

# Gresham boarding house right out of storybooks

Esther Maness runs a boarding house for grandmothers.

"It doesn't have a name—it's just home," the 71-year-old, white-haired proprietor said, laugh lines lighting up her face.

It is a home Esther shares with 18 women from 60 to 90. They pay for room and board.

The hugs come free.

Esther gets up in time to serve individually cooked breakfasts to her guests. She totes a tray to each between 5 and 6 o'clock.

"The dishes are done by 7," she said. "I like the early morning hours. It's a time for me to be by myself and feed my birds and fish."

She and her granddaughter, Jenell Hays, who's worked at the boarding house since she was 8, and a Mt. Hood Community College student share cooking and clean-up duties for the 11:30 a.m. dinner and 4:30 p.m. supper.

It is hearty fare. At Friday's dinner, there was tossed salad, fish fillets (They weren't hard to clean), baked potato, carrots, green beans, bread and butter, cake and ice cream, tea or coffee.

Esther shops around; she has to, what with today's prices. Some years she's put up 800 to 1,000 quarts of fruits and vegetables for herself and "the girls."

"We have fried chicken and homemade peach or apple pie every Sunday. It's something they can count on," Esther said. "I usually bake the pies Saturday night and Bob comes over to help fry the chicken."

Bob Hays is Esther's working partner and her fifth of seven children.

A fifth grade teacher at Wilkes School, Bob takes time out to wash windows, fry chicken, mow lawn, fix leaky faucets and generally make himself useful around the one-

acre plot.

It is a boarding house right out of the storybooks. The house on 10th and Roberts went on the tax rolls in 1899, and was the home of Gresham Mayor Charles Cleveland and his family.

"We put in the sidewalks. You used to have to put on your boots to go to the mailbox," Esther explained on a tour of the well-kept grounds that insulate the old house from the busy streets.

Most of the residents live in adjacent cottages, although some live in the upstairs in the big house with Esther.

"We have three rules," one resident said with a chuckle. "No smoking, no drinking, no men."

In fact, Esther nailed a "No Smoking" sign right on the front door, but she says men are welcome to visit.

"Sometimes people ask me if they know of a place just like mine where smoking is allowed. I tell them I sure don't."

It isn't a place for myriad rules.

"Everybody kind of does her own thing," Esther explained. "Some have their own little gardens. Some do quilting and sewing in their own rooms. There's no arguments about what TV program to watch because everyone has her own TV in her little apartment."

It's the kind of place you wish your grandmother could live in when she doesn't want to fix her own meals anymore.

"Sometimes some of the girls have to go to nursing homes when they can't take care of themselves anymore," Esther said sadly, then brightened, "but some of them still think they're living with me."

Esther said it's the love of her children that's kept her going through the years.

Besides Bob, there are two sons living in Tacoma, Wash., Bill, a former minister who is now a real estate broker, and Duane, also in real estate.

John works for the railroad and lives in Portland.

Three daughters, Betty Kipers, Clara Palmblad and Donna Brand, all live in the Gresham area.

Esther answers "Grandma" to 25 and will soon have 20 great-grandchildren.

She has her own formula for being a parent:

"I told my children God gave them a mind and He's watching them, and I'm trusting them. There's no reason for a lot of rules."

The family has lived in Oregon since 1939. Esther has lived through some grim times, taking in washing during the Depression.

She first began taking in boarders in 1950 in a house on Main Street. She and her first husband were separated, then divorced, and her second husband lived only a month after they were married.

She also worked at W.R. Hicks department store for four years and the wall of the study has a 1948 certificate which marks her completion of a course on the Art of Corset Fitting.

When the children were grown and married, Esther returned to school to become a licensed practical nurse. She worked two years at Gresham Community Hospital before going back to the boarding house business in 1960.

Esther's place is not a nursing home.

"A man came out to tell me what I'd have to do to have a nursing home," Esther recalled. "I decided I wouldn't make this into an institution even if I had to live here by myself."

One ponders how so many women with minds of their own can get along. It probably has to do with Esther's acceptance of people where they are.

"I don't know if I've ever met a stranger," she said. "What people get here is peace and tranquility. You have to live each day at a time and be as happy as possible."

Besides cooking and cleaning, Esther also does the laundry for all her guests.

"It's an everyday thing, but not hard to do," she said.

Admitting she sometimes catches an afternoon catnap, Esther sighs when she thinks of all her unfinished projects. The house is filled with her creations. She makes rock tables, lazy susans and seed and wildlife pictures.

