

Exeter's Boston Post Cane awarded to Ottie E. Lowther

Lowther awarded Boston Post Cane

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EXETER — In 1909 Joan of Arc was declared a saint, Lincoln head pennies were minted and issued, the Wright brothers delivered the first military plane to the Army, and colored moving pictures were demonstrated at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

The year has more local significance as it saw the publisher of the Boston Post newspaper send a gold-tipped ebony cane to the boards of selectmen in more than 700 New England towns as a publicity stunt. The Boston Post canes were to be presented to the oldest male citizen of each town.

Now 101 years later, what began as a publicity stunt to drum up newspaper sales, has become an honored New England tradition.

On Friday, Aug. 20, in front of a crowd of more than 40 friends, family and well-wishers, Ottie E. Lowther, 101, became the proud recipient of Exeter's replica Boston Post Cane signifying his status as the oldest member of the community. The town's original cane rests within the Exeter Historical Society's building.

"Today we're proud to recognize you as Exeter's oldest living resident and we wish you all the best," said Town Manager Russ Dean.

"Congratulations Ottie" said Selectman Don Clement, who presented the cane to Lowther, "It's a great honor to present this to you."

Lowther's daughter, Mary Palmer, addressed the assembled crowd in the Nowak Room of the Town Offices saying, "I think that everyone wanted to be here to help celebrate.

"He's befriended so many people and they've all been a great part of his life," Palmer said.

The scene was a slightly more personal affair than Lowther's 100th birthday celebration where he was joined by more than 100 people.

Born the fourth of five children in East Leicester, Nova Scotia, to Fredrick and Josephine Lowther, Ottie came to Exeter in 1929 to reside with his sister, Ora Bitomski. In 1936, Lowther married Mildred Tilton, a nurse from East Kingston, and together they raised three daughters and one son: Muriel Bodwell of Seminole, Fla.; Margaret Harrell of Providence Forge, Va.; Mary Palmer of Exeter, and Robert of Exeter. Lowther also has seven grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Sadly, Mildred died in 1996.

Lowther's granddaughter Leigh Burley of Exeter said her fondest memories of her grandfather were of watching him construct the various contraptions and machines he has a natural talent for creating. From the double transmission ATV he built long before they were marketed, dubbed the "Jed Clampett Mobile," to a lift for a young neighbor who was paralyzed from a motorcycle accident and even the home on Epping Road that he still resides in to this day in 1941.

Burley recalled summers spent at the family camp on Pleasant Lake in Deerfield where Lowther would shoot a cannon off on the Fourth of July, and lobster and clam bakes.

One particular story that stands out for Burley is when she saw her grandfather rescue herself and her mother

(Palmer) on a particularly harsh Thanksgiving day.

"We lived in Exeter, not far away from our grandparents, and my mother was in charge of making the turkey and there was so much snow on Thanksgiving that he had to come get us on the snowmobile," she said. "Turkey and all."

Janice Realy, who has known Lowther her entire life, has spent the last year living in an apartment above his home and serving as his caregiver.

Realy said the pair toughened out the winter heating the home with the wood stove Lowther himself had crafted.

"We survived the winter by watching old cowboy movies and making each other laugh and sharing every dinner together," she said.

While not a man of many words, she said Lowther is keenly observant and when he does speak it usually can be quite funny.

"His sense of humor is your quintessential dry New England sense of humor," said Realy.

When asked how he felt about receiving not only the cane but all the attention that came with it, Lowther said he was still trying to comprehend everything that was going on.

"I couldn't believe it," said Lowther on receiving word he was the oldest living resident in town. "I didn't think I'd ever get that old."

Asked to name some of the best experiences he has had over the past century Lowther said, in typically brief and humorous fashion, "You don't have time to hear them all."