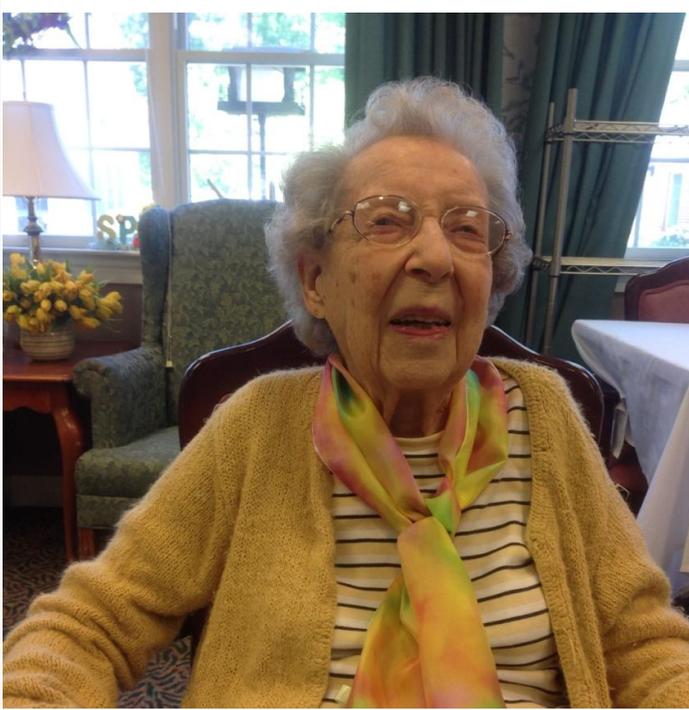


## “A Joyful Noise”



### Happy 105<sup>th</sup> to Clara Schannep Jensen

Clara Schannep Jensen will turn 105 on December 6, 2017. She lives in the healthcare unit at the Chesapeake Retirement Community in Newport News, VA. You'll find her there tapping her feet and swaying her shoulders to the beat of any music that happens to be playing. She'll even sing along if it is music of a certain vintage, or a tune she particularly likes.

*Clara, in a silk scarf she painted.*

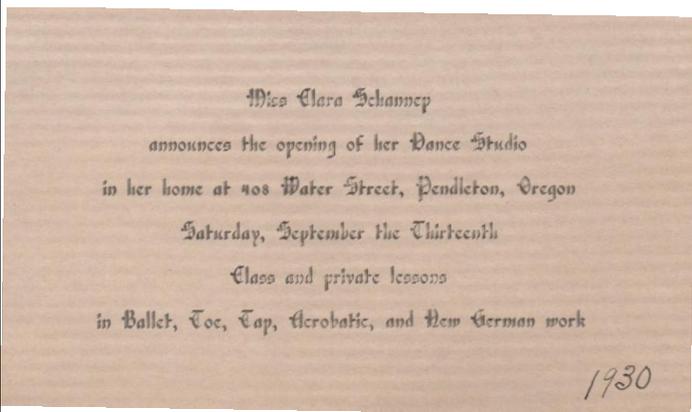
## CHAPTER 1 - EARLY LIFE



Clara was born December 6, 1912, in Versailles, MO. She was the third of five children born to Isaac Melvin and Clara Bahney Schannep. Father Isaac Melvin "Mel" was a self-taught lawyer and county judge. Siblings included: Maxine (1903-1977), Dwight (1906-1947), Bill (1910-1985), Josephine (1915-2009) and Charles (1918-1965).

The family later moved to Oregon, where Clara's dad became an attorney for the state highway department.

*Clara and her siblings (from Left: Charles, Josephine, Clara, William, Dwight, Maxine).*



Clara began performing at an early age: the newspaper in Pilot Rock, Oregon reported on December 29, 1916, that Clara Schannep quaintly sang "O Little Star of Bethlehem" at a church event. Clara had celebrated her fourth birthday just three weeks before the article was published!

In 1930, the same year she graduated Pilot Rock High School, Clara sent out engraved announcements that she was opening a Dance Studio offering class and private lessons in ballet, toe, tap, acrobatic and 'new German work'.

