to our house and picked me up and took me to her house in her buggy. She had three dolls hanging on the wall and she told me that I could pick the one I wanted to play with so, of course, I chose the prettiest one."

"Mike was always so much fun and I remember one dark night when I had to go to the outhouse and was carrying a lantern. He was hiding behind a kerosene barrel and jumped out and grabbed me, then laughed. There was no one like him!"

She said that her grandparents lived close by and she walked over to visit often.

"I remember when Grandpa asked me to go down in the cellar and get everyone an apple, then while sitting near the wood-burning stove, he would carefully peel them. I always sat right beside him and watched, fearing that the peeling would break and fall to the floor."

"A special memory to me was the time Grandpa Shirley gave me a dollar after our teacher took us to town for a track meet and I came in first."

When I took it home and showed Mother, she said she would buy material with the money, then she made me a pretty pink dress with a panel in front.

"The Shirley children attended Prairie View School and usually rode a horse to school. There were many pupils, as several families had large families, and Ira Laidig was our teacher."

"We often went to Norcatgur on Saturday night. However, if there was a sign of a cloud in the sky, we could not go, as Mother was so afraid of storms. One thing I will never forget was the time we got to town and saw these people dressed with sheets over their head. I thought, 'How dumb! Why would anyone wear sheets to town?' No one told me who they were at the time, but later I found out they were members of the Ku Klux Klan."

Life on the farm as a girl always included helping with chores, which included bringing in cobs from the pig pen for the cook and heating stoves and helping with the livestock and chickens, but she said her favorite pastime was riding her horse, Midge.

She recalled a time when her parents put the kids in the wagon, after her dad covered it with hay and

blankets to keep them warm, to go to a Christmas program. Their hired man drove the horses so fast, she said, they got there in about 10 minutes. Her biggest concern on that cold night, however, was feeling sorry for the horses, who had to stand out in the cold during the program.

"I always have had a determined personality," she said, "so one day when dad was in the field, I decided to drive the car over to see my grandparents. I had never driven a car before, but I had observed what my Dad did, so I managed to make it over there and back, even though I had to back up in their yard."

She said that when her dad would haul a load of wheat to Norcatgur in a wagon, he always brought each of the kids a sack of candy.

"Our family did their own butchering," she said, "and when they shot the hog before letting it down from ropes into a barrel of hot water out by the granary, I always screamed."

When she and Floyd Eckhart started dating, she said, they usually went to a show, or movie, in Oberlin or Norton or to a dance. He attended Blue Star School.

"We were married on March 9, 1935, at the Decatur County courthouse with Judge Ralph McLaughlin officiating, then we moved to the Eckhart family farm north of Norcatgur. I was baptized at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Norcatgur after we were married."

She said one day, after walking to the field where her husband was operating a weeder pulled by four horses, she told him that she could make a round.

"I don't think he thought I could do it, but I was

determined. I went the full length of the field, turned the horses around and came back to show him," she laughed. "And I got the weeds, too!"

Later, however, she said she and her husband hauled hay from a neighboring farm with each driving a team and wagon.

Her husband died in 1959 and more sadness came to Mrs. Eckhart in 1967 when their only son, Russ Eckhart, who was serving with the U.S. Marines, died from injuries received in the Vietnam War. He was a 1965 graduate of Norcatgur Rural High School.

After the death of her husband, she moved to Norcatgur, a place she said "will always be home to me." Several years ago, she moved to Wheat Ridge Terrace Apartments in Oberlin and recently to Cedar Living.

"When I make up my mind to do something, I still do it," she said, "and to prove it, one day I decided I didn't like my desk on the wall at the end of my bed . . . , so I just proceeded to move it to another location, even though I'm in a wheelchair!"

Mrs. Eckhart said that she feels young people today have a difficult time. Many just go home after school and watch television instead of having chores to do.

Among Oberlin relatives who will be helping her celebrate include two sisters-in-law, Merle Shirley and Alice "Tillie" Shirley, and two nephews, Herb (Carol) Shirley, and Dennis (Judy) Shirley.

When asked to what she attributes her long life, she quickly answered, "God will decide how long I live."

So in the meantime, she added, she is enjoying things to the fullest.



Floyd and Juanita Eckhart



Russ Eckhart