

## Town's oldest still in love with life, home

By CATHERINE BAUM Staff Writer

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WESTHAMPTON – At age 96, Jessie Cole may be Westhampton's oldest resident, but she sure doesn't seem it. In an interview Monday, she said she enjoys driving to Saint Philip's Episcopal Church in Easthampton every Sunday, attending Council on Aging luncheons, and being a member of the Friends of the Westhampton Library.

"I can't realize I'm 96," Cole said. She was born on Feb. 19, 1912.

The gold-tipped cane on the coffee table in front of her is known as the Boston Post Cane, a New England tradition that dates back to 1909. More than 400 towns take part in a tradition that involves passing the cane on to the town's oldest resident after the previous owner dies. The late Dorothy Loud, of Southampton Road, had the cane for about three months before she died, Cole said. The cane was passed to Cole in February, the month that she turned 96.

"I'm going to hide it," Cole said. "I don't want anything to happen to it so I'm going to keep it under cover."

Born in Easthampton, Cole graduated from Easthampton High School with the class of 1931. She has attended St. Philip's for 96 years, and in 2006 she co-authored a book on the church's 137 years of history. Her niece, Ilene Titus, of Southborough, also wrote the book, which can be found at the Emily Williston Memorial Library in Easthampton and the Forbes Library in Northampton.

"I'm real proud of this," Cole said as she flipped through historic pictures of the church's rectory, organ and stained-glass windows. The photos and records were kept in the church's safe, she said.

"You don't want to have records and not have them all together in one place - you have to have a history with anything that's important."

Maureen Lee, of Easthampton, is also a member of the church and has known Cole for about 35 years.

"I think it's pretty wonderful at her age to be so active," Lee said.

Cole graduated from the former Northampton Commercial College and worked as an accountant at United Elastic Company in Easthampton from 1938 to 1953, when she married the late Sidney Cole, who owned a poultry farm in Westhampton for 50 years. The couple travelled to Holland to buy an egg grader, and also took trips to England and France. Sidney Cole, who died in 1993, was an assessor and Jessie Cole was an assessor's clerk for six years in Westhampton.

"I love Westhampton," Cole said.

She points to a multitude of photos of relatives, many of whom she sees on a weekly basis.

"I'm all family," Cole said. She was expecting her cousins to visit Monday afternoon and her niece to visit today.

These days, Cole enjoys driving to church, the grocery store and the mall.

"You're independent when you can drive," Cole said.

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