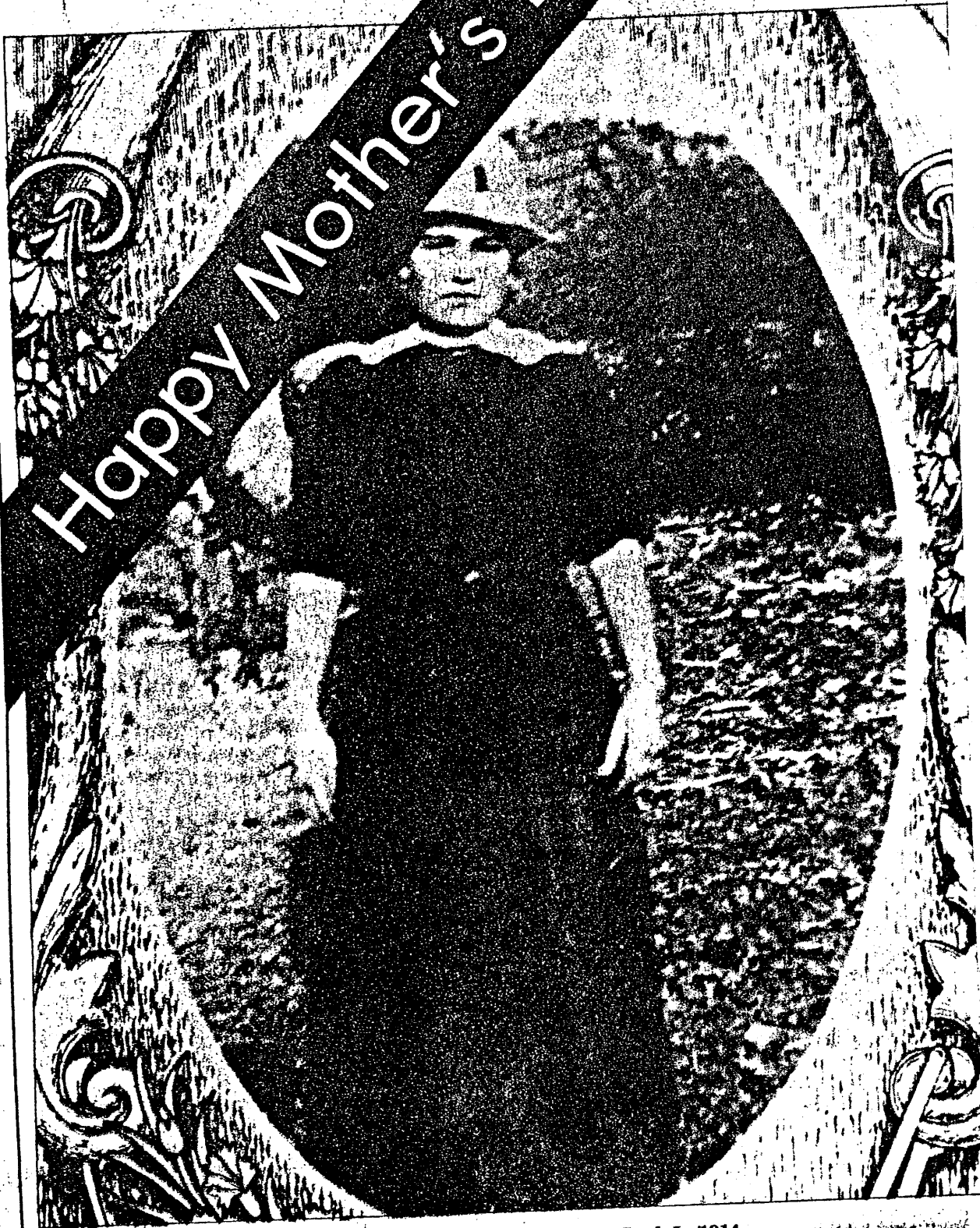


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BRISTOL HERALD COURIER • BRISTOL VIRGINIA-TENNESSEAN

Happy Mother's Day



Golden Gertrude Elizabeth White Cook In 1914
At the Age Of 18, Two Years After She Married
Smith Cook And One Year After She Became A Mother

TODAY'S LIVING

Sunday, May 13, 1984—Section E

In The
Beginning...



