

111 years and counting

Geneva McNicholl may be the oldest Oregonian alive — and she has stories to tell

by Erin Hoover Barnett

THE OREGONIAN

THE DALLES —

Geneva McNicholl waits for you to settle in beside her wheelchair at the Columbia Basin Care Center.

Her white hair is nicely combed. Her hearing aid is in place. She has agreed to tell her story.

And at 111 years old, she has much to tell.

At 111, she may be the oldest Oregonian alive.

The 2000 Census reports 650 Oregonians age 100 or older, 42 percent more than a decade ago. Twelve in this group were 110 or older, but McNicholl was the only one still alive when *The Oregonian* could locate.

So pull close for a moment. Let McNicholl sort back through the decades, and she will take you to a time before the motor car, before refrigeration, before world war.

McNicholl was born in Lafayette near McMinnville on Dec. 10, 1889, the year Washington became a state.

With the help of her 81-year old son, Bob Rogers of Cooks, Wash., she can put you in the two-story wood-framed home her grandparents built. She can remember the chocolate cakes her mother baked in the wood-burning stove.

She can take you to the restaurants at the Mallory Hotel in Portland, which opened in 1912, or The Seaside Hotel in Seaside in the 1920s. She waited tables before marrying railroad worker Harry E. Rogers in 1918, returning to the trade in the 1920s after getting a divorce, to support her son. Her diners tipped well.

"Mostly, they would be nice to me because I was little," says



Above: Bob Rogers, 81, shows his mother, Geneva Mc-Nicholl old photographs to stimulate her memory during one of his twice weekly visits to Columbia Basin Care Center in The Dalles. At 111 McNicholl's vision is dimmed by macular degeneration, and a series of strokes has left her unable to walk. But, she says, "I feel fine."

McNicholl, who stands 5-foot-1. "I was just a little bit a thing."

And she can take you to the clapboard store in the woods of south-central Washington near the Little White Salmon River — the store that she, young Bob and her second husband, a steam engineer, built in 1929.

"Well, I sold candy, and I also sold different kinds of soup," Mc-Nicholl says, her voice craggy yet vital. (continued)

WHERE IS THE COPY?



Left: Geneva Mc-Nicholl (then Geneva Grazier) and her son, Bob Rogers, posed for this portrait at Keller's Studio in Portland in the early 1920s. Rogers' birth certificate says he was born at Emanuel Hospital on June 1920, and shows his mother's age 30. She was born Dec. 10, 1889.

CHARACTERISTICS OF U.S. CENTENARIANS

- ◆ Four out of five are women.
- ◆ 78 percent are white.
- ◆ About half had some high school education.
- ◆ 10 percent are Californian; 8 percent New Yorkers.
- ◆ 17 percent were born in another country
- ◆ 79 percent are widowed (84 percent of women, 58 percent of men).
- ◆ About 50 percent are in nursing homes' about 15 percent live alone.

NOAH ROGERS, 6 months, held by mother Cheri, reaches out to his great-grandmother, Geneva McNicholl. They gathered to celebrate McNicholl's 112th birthday.



McNicholl celebrates 112 years

'Grandma Mac' cooked for family until she was 103

by NANCY LEMONS
of *The Dalles Chronicle*

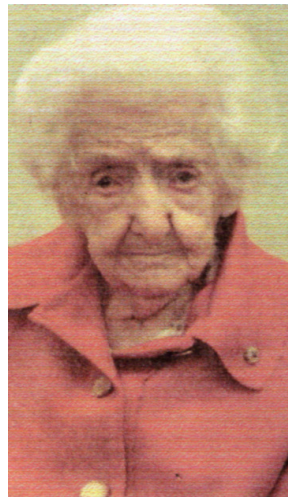
Is the secret to long life genetics or lifestyle?

For Geneva McNicholl, known as Grandma Mac to many, it could be a combination.

McNicholl turned 112 today, making her possibly the fifth oldest person in the United States.

A resident of the Columbia Basin Nursing Home in The Dalles, she is apparently the oldest living Oregonian.

Family are now gathering official records for documentation with the Gerontology Research Group. The ages of centenarians and supercentarians are tracked by several



Geneva McNicholl, shown in two views from different centuries, comes from a long-loved family. A resident of the The Dalles, she's one of the older Americans alive today.

organizations which seek to unlock the secrets of aging.

