

300 gather to celebrate Mary Rider's 100 years (1985)
From the Binghamton Press written by Marjolijn Bijlefeld

Mary Rider, who celebrated her 100th birthday yesterday among family and friends, said she isn't sure of a formula for long life. "Work and clean living? Who knows?"



Although Rider's birthday actually was Thursday, more than 300 people – members of the South Apalachin Baptist Church and her family – arranged for an enormous party and luncheon in the church gym on Pennsylvania Avenue yesterday.

Rider, whose sight and hearing are failing, has the stamina of someone much younger. "When she found out about this party, she wanted to run it," said her daughter, Jean Turner of Apalachin. "She wanted to plan the menu, but I had to tell her she was already about two months too late. She's used to managing everything."

Three pictures that Rider painted of local scenes painted by Rider about five years ago were hung in a small room near the gym. Rider painted until eyesight began to fail several years ago, said her nephew Douglas Strobe of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Rider has been a member of the church for many years and has taken part in many celebrations. Turner said that for the church's Centennial several years ago, her mother wore an embroidered eyelet dress from about 1903. (Age 30)

Although most of Rider's family has located around this area, Turner said there were some family members present at yesterday's celebration that she had never met before. Turner and Rider's two sons, Elmer of Gaylord Road, Apalachin, and Lynn of Syracuse, were present, as was Rider's younger sister Gertrude Strobe, who will be 90 next month.

Some family members flew in from Oklahoma, Texas, and other parts of the country. But many were from the church. Turner said about three-fourths of the people at the party call her mother "Aunt Mary."

Rider has written about some of the memories of her youth in the area.

Rider had her first date in the summer she was 14. She and several friends went to the then - brand new Ross Park in Binghamton, she recalled. It had only a few animals, a merry-go-round and an ice cream stand.

Rider graduated from the former Keuka Institute with a teaching degree in 1910 and taught for ten years "mostly in one-room schoolhouses" in the area. She was married in 1917 to Harry Rider, who died about 40 years ago, family members said.

Last Thursday, on her birthday, Rider and her sister prepared a speech that was read for Rider at the party yesterday.

"I believe our days are ordered from above. Mine has been an ordinary, regulated life of work and striving to reach a goal of usefulness. Work is a blessing. Why the Lord is keeping me here, I don't know. He must have a purpose. I am ready to go when He calls." she wrote.

But as Mary Rider sat yesterday posing for photos while more than 40 children, grandchildren and great grandchildren gathered around, and an entire church congregation looked on, it seemed as though she'll be keeping her life full just answering to calls of "Aunt Mary."