

1.

LAVONA EVANS

Thatcher

LaVona Evans pauses before a row of framed, black-and-white photographs hanging in the living room of her Thatcher home. She points to a picture of a family of six standing solemnly in front of a small brick house (opposite page). “I was born here, on the next street down,” she says. “I haven’t gone very far, have I?”

LaVona’s guests laugh. She may have settled a block from where she was born, but life has taken LaVona far — as far as Tonga, where she taught the queen to quilt. But for most of her life, LaVona has lived in Arizona, which seems fitting. On February 14, both LaVona and Arizona will turn 100.

LaVona grew up with the state and witnessed its history firsthand. She survived the TB epidemic of the early 1900s. Her father farmed the West Valley. As a young mother during the Depression, LaVona worked for a fledgling dairy operation called Shamrock. Like many others, she raised rabbits and vegetables during World War II. In the 1970s, hippies lived on land she owned near Redington. She has seen the explosion in the state’s population, and contributed to its growth more than a little.

That shared heritage extends even to LaVona’s name. The first three letters are the first three letters of Valentine, spelled backward, for the holiday celebrated on February 14. The last three letters come from Arizona. But the links between LaVona and Arizona go back even further.

LaVona Evans, who was born on Statehood Day, revisits her childhood home, pictured at right.

LaVona descended from Mormon pioneers who settled the state. Her great-grandfather, Daniel Webster Jones, led the group that colonized Lehi, originally called Jonesville, which became Mesa. Her grandfather, Daniel P. Jones, was speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives in the 1920s. His wife gave birth to the first baby born in Lehi. That baby, Daniel Dudley Jones, was LaVona’s father.

“He taught school until he was 80 years old,” LaVona says of her father, moving on to a photograph of perfectly scripted letters that he drew on a chalkboard.

“He liked penmanship,” she says. “Penmanship and English.” But he taught everything: Spanish, calculus, agronomy. He taught Spencer W. Kimball, who became president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And he taught LaVona.

“Don’t ever have your parents for your schoolteachers,” she says. “They use you for an example.”

LaVona’s early years were hard. One of her earliest memories involves running to her mother while being chased by an older brother. Her mother was carrying a pan of boiling water and LaVona got badly burned. She remembers Dr. Platt arriving each day by horse and buggy to change the bandages.

“They named my younger brother Donald Platt,” she says.



When LaVona was 5, her mother died of a brain tumor. She and Donald went to live with their grandparents in Mesa. LaVona shared a bed with her aunt Laura, who contracted tuberculosis while at school in Tempe. Laura and three other siblings died from the disease. Somehow, LaVona never got it.

After her father remarried, LaVona rejoined her family. They moved frequently as her father chased teaching jobs from Chandler to Goodyear, where he grew fields of cantaloupes in the summer. They moved again, to Tucson, and, eventually, to Colorado.

Her father never returned to Arizona, but LaVona came back with an older brother at age 18. They settled in the

keep her in the hospital.

"But I bawled so," she says. "He said, 'If you have someone carry you in, I'll let you go home.'"

She arrived just as her husband was being carried out. "He just looked at the baby and kissed me goodbye, and that's the last I saw of him."

It was in the midst of the Great Depression, but LaVona found work at a little operation called Shamrock Dairy.

"The owner, Mr. McClelland, was milking cows by hand," LaVona recalls. "And [his wife] was going to work in the office."

They hired LaVona to do housework, and let her bring her children. At Shamrock, LaVona met her second hus-



COURTESY OF LAVONA EVANS

Mormon community of Binghamton, now part of Tucson, in the Catalina foothills. There, she met and married her first husband, Lavar Price.

Lavar and LaVona built a home on Chapel Street, just off of Fort Lowell Road, where LaVona delivered their first child. The windows hadn't yet been installed and the house had no electricity. They couldn't use a lamp because of the chloroform, so the baby was delivered by flashlight. Lavar buried the afterbirth in the backyard — he was so excited he put the shovel through his shoe.

Ten days after the birth of their second child, in "the stork's nest" this time, Lavar died from a burst appendix. LaVona was still hemorrhaging, and the doctor wanted to

band, Quinton Hawkins. They added rooms onto the Binghamton house and had three more children. LaVona tended large gardens — flowers in front, vegetables in back. The girls helped in the house while the boys, active in 4H, tended cows, chickens, goats, horses and rabbits.

