

ONE HUNDRED AND FIVE YEARS OLD.

Mrs. Sarah Van Nostrand Still Enjoys Celebrating Her Birthdays.

One of the most picturesque figures in one of the most historical portions of New-Jersey is Mrs. Sarah Van Nostrand of Millstone. On the 6th of September she celebrated her one hundred and fifth birthday, and surprised everybody by remaining up till midnight, until the last guest had left. When the dominie of the church across the Raritan River left her he said: "I hope you may live to celebrate many more birthdays and feel as well and look as well as you do now."

The old lady took his hand and replied: "I may not be here next year, but if I am I hope all the friends who were here tonight will be with us."

It seems incredible that a person born one year after the adoption of the Federal Constitution and who was a baby in arms when Washington was inaugurated should still be in the land of the living, with fair memory, good appetite, and taking an interest in passing events. Many stories have been written about Mrs. Van Nostrand; some of them good, many of them atrociously false, so false and ridiculous, in fact, that her seventy-five-year-old spinster daughter, who has lived with her for thirty years and has taken care of her, now refuses to admit to the house any person known to have connection with newspapers.

It has been the custom of the family for the last twelve years to celebrate the old lady's birthday. On these occasions people drive from New-Brunswick and Bound Brook, Somerville, and Plainfield to do her homage. Amateur scribblers for local papers turn out in great force, and for weeks thereafter the family is inundated with paragraphs that have been rolling all over the country, describing habits that Mrs. Van Nostrand never possessed, and ascribing episodes to her that her family indignantly repudiates.

It is this class of paragraph that begets cynicism as to her age, and when a Denver paper seriously declared "that a woman of alleged one hundred and five years who could ride a horse without a saddle could only be raised in New-Jersey," the family decided to expose her no more to newspaper criticism or gossip. Of course, Mrs. Van Nostrand does not ride a horse, with or without a saddle. She has not been able to ride for years. Once in a while she ventures out for a drive with Uncle Peter Merrill, who is seventy-one himself and spryer than many men of thirty. Uncle Peter drives a low-seated buggy, the only one in Millstone, and this is a great convenience to his venerable charge when she wants an airing.

As to Mrs. Van Nostrand's age there is not the slightest doubt. The site of the house where she was born is still pointed out by the older people across the Raritan where the dingy old hotel now stands. The old family Bible affords additional evidence, while the records of the church are irrefutable. Her father was John Van Arsdale, of a family that furnished many recruits to Washington's tattered Continental Army. He was born on a farm back of Somerville in 1765, and was a drummer boy for several years during the Revolutionary War. His daughter, christened Sarah, has lived all her long life in the vicinity of Millstone. Uncle Peter Merrill remembers her as a woman of middle age when he was a boy. Men of middle age speak of her as an old lady when they were at school. Several ancient colored women hereabout boast of ages ranging from 110 to 112. But Mrs. Van Nostrand repudiates their assertion by declaring that she remembers them as children when she was a young girl.

She married when young, and was the mother of eight children, six of whom are now living; one of them, a son, "Ben," is the village blacksmith, a hale and sturdy man of eighty. Another son past seventy-five years is in the feed business. She has fourteen grandchildren, thirteen great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild.

Since her daughter began to take care of her house thirty years ago Mrs. Van Nostrand has had a life of tranquillity and ease. Occasionally she has dabbled in housework, but as a rule she sits at the corner window, which commands a view of the village street which leads to Weston to the right and New-Brunswick to the left, nodding pleasantly to the younger people or waving her hand to the older folks as they walk or drive by. Her eyesight is excellent, her hearing good, and her digestion, in the language of one of the villagers, "splendid."

She habitually wears the cap that was more familiar in our grandmothers' time than now. She is slender, almost fragile, in figure, as all very old ladies are. The pressure of 105 years has caused a slight stoop in the shoulders, but not so marked as in most elderly people thirty years younger. Her voice is tremulous, as is to be expected. She is proud of the fact that her father served in the Revolutionary War and that she is the oldest member of the Middlebrook Chapter of the Daughters of the Revolution, for the battle of Middlebrook was fought within a few miles of the place where she was born, and the remains of several British soldiers who were killed in that affair are buried hard by the Central Railway of New-Jersey's tracks, between Plainfield and Dunellen, while Washington himself viewed the conflict from the historical rock on the Watchung Mountains, to the north of Dunellen.