Henry Smith, 22 Years Of Age And His Wife, Gerrie, 17 Years Old,
Sitting With Their First-Born Son, Turner

13 May 1984

To Everyone...

She's The Grande

By PHIL TIMP

ABINGDON, Va. — They call her "Maw." That says it all.

Golden Gertrude Elizabeth Katherine White Cook, 87, is the grandest mother of all today. She is the mother of an even 100 descendants, the newest being three-week-old LaTonia Mae Jones, five generations removed, whom "Gertie" snuggles to her bosom as naturally as if the newborn were her own.

She can be justifiably proud of nine children of her own; 32 grandchildren, 49 great-grandchildren and 10 great-great-grandchildren.

"There's nothing in this world I love better than a little baby," says this southern-born, God-fear-

ing woman whose grayish white hair is pulled up on top of her head, framing it in a halo.

That's Gertie Cook, good as gold, with her only weakness being the corncob pipe she has smoked since 1927 after a country doctor suggested it to her as a cure for her asthma.

She admits the pipe isn't doing much good any more; old age has her in its grasp. Gertie clutches to a cane and, even then, feels as though her legs, swollen with phlebitis, are slipping out from under her, although she still tends to a garden and manages to get her share of meat-and-potato meals on the table every day. One grandson put it this way: "She always feels

a solution to any problem is a good stomach of food."

"I hop around and do what I can," Gertie says. "I've been a hard worker all my life, but I've kind of had to quit."

But where the flesh is weakening, the spirit remains strong.

Gertie won't soften her staunch beliefs in the way life should be lived. Baptized a Christian in Russell County's Moccasin Creek too long ago for her to remember, she holds fast to truths that got her this far in life.

Ask her about liquor, and she'll respond in no uncertain terms that it is "the devil in a bottle" and "the biggest enemy the U.S. has."

She has no use for television or radio, but instead prefers settling in at night with a copy of the Bible.

"It seems to me it's a different world now," she says, a quizzical look spreading across her face. "Neighbors never seem to have time to visit neighbors."

It is a difficult adjustment for a woman who grew up during an era in which a close family was the very key to survival.

Golden Gertie was born Jan. 30, 1897, at home in Clintwood, Va.

She was the oldest of 10 children, born to a tenant farmer and his wife, and took on her share of maternal responsibilities early, after the family moved to Russell County, Va.

Finding time for school among the daily drudgery of farmwork that paid 50 cents a day was difficult, but Gertie managed to squeeze in enough classes at several small county schoolhouses to earn a fourth-grade education.

"I can read and write and count a little bit," she says unabashedly.

Shy of her 16th birthday, Gertie, a pint-sized woman at four feet 10 inches tall, married a neighborhood sweetheart, Henry Smith Cook, in October 1912 at a country store in Hansonville, Va., about a dozen miles from the home she rents now off Route 58 just outside



The Rev. Robert Cross, The Minister
Who Married The Cooks
Sits On The Front Porch Of His Store,
Also The Site Of The Wedding Of Henry Smith Cook And
Gertie White

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est Mother Of All

the town limits here. She excuses herself for marrying at such a tender age, saying, "Sure, I oughta been older, but I was young and didn't have no mind."

Less than a year later, the couple gave birth to John Turner Cook, who, at age 71, sits with Gertie today during this visit, along with more than a half dozen other relatives who have gathered to help her reminisce and to sing "Maw's" praises.

"No matter how bad the situation is with her children, she never turns her back on them," said grandson Leonard Cook, 48, who has kept up with the family's history.

"Always truthful, always honest" is the way Leonard's brother, Frank, described his grandmother. "She's always willing to help with any kind of problem."

"I've always called her 'Mom-

mie,'" said Frank's wife, Margaret. "Not all mothers-in-law are mean, you know."

"She taught me religion and how to be good to everybody else."

And what does Gertie Cook think of herself as a mother who has weathered the joys and heartaches brought on by four generations of children? "I feel like I've done all I can do. I've told them the best I know how and now it's up to them."



Gertie And Her 100th Descendent, LaTonia Mae Jones