

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Nellie L. Nestle - Centenarian

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This week I'm pleased to present an article about Nellie L. Nestle written by her son, Dr. William Nestle of Childs. The photo included here shows Clifton, Nellie and their son William in the 1940's.

Former Albion resident Nellie L. (Mrs. Clifton) Nestle was one of 52 centenarians honored recently by the Monroe County Office of the Aging, for observing her 100th birthday in 1987. Mrs. Nestle will be 100 years old on July 16 of this year. Certificates of honor were presented by County Manager Lucien Morin to each centenarian present at ceremonies in the County Office Building in Rochester and mailed to those unable to attend in person.

The only one of three children to survive to adulthood, Nellie was born to William Briar and Lavinia Perkins Briar. Her father was a dealer in horses, buggies, wagons, etc. The Briar homestead still stands on the north side of the Ridge Road just west of Gaines Basin Road and is home today to Jeff and Coleen Lewis and family.

She attended schools in Gaines and Albion, but was forced to leave high school after her sophomore year to care for her terminally ill mother. Her recollections include having to drive a horse and cutter to get to school in Albion in winter. Sometimes, she says, potholes were so deep and wide that she had to find a route through a nearby field. She also recollects working in the dryhouse which stood on the Ridge west of Gaines, during the apple season, working with the other women and girls in peeling, coring, and drying the apples.

After marriage to Clifton Nestal, son of William Nestal and Allie Smith Nestal in 1917, she and her husband moved to Buffalo where Cliff was employed at the Curtiss Wright aero-plane factory. Following the birth of a son, William Briar Nestal, the family returned to Gaines to live with Mr. Briar. (The -tal spelling was corrected to -tle about this time, after William Nestal was able to re-establish contact with brothers and family he had not seen nor heard from since early childhood.)

During her Gaines years Nellie was active in the Gaines Grange, including serving at least one term as Lecturer, and in other Gaines activities, including the Old Schoolmates Reunions of former students at the Gaines School. A major interest at this time was the Gaines Congregational Church, where for some years she served as church organist.

After moving to Albion in 1927, the Nestles in 1931 purchased the W.C. Ramsdale home on East State Street, which was Nellie's home for the next 35 years. When Nellie gave up her home and moved to the Rochester Presbyterian Home the house was sold to Donald & Laura Brace and family, present occupants.

In Albion Nellie became active in the Presbyterian Church. Her special interest was the Signor Class. One story told of her in these years is that she was usually called upon to make the coffee for any church suppers, although she never drank coffee herself. When the time came to test each new urnful, someone else was called upon to taste it — yet they kept her making it.

Mrs. Nestle was one of the charter members of the Albion Chapter 800, Order of the Eastern Star, and was their first Adah. Later she served "through the chairs" to become Worthy Matron; today she is one of the oldest living Past Worthy

Matrons in New York State and, probably, in the country — if not the oldest. In her post-Matron years, Nellie often was called upon to play the piano to rehearse and present the officers in march formations as part of the O.E.S. chapter's programs.

Her music interest was carried over into giving music lessons to beginning students. Two of the pupils who recall going to her home for lessons are Agnes Daniels Radzinski and Virginia Daniels Kristine.

Mrs. Nestle always was interested in "old things," and often on a Sunday ride would pick up a piece of old glassware or china for one of her collections.

Like her husband, Clifton, she was always interested in the outdoors. In their last years together, both often went fishing together. In earlier years, however, while his interests included hunting and fishing, hers centered around her garden — inside her home and out. The windows of her East State Street home were filled with blooming African violets, most of which she had, by preference, raised from a single leaf, "slipped" from a plant. She received greater pleasure from this mothering of the young plants, than from receiving a large violet already heavy with blooms.

Her passion, however, was her outdoor garden, especially her flower garden. Working in it often proved to her to be of more worth than any medicine prescribed by a doctor. At one time, she had nearly 100 different varieties of Iris, as well as many roses. Again, many of these had been grown from slips. Hers was an English type garden, with no arrangement and many annuals self-sowing almost anywhere. Nor did she neglect the vegetable garden, even spading the earth for it one year after her husband died.

Even while living in the Rochester Presbyterian Home, for several years she managed a small flower plot of her own. There also, not one to sit still and wait for whatever might happen, she learned several craft activities — weaving placemats, towels, cloth for pillows, even cloth for a tie for her son; painting and glazing greenware for Christmas giving of vases, mugs, etc. and making things for the home's annual fair. Principal among these was the making of crazy-quilt type pillows with feather stitching. Her production totaled over 50 one year, with many of these going to friends and relatives, as well as for the fair.

Currently, Mrs. Nestle is a resident of Kirkhaven Nursing Home, 254 Alexander St., Rochester, 14607, operated by the Genesee Presbytery. Formerly the Pavilion Nursing Home, it was rebuilt and opened in February 1985. Nellie was one of the four residents admitted on the day of opening, and was featured in the Channel 10 news broadcast coverage of the event.

She still manages to get to most meals in a communal dining room, by use of a walker, dresses and undresses herself with some help, and reads the Albion paper regularly, although she doesn't recognize many names. Although her deafness precludes much conversation, she welcomes visitors. Names are beginning to evade her.

It is hoped that July 16 will see a flurry of cards and notes from Albion friends and well-wishers as she starts on her second century.