She has two outbuildings where she slices rocks on a diamond-edged saw and puts together the rocky works of art. "This is my playhouse," she said happily.

Another hobby is her study of geneology. She has a mailing list of 58 that she sends photos and family histories to.

"Somebody gave me an old Bible and that's how I got interested in the family history," she said.

Bob the fixit man also doubles as photographer when the women take their jaunts to places like Multnomah Falls, Timberline Lodge, the Japanese and rose gardens.

Bob believes his mother's personal interest in her boarders is a natural outgrowth of a life devoted to her children.

"When the kids left, this boarding house gave her another family," her son said.

Esther doesn't think her interest in her boarders is at all unusual.

"What's more important than people?" she asked.



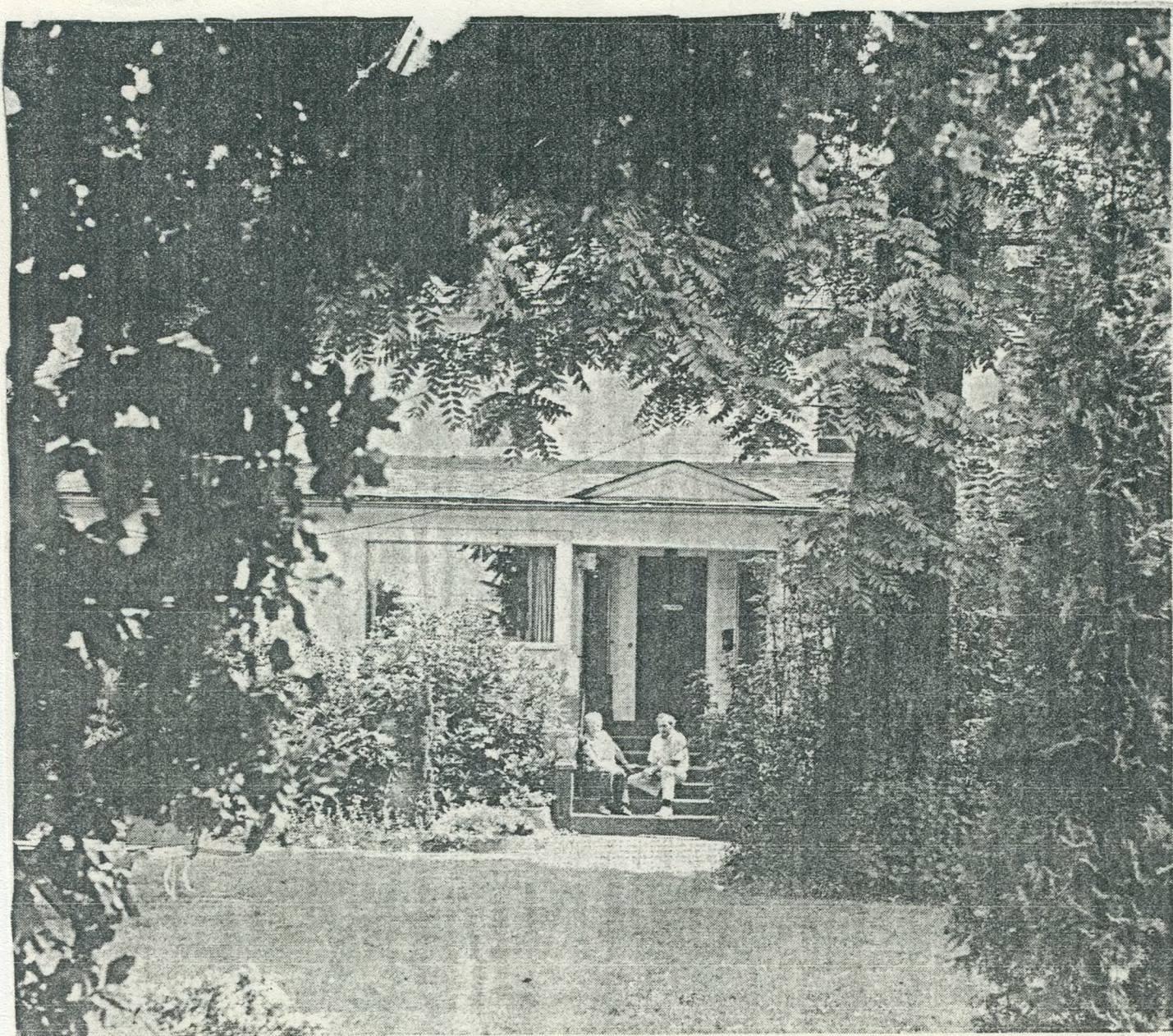


VINES GROW both inside and out in Esther Maness's boarding house. Son Bob

Hays mans the vacuum after the dinner meal while his mother gets a good laugh.

