

The Magazine Section

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118 Years Of Living

Story by Robin Adams

Photos by James Parker

Mrs. Betty Lyons doesn't need a history book to learn about the ante-bellum South, for she knows the history firsthand.

Born a year after the Civil War ended, Mrs. Lyons is 118 years old. She can remember when the first train, telephone, television and other "odd" inventions got to her native Davie County. Whether concentrating to get her facts straight, standing on the porch thinking about spring, or reminiscing by the fireplace, Mrs. Lyons is one history lesson after another.

Before moving to the Rogers Family Care Home in Winston-Salem in January, she lived in her family home in Lewisville. Here is her story in words and pictures.

Betty Lyons knew that she was having visitors last Wednesday afternoon. After lunch, she changed into a brown floral print dress, added a string of her favorite beads, tied a fashionable scarf around her neck and combed back her cottony white hair.

Mrs. Lyons has fixed up for a lot of visitors during her lifetime. After all, she is 118 years old.

"I didn't know how old I was until couple of months ago," Mrs. Lyons said. "I ain't ashamed to say that I didn't have much learnin'. I do know that I'm uh Junebug, born on June first."

Until January, Mrs. Lyons lived by herself at her family home in Lewisville. She now lives in the Rogers Family Home on Greenway Drive. "They say this is a home for the old and broke down," she said.

But any visitor to the home will know that Mrs.

Lyons does not fit that category.

She uses a walker, but only for support. Until she moved to Winston-Salem, she attended New Hope AME Zion Church in Lewisville regularly. She still combs her own hair, makes her bed, has a keen sense of humor, and at the mention of the word song starts "hollerin'" her favorite tune. With the exception of cataracts and "a little high blood pressure and rheumatism -- although they calls it arthritis now," she's fit as a fiddle.

How has she done it?

"I just got will power and faith that keeps me goin'," she said. "I ask the Lord to help me, but I don't sit and wait for him -- I git on up. I ask him to help, not to do it all."

"I always believed in livin' right and lovin'

everybody," she said. "The Bible says to honor your father and mother and your days shall be long. And that's what I did. That's what I've tried to do."

If the Department of Social Security has calculated correctly, Mrs. Lyons was born in 1866, one year after the Civil War ended and before airplanes, televisions, telephones and railroads arrived in Davie County.

"I remember when they first started the railroad. I didn't know much about them when they came through. They was new to me," she said. "I also remember the first phones I saw. They was the kind that hung on the wall and had to be cranked. Now they got phones with numbers. I never did learn how to dial, but when it rings I answer it."

To have lived over 100 years means that a person

has a lot of wisdom to share with the world and Mrs. Lyons is no exception. But her wisdom comes in a small package.

"Always try to live right and be honest," she said. "Live so you can have friends. And I believe that I got plenty friends, unless they foolin' me."

"The world today ain't like it use ta be," she said. "The Bible says that every generation gets weaker and wiser. And that's sho the truth. Folks now know too much."

Mrs. Lyons, who was married twice and has two sons, also has some advice on how a woman should treat her husband: "Just be nice and sweet to him every day and don't start no argument. If he's mad, just wait 'til he cools down. Then say to him, 'We

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Winston's Deltas celebrate second anniversary of a dream come true

By AUDREY WILLIAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

A lot of walls were knocked down, doors widened and gallons of paint used to convert the old house on Third Street that served as a residence for administrators of the old hospital to what it is today.

Exactly two years, one week and one day ago, Mayor Wayne Corpening cut the ribbon marking a dream come true for members of the Winston-Salem Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. as they opened the Delta Arts Center. The center is a subsidiary of Delta Fine Arts Inc.

"We have had very good support from the community," says Simona Allen, a member of the Delta Fine Arts board of directors. "It is our goal to increase cultural awareness and we feel that we're always improving, but we haven't arrived."

The Delta Arts Center is the only organization of its kind to be started by members of Delta or any other black sorority in the country, and the members all agree that the center is a model for others.

In 1972, the Winston-Salem Delta Fine Arts Inc. began offering cultural and educational projects featuring black American artists. By 1980, the sorority's alumnae chapter here had begun to establish itself as a true promoter of the arts and cultural awareness.

The chapter's sponsorship included major art ex-

hibitions outlining the black presence in America from the beginning until now, a contribution of 18 pieces of 19th century furniture now on display at the North Carolina Museum of History and the purchase and donation of six pieces of art by black North Carolinians to Winston-Salem State University and the performing arts.

From there, members of Delta say they realized they had established themselves enough to seek a central operating base. Gathering exhibits and sponsoring art shows was easy, say the members, compared to locating a permanent home for the center. After plans failed to materialize for the purchase of an old city fire station, Allen and other members of the Delta Fine Arts Board say they began to search even harder for an operations base.

"We went on faith, hope and determination," says Allen. "We didn't even have a model to pattern our center after."

"Many times while we were trying to secure the fire station we didn't have a prospect for home," says Wilma Lassiter, a member of and former president of the Fine Arts Board. "Yes, we did feel hopelessness. But we always believed we would find a place, though."

Finally, after months of searching, the Winston-Salem Housing Foundation and the developer of the East Winston Homes, which is adjacent to the center,

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Miss Louise Smith, left to right, Mrs. Simona Allen and Mrs. Wilma Lassiter are busy planning the second anniversary of the Delta Arts Center (photo by James Parker).