

spring 2010

Wesley Towers tapestry

Wesley Towers resident Florence King Fink is shown second from left in the top photo. Her husband Floyd Cornelius Taggart is shown second from left in the bottom photo.



A Century Of Living - Wesley Towers 2010

Two girls entered the world at the beginning of the 20th Century. At that time, horsepower meant their dads were hitching up their horses to take the buggy to church. A full moon helped bolster the light of a kerosene lantern while they helped their mothers clean up the supper dishes. A teddy bear was a newfangled toy named in honor of their President Theodore Roosevelt.

At the beginning of the 1900s, they couldn't have dreamed that horsepower would someday boost a space shuttle into outer space. They couldn't know that

the Man in the Moon of nursery rhymes would become a Man on the moon in the 1960s. During their lifetimes, the U.S. would be governed by 19 different presidents..

The late 106-year-old Florence Fink Taggart and 105-year-old Estella Schrock Lewis are Wesley Towers' two oldest residents. Neither believes she has a special story to share. But their story is the story of the U.S. through the 20th Century, through the eyes of two who

They experienced World Wars, the Depression and dusted the furniture during the Dust Bowl years. They experienced the widespread electrification of homes and businesses.

lived through the landmarks of more than 100 years. While many of the events they experienced are the stuff of history books, it is how those changes directly impacted their own lives and families that made the biggest impression.

They experienced World Wars, the Depression and dusted the furniture during the Dust Bowl years. They experienced the widespread electrification of homes and businesses. They answered everything from telephone party lines to princess phones to cell phones. They went from roads fit for a buggy to the superhighway called the Internet. Both agree it was an amazing time to be alive. So, come along for the journey, looking at some of the landmarks of history and how it impacted two women (At the beginning of each section, we'll set the stage by summarizing just a few of the advances during the decade.) Much of the information for Florence was handwritten in her life story, a project she completed with other Wesley Towers residents in a series of classes led by activity director, Nevada Dauber, prior to Florence's death on Feb. 7, 2010. Estella shared her remembrances from her 4th floor Wesley Towers apartment, where she still lives independently at age 105.

1900-1909

1903: Ford Motor Company produces its first car - the Ford Model A.

1903: The Wright brothers fly

at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

1904: The U.S. began construction on the Panama Canal (completed in 1914)

1906: The Victor Talking Machine Company releases the Victrola, the most popular gramophone model until the late 1920s.

1908: The Model T Ford is introduced, the first "affordable" automobile.



Florence

It was a dark and stormy Friday night when Florence King Fink came into the world on April 17, 1903, just a few months before the Wright brothers' famous flight. The first child of parents Elwood and Gertrude Fink, Florence was delivered at the family home in Philadelphia, Pa. The doctor and nurse who attended the birth left the horse and buggy parked in the street in

the snow, causing raised eyebrows among neighbors who were concerned about the horse's welfare.

"I weighed a hefty 8 pounds, with blue eyes and no hair," Florence wrote in her autobiography. At age 3, the family (which then included a younger brother) moved to Denver, Colo., in hopes that the climate would help her father, who had tuberculosis.

At that time, Denver was about the size of Hutchinson, Florence wrote. Her family had a car, but they also rode a streetcar, since there was a stop at the end of their block.

"My father loved good music," she wrote. "We had a gramophone with lots of records to play. This instrument was the same as a Victrola, a fine musical box (see timeline above). I can still remember hearing some famous singers and operas."

As a young girl, she played with dolls and blocks. Outside, she jumped rope with friends and played hopscotch, making squares on the sidewalk with chalk.

Estella

While firstborn daughter Florence was born in the big city, Estella Schrock was the last child born to farmers Joseph and Fannie Schrock at their rural Sterling home on October 21, 1904. Estella was the fifth of their children, which included two other girls and two boys.

"I played outdoors a lot with my sister," Estella remembered. "We made lots of

In 1912, the “unsinkable” ocean liner RMS Titanic struck an iceberg and sank on its maiden voyage.



Aunt Estella - Martha Elise - Alice Schreck



Aunt Estella - Martha Elise - Alice Schreck

mud pies. We also liked to play school.” Even though Estella was the younger by a year and a half, the two took turns playing pupil and teacher.

Most of their time was spent on the farm, producing primarily wheat and alfalfa. As with most farm families of the time, the majority of their food came from their large garden and the livestock they raised.