Quinton and LaVona were married 38 years when he died of lung cancer.

At 62, LaVona married Junius Evans, a man seven years younger. They moved to a remote area near Redington, in a house with no closets and boards for cupboards.

A colorful character, Junius flew a plane held together with baling wire, allowed a group of hippies to settle on their land and made pets of the javelinas, which, according

to LaVona, had the run of the house.

"They went around by the front porch and knew if they kept hitting on the screen door it would open just enough so they could get their legs in there and come on in," LaVona recalls.

Junius drove the animals to town, where they'd follow him to the bank and the store.

"He was real interesting," LaVona says.

Junius was a well driller and, in 1980, their church sent the couple on a two-year mission to Tonga.

"My husband was drilling a well for the king, and the queen was there," LaVona recalls. "She asked [Junius] what his wife was doing, and he told her that I was home quilting. She came over and said she wanted to quilt."

One of their projects was a wedding gift for Prince Charles and Lady Diana.

"She came to my house all the time, just like any neighbor," LaVona recalls. "But she always had a lady-in-waiting with her."

In 1986, Junius and LaVona built a house in Thatcher to be near LaVona's three brothers and two daughters.

LaVona has lived there alone since Junius died in 1988. She grows tomatoes and cuts her own grass with an electric mower. A small back room holds toys for the great-grandkids. An easel displays her latest painting, and a frame holds the quilt she's working on. Each week, she bakes a dozen loaves of bread. She also prepares meals for people she refers to as "the elderly." Still active in her church, she's been a visiting teacher — a kind of mentor to younger women — for 75 years.

She renewed her driver's license not long ago and drives herself to Bashas'. She takes no medications and, aside from having her babies and a gallbladder operation, LaVona's never been to the hospital. If she's lost track of how many grandkids she has, she can be forgiven. Four years ago, her descendants totaled 137.

They gather on her birthday. Last year, the family played a game of *Jeopardy!* with categories such as "Early Years," "Husbands" and "Tonga."

As this article went to press, the family hadn't finalized plans for this year. LaVona's daughter, Louise, knew only one thing for sure: It would be very special.

—Kathy Montgomery

EDITOR'S NOTE: What follows are 99 other things that were around when Arizona was granted statehood. Most are on the National Register of Historic Places, and most are open to the public. Some, however, are not. Please respect the rights of private property owners.

2.

ADAMS SCHOOL

(a.k.a. Grace Court School)

800 W. Adams Street, Phoenix
Adams School was established in 1911 and was later named for its long-serving principal, Grace Court. The school closed in 1977, and, after a series of owners and renovations, now hosts office space for private companies. One of the original classrooms remains intact.

3.

ALMA WARD MEETING HOUSE

809 W. Main Street, Mesa

The Alma Ward Meeting House was once just that — a place of meeting for members of a Mormon ward in Mesa. Today, the structure serves as the Landmark Restaurant. The church was housed in what is now the dining room.

4.

ARIZONA PIONEERS' HOME

300 S. McCormick Street, Prescott

Prescott's Arizona Pioneers' Home has always ministered to the elderly. Opened in 1911, it served as a hospital, as well as institutional housing. Today, it's an assisted-living and skilled-care facility.

5.

ARIZONA RANCHO

Tovar & Apache streets, Holbrook

Arizona Rancho was constructed as a hotel in 1888 and has since gone through several incarnations — the Higgins House, the Brunswick Hotel and the Arizona Hotel, to name a few. Today, the building is vacant.



6.

ASHURST HOUSE

421 W. Aspen Avenue, Flagstaff

Before Henry J. Ashurst and his family moved in, brick-manufacturer-turned-judge J.C. Mulligan inhabited this now-private residence. It was built in 1890 and was once used by the U.S. Weather Bureau.

7.

BABBITT BROTHERS BUILDING

12 E. Aspen Avenue, Flagstaff

The Babbitt family built a two-story structure at the corner of Aspen Avenue and San Francisco Street in Flagstaff in 1889, and there opened Babbitt Brothers Trading Co. Today, the building houses Babbitt's Backcountry Outfitters.

8.

BEEET SUGAR FACTORY

5243 W. Glendale Avenue, Glendale

This site opened as a sugar-beet processing plant in 1906. It also served as a soy sauce processing plant during World War II. After many years of vacancy, the factory is now being renovated into a distillery.
