

▼ A LIFE IN 3 CENTURIES



Gazette photo/BOB ZELLAR

**Anna Lawson, 100, has seen many changes since her birth July 20, 1899, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.**

## Woman, 100, recalls time when life was family, home

By **SUSAN OLP**  
Of The Gazette Staff

Anna Lawson has lived in three different centuries, yet she measures life not by milestones but instead takes each day as it comes.

Anna, who was born July 20, 1899, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, now lives in the retirement section of St. John's Nursing Home in Billings.

In her lifetime, 18 United States presidents have been sworn into office. Five states have been added to the union. Jets now transport people across the Atlantic Ocean in a matter of hours, but in 1900, automobiles were still a relatively new phenomenon. One in every 13 houses had a telephone in 1900, according to Time magazine, and the life expectancy was 47 years. A pound of sugar cost 4 cents and a pound of butter cost 24 cents. You could buy a Brownie camera for \$1.



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## Lawson

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Asked to recall her past, Anna spent a few moments on New Year's Day reminiscing about moments in her life. Seated in her wheelchair wearing a green cotton dress and tan shoes, the 100-year-old woman spoke in a clear voice, her eyes bright and alert. She wears glasses only for reading.

A photo to her right showed her surrounded by family during her 100th birthday party last summer. A nearby shelf holds other mementos.

Anna is the only child in her family who is still alive, she said. She was born to Louis and Ethel Lantz, the second oldest of five boys and two girls.

Her family moved to Lincoln, Neb., eight months after Anna was born. Her father was a passenger conductor with Burlington Northern, which meant that the family could travel by rail back to Iowa to visit family.

"That wasn't such a good thing for Anna.

"I got train sick, so it wasn't enjoyable," she said. "It's not much fun traveling when you're heaving."

Around town, she remembered, people traveled by street cars and

horse-pulled conveyances. By age 10, she helped her mother care for the family's newborn twins. In school, she liked spelling and arithmetic.

She didn't participate in sports, though.

"Girls didn't play sports in those days," Anna said.

She didn't lose any family in World War I, "but my older brother lost a couple of pals," Anna said.

By the time the Depression hit, Anna had married Boyd Lawson and the couple had two little boys.

"That was hard," she said. "I remember a lot of men who were in the WPA, standing on the street corner with not much to do. But at least they got paid."

A job transfer brought the Lawson family to Billings in 1936. Boyd was a traveling salesman, going all over Montana and parts of Wyoming.

"Airport Road seemed like a mountain to me when I moved here from Nebraska," Anna said.

She remembered shopping at department stores such as Cole's and Hart-Albin. Her boys attended McKinley Elementary, Lincoln Junior High and Senior High.

"I remember when Senior was built at Fifth Street West," Anna said.

"That was about the west edge of town. When they built it, I said

"why are they building it all the way out there?"

Life was filled with raising a family and being a homemaker.

"In those days, girls quit their jobs when they got married," he said.

Her family has blossomed to include a growing number of descendants. Anna has a little trouble recalling exactly how many.

Her husband is dead now. Her son Boyd lives in Billings, while Anna's other son, Don, lives in Seattle. Anna moved to St. John's in 1983.

At first, she was pretty active in the retirement community.

"I used to belong to everything out here," she said. "I was president of the Friendship Club for about five years."

Now she lives a quiet life, frequently watching TV and eating meals in the dining room. She likes quiz shows. "Jeopardy" is one of her favorites, along with "Wheel of Fortune."

Asked the secret of her longevity, Anna talks about her outlook on life.

"I never think about tomorrow," she said. "I just take it a day at a time."

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