*Announcement of Clara's Dance Studio*



Within a year of graduating from high school, Clara decided she needed professional training, and, in 1931 and 1932, attended the Perry Mansfield School for Performing Arts in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. The school is still in business, still training students in performing arts. Clara fully embraced the school's lessons on expressing innovation and imagination in theatre, dance, musical theatre, and creative writing.

*Perry Mansfield, 1930*

## CHAPTER 2 - PERFORMER



After leaving Performing Arts school, Clara toured with a dance group on the "Orpheum Circuit", visiting places like Salt Lake City, Omaha, Kansas City, San Antonio, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. She moved to Greenwich Village in New York City, and shared housing with a half dozen friends who were trying to have careers as performers. Clara herself was most often cast as an ingénue in various productions.

*Clara (2<sup>nd</sup> from Left) Posing in front of Grauman's Chinese*

***Theatre – Hollywood, Cal.***

Clara returned to Oregon where she participated in local theater and provided piano accompaniment for recitals. After two years, she moved to Tallahassee, Florida where her sister, Maxine was a college professor and brother-in-law, Bill Putnam, owned a jewelry store. Paul Johnson was a favored dance partner while in Florida.



***Paul Johnson and Clara Jensen, Tallahassee, FL, 1940***

## CHAPTER 3 - RED CROSS AND THE WAR YEARS



### **“Expecting to get called anytime”**

At the end of 1944, Clara signed up to work for the American Red Cross anywhere they wanted to send her. She moved to Washington DC and reported back to her family “...I’m working at the Printcraft bldg here at Headquarters. ...[I] have quite a responsible job and am quite thrilled that they felt I could handle it. Of course it is just something to keep me busy until they send me out.”<sup>1</sup>

In January, 1945, Clara received word she had been “appointed as Staff Assistant and in this capacity you will serve under the direction of the responsible American Red Cross official in the insular or foreign area to which you may be assigned.”<sup>2</sup>

**Clara Jensen (far right) with the American Red Cross in England.**

<sup>1</sup> Letter – Washington DC, 1/1/1945 – Clara to family members

<sup>2</sup> 2/10/1945 – VMAIL – Clara to parents

### **“Spent the Whole Day Making Doughnuts”**

By February, 1945, Clara had arrived in England, and reported the following week that “... *The day before yesterday we spent the whole day making doughnuts. They were pretty good, too. We were in a clubmobile which was parked in a garage. .... We’re living at a Red Cross Club – steam heat etc., very nice.*”

A month later, Clara was still working in the Clubmobile, and wrote home” ... *We have so much help on Saturday mornings at the Clubmobile that we can hardly get our work done. All the little English kids from 9 to 14 want to help. Sometimes there have been as many as 10 or 15 of them in the Clubmobile at one time. ... We never walk down the street without some little kid yelling “Hello Clara” etc.*<sup>3</sup>



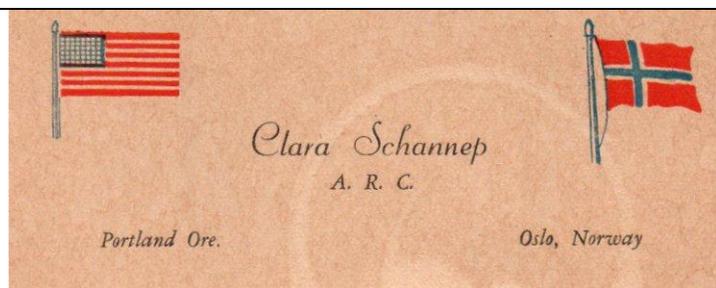
**Clara and a Clubmobile**

<sup>3</sup> 3/18/1945 – letter - Clara to “the Gang”



Back home in Oregon, on June 11, 1945, the *Oregon Journal* published a full page advertisement for people to serve with the American Red Cross at home or overseas. Of the eight individuals featured in the ad, Clara's photo and bio (literally) topped the list in the upper right corner of the page.

*Oregon Journal June 11, 1945*



*Business Card for Clara while in Norway*

Within six months, Clara was one of a small group transferred to Oslo Norway to set up and run a soldiers' club.

From Oslo, Norway, she wrote *"It's a gorgeous building. The club was used by the Nazis for more or less of an officer's club at one time. The dishes even have still some German words on them."*<sup>4</sup>

Later in the same letter, she reported *"Tomorrow the Americans are having a big parade to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup>. We are to be in the parade. Tonight Sonya Henie is supposed to make an appearance at the Club."*<sup>5</sup>

Even to this day, Clara proudly displays on the oversize certificate she received for her part in "The Liberation of Norway."