“I remember having to get up at 5 o’clock in the morning to milk the cows,” Estella said. “I did the normal chores that a child had to do – carrying wood in for the stove, pulled weeds in the garden, set and cleared the table, helped my mother in the kitchen and learned to cook. I had older sisters, so I didn’t really learn to sew as much.”

On occasion, they hitched up the carriage to the two horses and headed the 7 miles to Sterling on a Saturday night. On Sundays, the family was gathered in the

pews of the Missionary Bible Church or the Mennonite Church, both about 3 miles from the farmstead.

“After church, we would usually have company over for dinner or we would go to someone’s house,” Estella recalled. “I liked playing with my friends.”

1910-1919

1912: The “unsinkable” ocean liner RMS Titanic strikes an iceberg and sinks on its maiden voyage.

1914-1918: World War I dominates the Western world.

1918-1920: The Spanish flu killed 20 to 100 million people worldwide.

The Ford Model T dominates the automobile market, selling more than all other makers combined in 1914.

Radio programming becomes popular.

Florence

During this decade Florence had several “sightings” of famous people and events.

“I saw President Theodore Roosevelt wave from the back of the train when going through Denver,” Florence wrote. “I was very young, so it is more of an impression than a vivid memory. The memory I have most is the statement my 4-year-old brother made when he remarked that he did not see any teddy bear. The toy had just been called by name due to the president’s nickname, and it was a very popular toy.”

Several years later, Florence

saw President Taft waving from the back of a train.

“My memory of him was of a short, heavyset man with a ready smile,” Florence wrote.

But it was a natural occurrence, rather than a presidential visit, that made the biggest impression for Florence.

“One vivid memory is my father showing my brother Frank and me Halley’s Comet one dark night. It was an awesome sight to a little girl (Though Florence doesn’t record the date, Halley’s Comet was seen in April 1910, when she would have been 7 years old. Halley’s Comet again appeared in 1986, when Florence was 83 years old.)

While the comet streaking across the night sky created a lifetime memory, “World War I had very little influence on my personal life,” Florence wrote. “During that time, I was 14 to 16 years old, and no one in the family was in the Army.” However, her father was a certified public ac-



The stock market crash of 1929 devastated economies across the world and marks the beginning of the Great Depression.

countant in Denver. During World War I, he was hired as an accountant for a large Eastern firm which was mining tungsten and ore in Colorado for the Army.

Like most teenagers, Florence was interested in being with friends.

"When I was a teenager in Denver, my friends and I would go to a certain theater to watch a serial movie. It was always a Saturday matinee. There would be scenes of current events shone at first, then the movie. The heroine would have all kinds of adventures and the last scene was when she was tied to a railroad track or similar precarious situation. The train was coming to her, then the movie would stop and say, 'Continued next week.' We had to go next week. The words were on the screen. Any picture with Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks was a must!"

It was during her family's summer trip to Estes Park, Colo., 15-year-old Florence would meet the boy who would later become her husband. Topeka teenager Floyd Taggart worked during the summers at the campgrounds.

But it wasn't all play. Florence rode to classes at East Denver High School on a trolley car. After four years there, her parents sent her to Mary Lyon School, a boarding school on the campus of Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania.

Estella

For school, the Schrock children were picked up by a horse and a hack, which Estella describes as a horse-drawn school bus. They were transported about 3 miles to Union 5 school, a schoolhouse with four classrooms for students through 8th grade.

Estella was 9 or 10 when the family traded their team and carriage for the new Model T Ford.



"It was a big deal," Estella said.

For high school, Estella and her sister, Elsie, came to Hutchinson to a Christian school, Brezee College.

"I suppose it was somewhat unusual for my parents to send us to Hutchinson, but they wanted us to attend a church school," Estella recalled. The two were boarders with a Hutchinson family and attended classes at the school on East 4th Street.

For Estella, World War I hit close to home.

"My brother, Frank Schrock, was in the Army. He was based at Fort Riley and we would drive to see him. I do remember one thing that

was rationed was sugar. I'm sure there were other things rationed, but I'm not sure what. As a child, you don't pay as much attention to things like that."

1920-1929

Often referred to as the Roaring Twenties or the Jazz Age.

The major sport was baseball and the most famous player was Babe Ruth.

Stock market crash of 1929 devastates economies across the world and marks the beginning of the Great Depression.

Women's suffrage movement continues to make gains.

