

108 today; county's oldest?

BY JIMMY PIANKA
Staff Writer

Here's hoping Brethren Village Retirement Community bought a gargantuan cake for today's birthday celebration.

Ellen "Dolly" Barber, who today turns 108, may well be the county's oldest living person. She remains in good health and bright spirits, mobile on her walker and eager for news of her family.

"She still loves being a lady," granddaughter Kathy Morgan said.

Barber was born in 1903 to a family of German descent near Eden. Her father owned the former Eden Tavern.

Barber mischievously recalls stealing his car as a child and careening down a hill into a barn. She



Ellen "Dolly" Barber

Photo see 106, page B2

108: 'Dolly' Barber

Continued from B1

would never drive again.

Her family later moved to Prince Street in Lancaster, and at 16 years old she spent several months working at The Farnum Cotton Mills.

"I didn't like it there," she said. "All the little pieces would fly around and get in your hair."

The mills, which employed a large number of German immigrants during their century of production, now house the Water Street Rescue Mission and offices of the city school district.

At 18, she married her neighbor, Thomas Barber, who then was working as a reporter for the Lancaster New Era. He eventually became the editor of the New Era's Sunday edition and served in that position for many years.

When Barber was 30 years old, she and her husband moved into a duplex on State Street. At that time, their house looked onto an apple orchard.

She proudly assumed the role of housewife and managed the family funds. Her investments were so sound that they support her assisted living to this day.

When asked about her life's best years, Barber cited her entire marriage.

"They were crazy about each other," Morgan said. Together they enjoyed the many perks of her husband's journalism connections, most notably an invitation to tea with first ladies Jacqueline Kennedy and Lady Bird Johnson. Barber and her husband also visited Cuba before the embargo.

They had a son, John. During his freshman year at Franklin & Marshall College, he enlisted in the military and departed for World War II. Barber wrote to him diligently, but she grew worried when he failed to respond. She remedied this by writing to his commanding officer, who then ordered young John to write his mother a letter while he watched.

John eventually attended Georgetown University and worked at law firm Barley, Stryker, Cooper & Barber as an attorney.

When her husband passed away, Barber stayed on in their State Street home and dedicated herself to its renovation and redecoration. She remained there until just before her 104th birthday, when she moved to Brethren Village.

She lives there today, and still wears a string of pearls.
jpianka@tpnews.com