After transferring from Norway, she worked at the Palmgarten in Frankfurt, Germany, and finally,



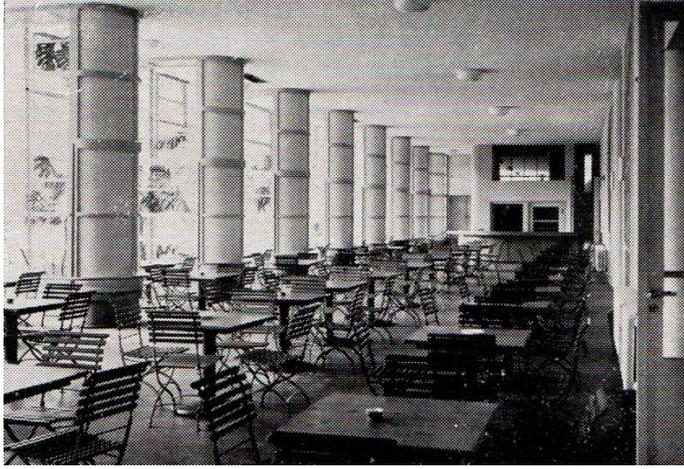
*Window Over Main Entrance of the Palmgarten*

<sup>4</sup> 7/3/1945 – Norway letter - Clara to her parents.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

served as Director of a Red Cross club in Darmstadt, Germany.

### Imagination, Initiative, Interest And Effort



Clara's work with the soldiers' clubs led to a number of commendations and awards:

September 5, 1945, from Brigadier General Owen Summers

*I would like to express my appreciation for the splendid effort the American Red Cross has put forth in servicing our troops in Norway.*

*The hard work, loyal cooperation and earnest effort of all American Red Cross personnel stationed here has been of the greatest value to us in the accomplishment of our mission.*

*I, personally, have been most grateful to the Red Cross for the part they have played in maintaining the morale of this Force. The job of discipline in this command has been made much simpler by the superior work your personnel has done here. Each member of the Red Cross staff here should feel much satisfaction in the splendid work they have done.<sup>6</sup>*

November 1, 1946, from Col. L. L. Cobb to Claire (sic) Schannep

*Please accept the thanks of all military personnel of the QM School Center for the grand entertainment afforded us.*

*The attractive decorations, the well balanced floor show, the contests with prize awards, and, in fact, the over-all arrangements were indicative of the **imagination, initiative, interest and effort that is ever evident** in you and your helpers. The nightly attendance at the Red*

<sup>6</sup> 9/5/1945 letter from General Owen Summers to Mr. Harry Palmer, American Red Cross

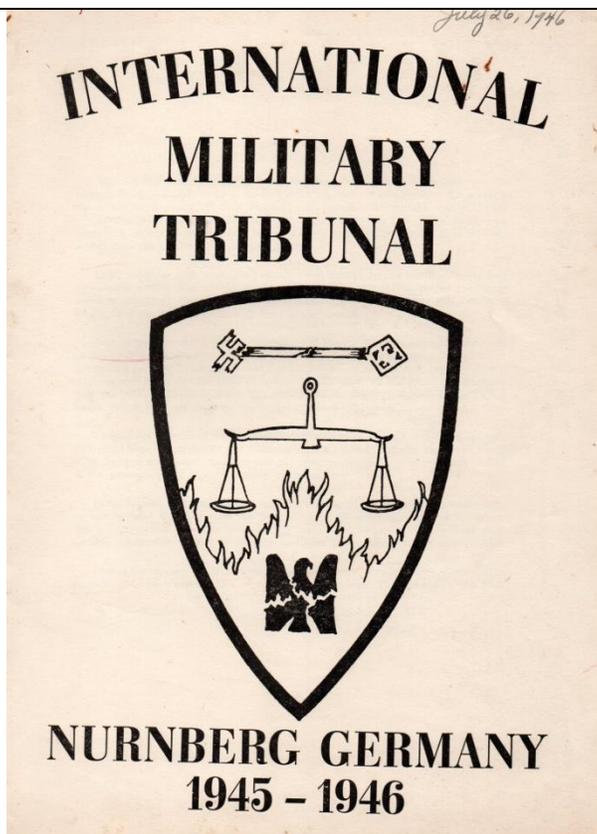


*Cross building also lends evidence to your ability and accomplishments.<sup>7</sup>*

In February, 1946, Clara received a permanent transfer to Germany.