Florence

While Florence had enjoyed her time as a student Back East, she returned to Denver University for college in the fall of 1922, majoring in English and psychology and a minor in religion. Floyd Taggart attended the Colorado Medical School in Denver. The two were married June 10, 1927, after Florence graduated from college and Floyd was in his second year as a medical student. They began their married life near the place they met. Floyd was serving as a park ranger at Bear Lake in Colorado during the summers off from medical school.

"No running water, but a bubbly stream right near the cabin," Florence recalled. "It was a bit primitive, but we were young and in love, so life was wonderful."

Between 1935 and 1939, the number of farms using electric services more than doubled.

After Floyd graduated from medical school, they moved to California for his further training.

Estella



After Estella's graduation from high school in 1923, the Schrocks traveled from Kansas to Los Angeles in their Model T Ford to visit friends. Along the way, they slept in tents at campgrounds, cooking over a camp fire. It was a trip full of discoveries: It was the first time Estella and her sister Elsie had ever seen the mountains or the ocean. It also launched her career.

"My parents' friend arranged for a job for me, so I stayed behind when they returned to Kansas," Estella said. "I worked in the office of an architect for 2 ½ years. Then, when my father got sick, I took the train back to Hutchinson."

Estella worked as a stenographer and bookkeeper at the Farmers Cooperative Commission Co., based at the Wiley Building.

As a young single woman, Estella felt fortunate just to

have a job when the stock market crashed in 1929.

"I did have to take a pay cut," Estella said. "I had been making about \$100 a month, and then I was reduced to about \$12 a week. But it was a job."

1930-1939

Sometimes referred to as the Dirty Thirties, the first few years of the decade were marked by the Great Depression.

Amelia Earhart receives major attention in the 1930s as the first woman pilot to conduct major air flights. Her disappearance for unknown reasons in 1937 while on flight prompted search efforts which failed.

1936: Kodachrome is invented, being the first color film made by Eastman Kodak.

1936: United States Congress adopts the Rural Electrification Act. Between 1935 and 1939, the number of farms using electric services more than doubled.

Florence

This is the decade that Florence became a mother, giving birth to three daughters – Nancy, Mary and Ruth.

In 1932, the young mother felt empathy for famous aviator Charles Lindbergh and his wife, Anne, whose 20-month-old son and Charles' namesake was kidnapped.

"People used to tell me how pretty Nancy was with her yellow curls and blue eyes. It was the same time

the Lindbergh baby was kidnapped, and he had that same hair and eyes, so people would think of him when seeing Nancy."

Motherhood has held great rewards, Florence said.

"The accomplishment of which I am most proud is the raising of our three daughters," Florence wrote. "We, my husband and I, gave them all the love we had, but with it good advice, firm discipline, a fine Christian knowledge and a happy experience. We tried to instill fine moral standards and trust. We tried to be a good example, but respected their choices in life. ... I am proud of them, and if I have accomplished something acceptable, I am happy and grateful. The bottom line is love and happiness and faith."

The Depression changed plans for the Taggarts. They were in California, living near Florence's parents. But after the birth of their first baby, the young couple traveled to Topeka to visit Floyd's parents.

"When we arrived in Topeka, he was met by the doctor who had influenced my husband to go into medicine," Florence wrote. "He said, 'There is an office here for you. My partner and I will help you get started, so you had better stay.' Since it was the Depression and we had no doctors in California to help us get started, we stayed."

"Money was tight, but fruits and vegetables were plentiful from grateful pa-

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wesley towers tapestry

tients," Florence wrote. "We were at the bottom and could do nothing but go up."

Estella

Estella began working for United Power & Light. A bookkeeper there seemed to take a special interest in the meters – or perhaps the secretary in the room where the meters were stored, Estella admits. In 1935, Estella married that bookkeeper - Phillip Lewis - in a ceremony at her parents' home in Hutchinson. They would celebrate their 49th wedding anniversary before Phillip died.

While this decade brought a great change in Estella's personal life, it also brought landmark changes in U.S. culture.

"I'd say some of the biggest advances were getting electricity," said Estella. Since they lived in Hutchinson, they had electricity much sooner than the neighbors Estella grew up with on the Sterling farm. Electricity changed how people lived their lives. One of the biggest changes was in refrigeration, Estella said.

"When we lived on the farm, we would get ice, 300 pounds at a time," Estella said. "We would have to put it in the ice box to keep the food cold." Prior to refrigerators becoming commonplace in kitchens, much of the produce and meat produced on the farm was canned and stored at room temperature, Estella said.

(continued in next issue)

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