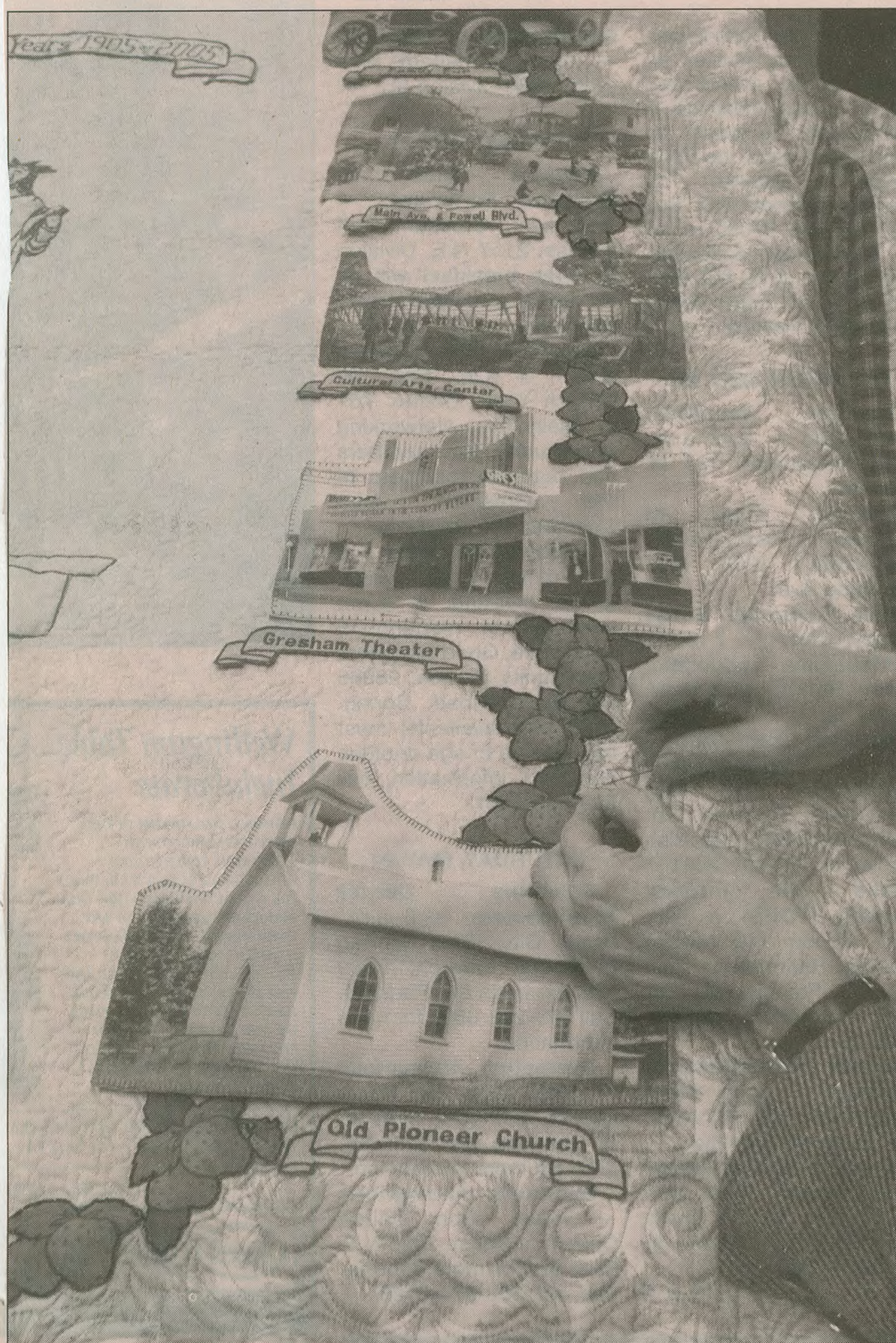






**BOARDING HOUSE** run by Esther Maness and her son, Bob Hays, used to be the home of Gresham Mayor Charles Cleveland. It went on the tax rolls in 1899.





FILE PHOTO

The Gresham Senior Center, Multnomah County East Building, 600 N.E. Eighth St., is offering a quilting class from 9 to 10:30 a.m. Thursday, May 22.