McNicholl was born Dec. 10, 1889, in Lafayette, Ore., to Sylvester and Lavina Groce.

McNicholl's mother, with whom she shared a birthday, died just a couple of months shy of 100. Those family genes may be a part in explaining McNicholl's longevity.

But, her only child,

Bob Rogers, contributes it to eating well, sleeping well with no guilt, working hard and being outdoors."

"She ate like a logger," said Marian, Bob's wife the the past eleven years, who says it has been a joy getting to know her mother-in-law.

McNicholl cooked hardy "meat and potatoes" meals, and always had dessert.

"She cooked for us up until she was 103," commented Marian.

But, failing health and a series of strokes has led McNicholl to the Columbia Basin, where she now lives.

"She was a good cook in her day," said Bob.

She liked making different pies of white

grapes, Italian prunes, and apples. These were all fruits she grew in her yard.

McNicholl says she used Gravenstein apples for her famous deep-dish apple pie.

On her family's farm in the Willamette Valley they grew all kinds of apples, including Gravenstein, said McNicholl.

In 1853, her grandparents traveled across the Plains, settling in the Willamette Valley where McNicholl grew up, along with her two brothers, one younger and one older than she.

McNicholl says her brothers taught her how to dance, one of her favorite activities in younger days.

Long, dark hair and dark eyes, combined with a red-velvet dress, made her a popular girl at the dances. Guys lined up to be her partner.

And, McNicholl admits with a grin, she was much the flirt.

In 1917, she married her first husband, and in 1920 had her son Bob, whom she says was a good kid to raise.

Later, she married Jim McNicholl, who worked as a steam engineer for large logging companies.

In 1929, the couple, along with young Bob, moved to Mill A, Wash., where they operated a store and Shell gas station. They also rented out three guest cabins.

In the late 1930s, they divorced but Geneva McNicholl continued to operate the store until 1966, when health problems forced her to quit. She was 77.

Son Bob then took over the business until his retirement in 1981.

The store was popular among the loggers, who enjoyed the cold beer served there.

McNicholl didn't care for

swearing and cussing in her store. Those who had the nerve to do so were told to deposit two bits into the Red Cross collection, a mayonnaise jar that sat on the store's counter.

One day, a fellow in the store refused to mind her, so McNicholl grabbed a broom and chased him out and down the street.

"She was very strict," said Marian.

The Rogers laughed thinking about what a sight that must have been to see this little, petite lady chasing a grown man down the street.

She was also a good huntress, and a good shot, say family members.

"She hunted deer, rabbits, anything for food during the Depression, even porcupine. Bob says he became very good at skinning them," Marian said.

Although McNicholl enjoys homecooking, she is also a big fan of fast food.

One day last week, she was not pleased with the meal served to her, so one of the care facility employees ran to Burger King for a burger and fries.

"They have really spoiled her," said Marian.

In addition to cooking, McNicholl also enjoyed gardening, growing several prized double-bloom rhododendrons.

She continued to garden past the age of 100, until the family stopped plowing the ground for her. They feared she would fall and get hurt.

At 103, she sat on the ground and scooted her bottom to pull weeds. Close by a wheel-barrow provided a place to sit down and rest and doubled as a walking aid.

Houseplants were of no interest to her: she would

rather be outside gardening.

"She was an outdoors person," said Marian.

Macular degeneration now keeps her from reading the Sunday Oregonian from cover to cover, as she did in the past.

And, her hearing is also limited, or it could be "selective," says Bob. Often, she turns to look at him even when he's not speaking directly into the hearing device.

McNicholl is particularly careful with this device, saying "You don't want to lose that."

Communicating with family and friends is important to her.

Tom Senior, representing Portland's Channel 2, was there to film her party. Years ago he says he talked with McNicholl via CB radio. Her handle was simply "Mrs. Mac."

For years, Bob and the family tried to get McNicholl to let them install a telephone, but she preferred the CB.

Finally, they installed one anyway. Once she got used to it, she wanted phones all over the house for convenience.

On the walls of the care facility, McNicholl's life was displayed in pictures. Birthday cards, including one from President Bush and wife, lay on the table.

Before the family ate lunch and cut the cake, great-grandson Brennan, age 5, visited with McNicholl, informing her he had lost some teeth.

Brennan then introduced her to his baby brother, Noah, 6 months.

Small, new eyes studied McNicholl's face. Small hand reached toward her.

