



“GRANDMA TO 300” – Approximately 300 residents of Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties are direct descendants of Mrs. Mary Ann Nelson, widow of James Nelson, who is entering her ninety-sixth year. [News Journal photo by Foote]

Grandma of 300 Keeps Busy Making Quilts and Canning

[By Dee Jones-Pensacola News Journal – June 1, 1947]

“I’m fussy about what I eat”, said Aunt Mary Ann Nelson, explaining how she still can piece quilts and can peaches as she enters her ninety-sixth year, outliving many of more than 300 descendants.

Aunt Mary Ann spurns milk and spinach, preferring coffee, corn bread, butter beans and “spring water” as a longevity diet.

It appears to agree with the spry old lady who last week was visiting her niece, Mrs. W.H. Crawford, principal of P. K. Yonge School, and her granddaughter, Mrs. L. B. Kennedy, 1224 East Cervantes street.

Mrs. Kennedy is one of more than 300 of Mrs. Nelson's descendants who are living in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. Although the family congregates only for funerals and other special events, Mrs. Nelson estimated that her 10 children have given her 95 grandchildren, 53 of whom are living; 180 great-grand-children, with 86 still alive and 57 great-great-grand-children.

200 at Birthday

When Mrs. Nelson celebrated her ninety-fifth birthday last month, 200 of her relatives called at her home in Jay to wish her "many happy returns."

A native of Bluff Springs, Mrs. Nelson was born in 1851 and remembers climbing on the porch rail of her father's farmhouse to see the conquering Yankee soldiers march through Florida. Three of her brothers served in the Confederate forces with her father and two other brothers in the Home Guard.

John William Diamond, her father, set an age record for his daughter to equal. Although the family Bible recorded his death at the age of 96, other records showing that he served with Andrew Jackson in the war against the Indians indicate that Diamond may have been more than 100 when he died.

Records Confused

That records of his birth may be confused is understandable because the family legend is that John William Diamond was born on a houseboat while his parents were drifting from South Carolina to Florida to make their home in the southern wilderness.

Mrs. Nelson remembers spinning and weaving cloth from cotton grown on her father's farm during her youth. All 14 Diamond children were taught to work to help their Baptist parents who did not believe in slavery. Quilting is still one of Aunt Mary Ann's favorite pastimes to avoid sitting "doing nothing." "I like to go fishing, too, if somebody'll haul me down to the water."

Likes Spring Water

Aunt Mary Ann no longer works in the fields as she used to do, but she regularly carries her own spring water up the hill to her home because it's better than well water. Pensacola tap water also is inferior stuff, Aunt Mary Ann believes.

Although she enjoys automobile riding, Aunt Mary Ann is reluctant to accept an invitation to go flying with her pilot nephew High Gilmore, 1700 East Jordan Street. She told him, "that's too high for me."
