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News Feature

SURRY

The Weekly Packet, November 4, 2010

Surry's Boston Post Cane presented to Viola Buzzell

by Jonathan Thomas

As the town's oldest citizen, 95-year old Viola Buzzell is the latest to receive Surry's Boston Post gold-headed cane. Born in Massachusetts in 1915, Buzzell said she was 3 years old when her family moved to Surry's Toddy Pond Road, an area where she has lived for most of her life.

Selectmen Stephen Bemiss and Dale Sprinkle presented the cane to her on October 28 in a ceremony attended by three of her four children.

According to the written citation from the selectmen, Surry's Boston Post Cane is one of 431 distributed in 1909 to selectmen in towns around New England by the newspaper's publisher, Edwin Grozier. He instructed that it be presented to the oldest male resident of each town, and then be handed on to the next oldest resident at the previous holder's death. (In 1930 women became eligible to receive the cane.)

Each original cane has a two-inch long 14-carat gold head. The cane shaft is made of ebony from Africa. Over the years, some of the 431 original canes have been lost, stolen, or accidentally destroyed.

Several years ago, Surry had cane replicas made so that, after a presentation, the original cane is returned to a display rack in the town office and the replica is left



Viola Buzzell displays her replica of Surry's Boston Post Cane, given to her as the town's oldest citizen. In a ceremony a few days before, Buzzell was presented with the town's original cane. Afterward, the original was returned to a display rack in the town office and Buzzell was given this replica.

By Jonathan Thomas

with the recipient.

During an interview this week, Buzzell said she was pleased to be able to put her hand on the real gold handle during the ceremony.

In talking about her childhood, Buzzell described the two-mile walks to a red schoolhouse—no longer existing—that used to be at the corner of Cunningham Ridge Road. Later she attended the schoolhouse that is still standing at the village end of Toddy Pond Road.

The mud season in the days of unpaved roads was a serious matter, said Buzzell, especially through a wooded area near her home. School would be closed after Christmas and not reopen until late in March because travel was so difficult.

Buzzell said that after receiving her grammar school diploma at about age 15, she went to work in Ellsworth, doing home care and housekeeping work in several homes, and sending money back to her mother and family on Toddy Pond Road.

During the depression in the Roosevelt years, she worked for a time in Washington County. Buzzell said she does not regret that she has not traveled very much in her life, saying that much of the time she was too busy to even think about it very much.

Commenting on her generally good health, she attributed it to her hard work during so much of her life. “Hard work keeps you going,” she said. Knitting and crocheting are her main activities now.

She no longer raises goats and angora rabbits, and has a dog and cat to keep her company.

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