Did McNicholl's pass on her endurance to these younger generations? We'll see.

Oldest Oregonian marks 112th year

Those who know her attribute her longevity to a hearty appetite

The Associated Press

THE DALLES — There's a reason Geneva McNicholl, known to many as Grandma Mac, has lived to age 112: eating like a logger.

McNicholl, apparently the oldest living Oregonian, liked to cook hearty "meat and potatoes" meals, and always had dessert, said daughter-in-law Marian Rogers.

She cooked for us until she was 103," Rogers said.

McNicholl, born Dec. 10, 1889, now lives at Columbia Basin Nursing Home in The Dalles.

She grew up in the Willamette Valley, along with two brothers, and married her first husband in 1917. Three years later,



CELEBRATION: Noah Rogers, 6 months, held by his mother Sheri, reaches Sunday toward his grandmother, Geneva McNicholl, in The Dalles during McNicholl's 112th birthday party.

her son Bob was born.

She married Jim McNicholl and moved with him to Mill A, Wash., in 1929, where they ran a store and gas station and rented out guest cabins.

The couple divorced in the late 1930s, but Geneva

McNicholl continued to operate the store until 1966, when health problems forced her to quit.

McNicholl didn't care for swearing and cussing in her store.

Those who had the nerve to do so were told to deposit two bits into the

Red Cross collection, a mayonnaise jar that sat on the store's counter.

One day, a fellow in the store stood up to her, so McNicholl grabbed a broom and chased him out and down the street.

Cooking was a favorite pastime. McNicholl liked making pies, with white grapes, Italian prunes and apples — all fruit that she grew in her yard.

But genetics also might have played a part in her longevity. Her mother, Lavina Groce, with whom she shared a birthday, died just several months shy of 100.

Poor eyesight now keeps McNicholl from reading the Sunday newspaper from cover to cover, as she once did.

Her hearing also is limited — or selective, as her son says.

Eye of the storm . . .

By Joanna Grammon

Happy birthday, Mrs. Mac! On Monday, Dec. 10, Geneva McNicholl turns 112. A family celebration is planned Sunday at the nursing home in The Dalles where she lives.

Attaining that age is an astounding achievement. Born Dec. 10, 1889, in Lafayette, Ore., Geneva Grazier grew up in the square house pictured in a photograph from the 1950s that was still hanging on the wall of her Mill A home when she turned 100.

That was 1989, the year of the Washington Centennial, and Mrs. Mac cut the cake for a county celebration. At 100, she was still living alone and maintaining a garden with the help of a teenager who did a little yard work and cut the wood for her wood stove.

In the dining room in the home where she lived until she was 104, was sideboard that came around the Horn when her family migrated from Belgian.

In the late 1920s, Mrs. Mac came to the town of Mill A, when the mill that gave it its name was still operating in the vicinity. She and her husband built a store with gas pumps and a little lunch counter. She kept the business open until 1966, when she turned it over to her son, Bob Rogers. She was 76, long past retirement age for many, which may be one of the secrets of her longevity.

The changes she has seen in her lifetime boggle the mind. From horse and buggy days to Model A cars, from loggers in calk boots stopping at her store for a beer to tourists stopping for directions, from wood-burning sternwheelers and team trains traveling up the gorge to the computer age.

The Oregonian did a nice story on Mrs. Mac a couple of months ago. They said at 111, she is most likely the oldest living Oregonian. I guess it doesn't matter that she actually lived in Skamania County for 64 years. I don't know who the oldest living Washingtonian is, but Mrs. Mac should have honorary status in this state, too. Once again, many happy returns.

* * *

Angela Rogers, the Pioneer's ad person, is married to Mrs. Mac's grandson, Alan Rogers. She says the Columbia Basin Care Center in the Dalles has taken good care of Mrs. Mac. However, it would be easier to visit her more frequently if she could be in a nursing home a little closer to home.

There are some wonderful and caring people working at Rock Cove, and it is a cheery place to visit. However, it is, after all, an assisted living facility and not a nursing home.

It is a good transition for people who are no longer able to live alone in their own homes. They may need help dressing, taking a bath, or getting to their meals. But when their medical condition or memory loss becomes too severe, the need for access to round-the-clock nursing care becomes an issue.

The population of the U.S. is aging. There's no doubt that we baby boomers will be putting a bulge in the statistics. Better nutrition and medical care are helping people live much longer and better.

