

Native Daughters' oldest member to celebrate 105

By Ian Hill
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STOCKTON — Virgie Oberg spent part of her youth in a log home without electricity, indoor plumbing or a telephone.

Today, she keeps up with her friends via e-mail from the Rio Las Palmas retirement center on March Lane.

Oberg will celebrate her 105th birthday Sunday with a small party at the Morada home of her granddaughter, Denise Mayfield.

Oberg is the oldest member of the Native Daughters of the Golden West, a fraternal organization that does community projects and works to preserve California's pioneer history.

Native Daughters of the Golden West has about 7,000 members. Oberg belongs to the organization's Yosemite Parlor No. 187 in Fresno, where she spent most of her life.

Oberg's ties to California's pioneer past make her an important part of the organization, Yosemite Parlor President Karen Fini said.

"When you think about it,

1900 doesn't sound like a long time ago, but it was," Fini said.

Oberg gets around using a motorized chair, but her mind and memory are still sharp.

She said her family moved around California when she was a child, and she recalled taking a donkey-drawn cart to school during her elementary years near Exeter, east of Visalia.

Her ancestors had led a wagon train to California from Missouri in 1850. They later settled on a 160-acre homestead in Palo Verde in Southern California, where they built a log home that had walls plastered together with mud.

The closest high school was in Blythe, about 20 miles away. Oberg lived with a family in Blythe during high school and worked to pay for her room and board.

"I washed a million diapers to go to school," Oberg said. She also spent the holiday season addressing Christmas cards at a mission to make money.

The high school was turned into a hospital during the 1918 flu epidemic, and Oberg said her 16-year-old sister, Edith, died on a cot in the school lying next

to their mother, who also was sick.

Oberg finished high school and attended Heald College in Riverside before returning to Blythe to work. She met her husband, Harry, in 1920, and the couple lived in San Diego and La Jolla before settling in Fresno, where she worked as a legal secretary and he ran a construction business.

They also had a daughter, Esther.

When they eventually retired, the Obergs traveled the world, visiting China, India, Italy and Egypt, among other countries. Virgie Oberg spent her 65th birthday in Paris. Her husband died in 1971, and 20 years later, their daughter passed away.

Virgie has lived in Rio Las Palmas since 1994.

"She wakes up every morning and says, 'God forgot to pick me up,'" Mayfield said. "I don't want to live without her. She's my support system."

Fini added, "We hope we have her for a long time."

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Stockton resident Virgie Oberg, left, will celebrate her 105th birthday Sunday with granddaughter Denise Mayfield and other family members.