

## Congratulations Justine Taylor!

By Sam Whitmore

Ninety-year-old Justine Taylor now has the title of "oldest citizen of Starks" -- and a new cane to prove it.

Well, it isn't actually new. Carrying on a tradition that began more than a century ago, Starks leaders this month presented a black ebony cane to Justine, the mother of five and a longtime resident of Poor Farm Road. Inscribed in its gold top: "Presented by the Boston Post to the oldest citizen of Starks, Maine."

The Post donated 700 canes to towns all across New England back in the day, partly to build good word-of-mouth and partly to sell some extra papers.

How did Justine feel on her big day? "Nice... because my children were here, except one of my girls, who was out of state," she says.

First selectman Paul Frederic, who happens to be Justine's nephew, personally presented his aunt with the storied black stick. He has seen at least four citizens receive the cane over the years.

The town learned a good lesson back in the 1950s, Paul recalls, when the then-oldest citizen in town, Barlow Nichols, decided in a fit of practicality to use the precious cane as a stove poker. Lest such a civic heirloom go up in smoke, Starks repossessed the original cane and invested in a replica. The original cane (see photo) remains to this day safely inside a fireproof vault in the Starks town offices.

It's the replica that Justine now keeps in her bedroom. Justine says she'd never use it as a poker, or even for its more traditional purpose, stating that she uses "no walker, no cane, no nothing."

The Boston Post's "promotional gimmick" of bestowing the cane to a senior citizen "ironically outlived the newspaper itself," Paul notes. The Post went out of business in the 1950s.

As for Justine, she plans to just keep going, working in her yard once the weather allows it, and eating as well as she can.

"It seems as though time has gone by so fast, you didn't even see it."