It was literally decades before the dream of having an assisted living facility for seniors within Skamania County became a reality. Perhaps it's time to start dreaming again, this time about finally locating a nursing home here.

BOB AND MARIAN ROGERS

From: Louis Epstein
Sent: Friday, January 11, 2002
Subject: The Living Supercentarians January 2002

Below is the current list of the living Supercentarians. The most recent addition is Italy's Teres Fumarola of who I learned from researcher Michel Poulain just yesterday.

	Years	Days	Born	Last Known Alive
Maud (Davis) Farris Luse	114	353+	Jan. 21, 1887	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 9, 2002
Kamato Hongo	114	109+	Sept. 16, 1887	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 3, 2002
Christina (Clay) Cock	114	11+	Dec. 25, 1887	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 5, 2002
Germaine (Germain) Haye	113	8+	Oct. 10, 1888	STILL ALIVE — AUG. 18, 2002
Mary Delvina (Morisette) Dahlheimer	113	+	Dec. 31, 1888	STILL ALIVE — DEC. 31, 2001
(birth registered 1889, 1942 revision was attested to by mother).				
Yukichi Chuganji	112	294+	Mar. 23, 1889	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 10, 2002
Mitoyo Kawate	112	237+	May 15, 1889	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 7, 2002
John Ingram McMorran	112	200+	June 18, 1889	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 4, 2002
(authenticated by New England Centenarian Study)				
Nellie Greenwood Bradley	112	54+	Sept. 12, 1889	STILL ALIVE — NOV. 5, 2001
Nellie Florence (Wakefield) Cross	112	75+	Oct. 28, 1889	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 11, 2002
Teresa Fumarola	112	39+	Dec. 2, 1889	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 10, 2002
Geneva Arlene (Grazier) McNicholl	112	26+	Dec. 10, 1889	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 5, 2002
Joanna Catharina (Turcksin) DeRoover	111	215+	June 3, 1890	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 4, 2002
Jessie (Stubbs) Hurley	111	129+	June 15, 1890	STILL ALIVE — Oct. 10, 2001
(authenticated by New England Centenarian Study from Australian records.)				
Hendrikje (Schipper) Van Anandel	111	148+	June 29, 1890	STILL ALIVE — NOV. 24, 2001
Ura Koyama	111	31+	Aug. 30, 1890	STILL ALIVE — SEPT. 30, 2002
Cleo (Cranney) Hinckley	111	35+	Oct. 13, 1890	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 7, 2002
Mise Ito	110	328+	Nov. 6, 1890	STILL ALIVE — SEPT. 30, 2001
Fred Harold Hale	111	35+	Dec. 1, 1890	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 5, 2002
Giovanni Frau	111	262+	Dec. 29, 1890	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 4, 2002
Tsuru Misawa	111	6+	Jan. 11, 1891	STILL ALIVE — SEPT. 30, 2001
John Henry "Jack" Lockette	110	348+	Jan. 22, 1891	STILL ALIVE — JAN. 5, 2002
(authenticated by New England Centenarian Study from Australian records.)				
Shizuno Iwasaki	110	241+	Feb. 1, 1891	STILL ALIVE — SEPT. 30, 2001
Kumekichi Tani	111	163+	April 10, 1891	STILL ALIVE — SEPT. 30, 2001
Yuinoshuke Hashimoto	110	156+	April 27, 1891	STILL ALIVE — SEPT. 30, 2001
Tsuru Takenaka	110	135+	May 18, 1891	STILL ALIVE — SEPT. 30, 2001
Leopold Vietoris	110	138+	June 4, 1891	STILL ALIVE — OCT. 20, 2001
Sawayo Tanaka	110	113+	June 9, 1891	STILL ALIVE — SEPT. 30, 2001
Jan Pieter Bos	110	130+	July 12, 1891	STILL ALIVE — NOV. 19, 2001
Julie Winnefred Bertrand	110	23+	Sept. 16, 1891	STILL ALIVE — OCT. 9, 2001
Kame Nagayama	110	63+	Sept. 21, 1891	STILL ALIVE — NOV. 23, 2001
Jenny Karlsson	110	41+	Oct. 17, 1891	STILL ALIVE — NOV. 27, 2001
Kama Nakasone	110	4+	Nov. 23, 1891	STILL ALIVE — NOV. 27, 2001