*Clara was a valued staff member at the Palmgarden, American Red Cross Club in Calais*

### Where The Swastikas Once Bloomed



*Clara's program booklet from the Nurnburg Trials*

In July 1946, Clara had a brief pause before working to open a new club in Darmstadt, and took a trip to attend the Nuremberg trials, an experience she described in a detailed letter to her brother, Dwight, a West Point graduate and Colonel in the Army Air Forces.

*I've been wanting to go to Nurnberg for months now – so Thursday of this week I goofed off with Temporary Duty orders from the Colonel here at the post and drove down with a girl from the 97<sup>th</sup> General Hospital in Frankfurt. We didn't get off until 4pm and arrived in Nurnberg about 12:30 midnight. I had to do all the driving because Eleanor didn't have a G.I. License. I was exhausted – we finally found billets – two beds in fixed over bombed out hotel. We had a flat tire on the way down and had to have that fixed.*

*... Next morning July 26<sup>th</sup> we had breakfast – got tickets to the trials and got in to them at about 10 am. We stayed until they recessed for lunch at about 12:30. 'Twas a thrilling experience – it so happened that we got there on the very day that Justice Robert H. Jackson of the U.S. gave his 25,000 word speech – summing up the trials and asking for punishment. It was a marvelous speech.*

*We saw Goering, Raeder, Von Papan – all of them except Hess who was too ill to attend.*

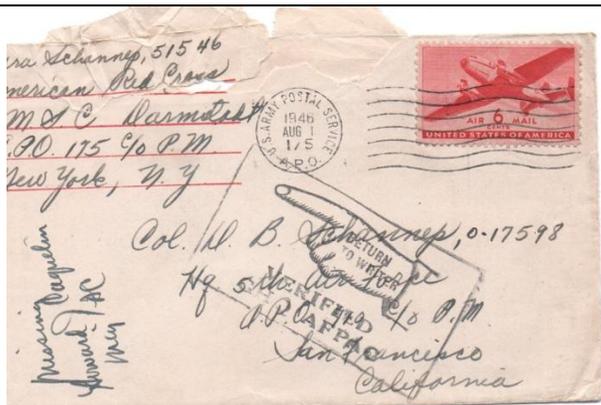
*The International Business Machines have installed ear phones at all the seats so that you can hear the*

<sup>7</sup> 11/1/1946 letter from Col. L. L. Cobb to named Red Cross personnel,

trials in any language. Of course Jackson was speaking in English so we listened to him directly but interpreters were speaking all the time he was into microphones – so that all the prisoners were listening, too. They're(sic) expressions were very interesting. Somehow it seemed just like a stage play or the movies. Goering has lost about 100 lbs – butt he has composure and even arrogance, I would say. The court room is small – so that you could see the prisoners very well.

We had lunch in the Palace of Justice where the trials are held – then dashed out to Soldier's Field – which is a huge field or stadium – Hitler at one time gave his speeches there and reviewed marching troops. You've probably seen news reels of it – white cement or stone with columns – where the swastikas once bloomed – there are now Army insignias and a huge "Soldier's Field" sign. You couldn't help comparing it to Caesar's time or Napoleon's. You could almost see Hitler up there blowing his top about something.

About 3 o'clock we left Nurnberg and started back. Had another flat tire, ran out of gas, ate at a Transient Mess and got home about 11pm. It was without a doubt one of the most thrilling experiences I have had overseas.



It must have been a shock to Clara when she learned this letter was never received or read by her brother. On July 25, 1946, Colonel Dwight Schanep was co-pilot on a B-17 airplane lost on a flight from the Philippines to Japan. The plane made radio contact with Okinawa, but was never heard from again, and never reached its destination.



After losing her brother in the summer of 1946, Clara learned while continuing to serve in Europe that her father had died February 9, 1947. In May of 1947, Clara returned home and resigned her position with the American Red Cross.

