

Arthur Lionberger, at 105; was Rochester's oldest citizen

By Gloria Negri
GLOBE STAFF

Arthur Lionberger would recall in poetry how as a child in St. Louis he sat on the curb and watched President Theodore Roosevelt ride by in a parade.

In a poem titled, "Footsteps" he wrote: "As a child I watched a marching band/But was too young to understand/How others waving banners felt/Beholding Teddy Roosevelt."

Roosevelt was not the only famous figure Mr. Lionberger encountered or historic event he witnessed in more than a century.

His niece, Nancy Putnam of Marion, recalled him telling how he had watched the building of the Panama Canal in the early 1900s.

The legendary Mr. Lionberger, a writer, Princeton University graduate, a chicken farmer for many years, and Rochester's oldest citizen, died at his home on July 4. He was 105.

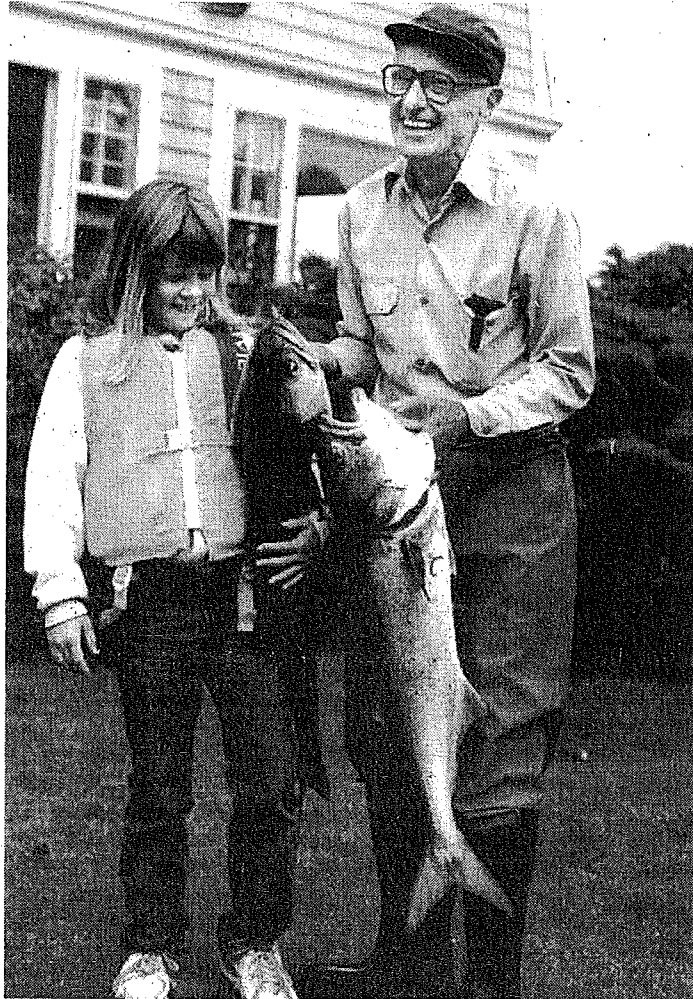
Mr. Lionberger, known by his family as Unc, aged with a sharp mind. He wrote "right to the end," Putnam said, writing a letter to another niece on his ancient typewriter just before he died. As Rochester's oldest resident, Mr. Lionberger had possession of a Boston Post Cane, first given by the now-defunct newspaper in 1909 to the oldest citizens in Massachusetts communities. A 2002 Globe story said Mr. Lionberger was given the cane at age 99. "He got three or four," said his grandniece, Leah Garcia of Durham, N.C. "He kept the last one in his hope chest."

He attributed his longevity to "no stress, eating a lot of fish — most of which he caught — and having the wherewithal to live as he wished," Putnam said.

He knew "every nook and cranny" of the waters off Marion where the fish were, friends said. He especially knew where to find the blues and stripers, said Garcia, who often fished with him off the pier in Marion. He was still fishing at 104.

At 100, Mr. Lionberger continued volunteering to entertain residents of nursing homes on his mandolin as a charter member of the Woodchoppers, a group of local musicians.

Sometimes Mr. Lionberger's



Arthur Lionberger and his great-great-grandniece Suzanne Smith were photographed with the catch of the day.

wife, Alene, sang with the band. "Without Arthur, Woodchoppers is gone," said Jeanette Pajunen of Wareham, who played the accordion with the group.

At 100, Mr. Lionberger, a small, slim man with gray hair and sparkling blue eyes, "was still bombing around Rochester and Marion in his stick-shift truck with no floor," Putnam said. That year, at his family's request, he reluctantly surrendered his license.

For more than 20 years, Mr. Lionberger brought readers into his wide world with poetry, book reviews, editorials, and columns published in the prize-winning former weekly newspaper, the Sipican Sentinel of Marion.

Lawrence P. Pangaro of Center Harbor, N.H., former editor and publisher of the Sentinel, said Mr. Lionberger joined him at the newspaper in 1966, starting out

with poetry and book reviews, then branching out to editorials, generally on national issues, and a weekly column he called "The Wise Owl" with the byline, Moronius.

His subjects ranged from memories of bygone days in Rochester and Marion to more immediate issues, for example, the Audubon Society's efforts to save the terns nesting on Bird Island in Marion Harbor from predatory gulls. His editorials on national events were provocative.

Mr. Lionberger was born in St. Louis, the youngest of six children of Isaac H. and Louise (Shepley) Lionberger. His father, a lawyer, was an assistant attorney general under President Grover Cleveland. His mother died when he was 6, Putnam said, and he was brought up by a nanny. He always loved reading and writing and hoped to

have a career in writing after graduating from Princeton University in 1922.

However, Putnam said, Mr. Lionberger's stutter caused him to pass up several job offers in the writing field. For a while, he worked in advertising. He traveled widely, including biking through Europe. He was drawn to the Boston area, she said, because two sisters had married Bostonians.

Mr. Lionberger bought a house in Rochester with a crooked floor and a historic barn, his niece said. He met local schoolteacher Alene DeLaura. They married in the early 1930s and moved into Mr. Lionberger's house. With no children, they traveled a lot. Also, they started a chicken farm, where they sold chickens and eggs locally.

Mrs. Lionberger died last year at 98.

Mr. Lionberger's "Footsteps" poem, his last written several years ago, was truly a summing up of his life: "Heaven has been good to me/But time has come to pack my trunk/And sign LAST WORDS/With love from Unc."

Besides his niece and grandniece, Mr. Lionberger leaves two nephews, two other nieces, and many grandnieces and grandnephews.

There will be a family memorial service July 24 on the Marion waterfront, where for so many years Mr. Lionberger cast his line.

After the service, Mr. Lionberger's ashes and those of his wife of 75 years will be buried in Point Road Memorial Forest in Marion.

In Brief

Mary C. Forshay

Mary Catherine (McCarthy) Forshay, a pediatric nurse with Massachusetts General Hospital and a breast cancer survivor, died Wednesday of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, known as Lou Gehrig's disease, in Melrose. She was 56.

Mrs. Forshay was born in Cambridge and grew up in Allston. She leaves her husband, Robert C. of Melrose; three sons, Christopher, Matthew, and Michael, all of Melrose; two sisters, Patricia M. Pugsley of Connecticut and Eileen A. McCarthy of Melrose; and a brother, Francis G. McCarthy of Allston.

A funeral Mass will be said today at 10 a.m. in St. Mary's Church

Janwillem van de Wetering, at 77;