Clara's duties with the Red Cross had taken her to London, England, Oslo, Norway, Frankfurt, Germany, Cannes, Calais Marseille and Paris, France, Switzerland, Luxembourg, and Rome, Italy.

## Take Many Bows for All You Did



Clara was a wonderful ambassador to everyone she met overseas

In January 1946, Clara wrote that she had “*sent a package home not long ago – my mahogany box which the P.W’s (Prisoners of War) made for me at Christmas time.*”

As she was leaving Europe, she received letter from Annemarie Bennett, a German native that read, in part,

*Take many bows for all you did for me during the time I was working for you. Especially grateful always felt about the nice ways you had, never to let me feel as one has it so often now, belonging to that defeated Germany and therefore to be second class people. You know what I mean”.*

## CHAPTER 4 – HOME AND FAMILY



After the War, Clara married Alfred A. Jensen, a soldier she had met while in Europe. At the time of their marriage, Alfred was stationed at Camp Campbell, teaching ROTC at Xavier University. Al – sometimes with Clara accompanying him -- also served in Monterey, CA, Brooklyn, NY, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Azores, Labrador, Vietnam, and Iran. For most of Alfred’s military career (which extended from WWII to the Vietnam War), he served as a Warrant Officer in the Transportation Corps. His primary duty was as a Marinet Engineer on the U.S. Army BVL John D. Page. As such, home base was Fort Eustis.

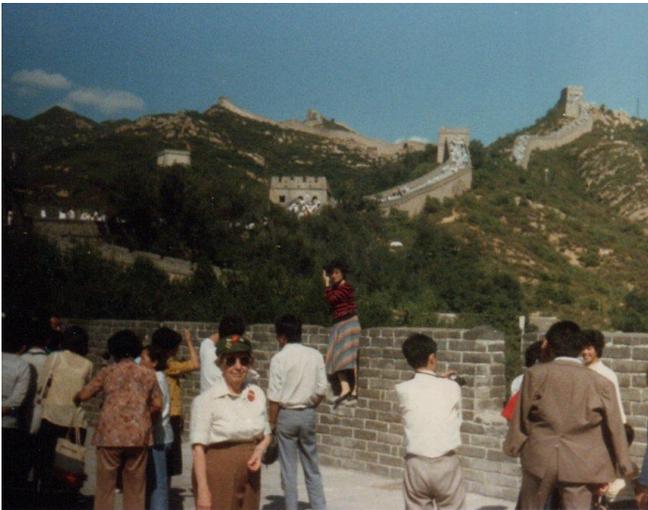
While remaining at home base in Williamsburg, Clara became a costumed hostess for Colonial Williamsburg, and received a number of commendations for her skill in working with VIP and foreign visitors.

Al and Clara had one son, Leslie Dwight, who exhibited an interest in military history from a very early age. Al and Clara encouraged his interest, taking him to many military sites in the US and Europe. He has spent his career as a curator and director of military museums, and is today a Curator

of Arms and Armor at the West Point Museum.



***The RV was loaded onto a Train for a Trip to Mexico***



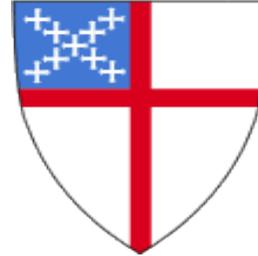
***Clara at the Great Wall of China***

After Al retired from the Army, he worked for the National River Academy and Loveland Corporation, then retired again. He and Clara were able to satisfy their desire to travel, logging many miles in Recreational Vehicles as they criss-crossed America. They also made several trips overseas, visiting Europe and China, and took three trips to Israel.



***Son, Leslie, Clara and Al in front of The Chesapeake***

While living in Newport News, Al and Clara were active in the establishment of St. Georges Episcopal Church. After they relocated to Virginia Beach, they became longtime members of Old Donation Episcopal Church where Al and Clara served in a number of ministries and leadership positions.



In 2002 Al and Clara made the decision to move into the Chesapeake Retirement Village, progressing through independent, assisted living, and healthcare. Al passed away in March, 2014.

These days, Clara remains the life of the party in the healthcare unit, participating in low impact aerobic exercise classes, social events, and arts and crafts, still making “A Joyful Noise” and being a blessing to those around her.