bring me back a leprechaun, but he said he didn't want me to be disappointed if the leprechauns were too fast for him to catch. What he did bring back was a leprechaun doll in a box, with gray socks and a pipe and bat. He told me it was a dead leprechaun, and that the salt water had killed him. I think I half-believed him, and I went around the neighborhood showing my dead leprechaun to my friends. One of their mothers told my mother, 'Agnes' imagination is growing up faster than she is.''

''The leprechaun went back into a box,'' she says, ''but he'd get to come out on my birthdays and special occasions.''

Now a family heirloom, the doll resides with her great-niece, Sallie Graham.

Sister Agnes Clare says the Springfield she grew up in wasn't a small town. There were 50,000 people living here at the beginning of the 20th century. Downtown was populated with family-owned businesses, and people tended to stay at the same job all of their lives.

The streets were paved with bricks that popped up without warning. People waited all year for the biggest event on the calendar: the Illinois State Fair.

''My mother baked hams and fried chickens so we had safe food to take to the fair. Lots of people got sick from eating at the fairgrounds because there was no refrigeration. At night, the area around the Old Capitol would be filled with fair performers who put on shows. Acrobats, singers and actors would perform on one side of the square. Then we would rush to the other side to get a front row seat on the ground. Everyone in town seemed to come out, and all the stores stayed open late so people could shop.''

A rare treat was a little cash for ice cream, usually provided by big brother Hugh because there was an ice cream shop across from the Graham law office.

A chance meeting with Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis was a highlight of the years Sister Agnes Clare spent in Washington as the young daughter of an Illinois congressman. She tells how Brandeis and her father worked together to investigate and remove corrupt agents who were swindling the residents of Indian reservations.

''Justice Brandeis came to our home because he was leaving Washington and he wanted to tell my father goodbye. I happened to be hanging on the fence in the front yard, so he gave me his business card and told me to give it to my father. He said my father was a great man.''

''Indians would show up at my father's office in full native dress. My father spent a lot of time away from Washington inspecting the reservations. He told me stories of Indians so badly cared for (that) their feet left bloody footprints in the snow. One agent my father got removed gave an Indian a broken sewing machine for land that had oil and timber on it. The Indians were so grateful, a tribe in South Dakota made my father an honorary member with the title Chief Stand Up Straight.''

Years later, when the Graham family home in Springfield was sold, she says, relatives donated her father's papers from that period to Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass.

In adulthood, Sister Agnes Clare attended college and was a librarian and a founding teacher at a mission and school in Duluth, Minn. However, her long lifetime often has been attached to a small geographic area bounded by the neighborhood where she was born and extending a few blocks west to the places where she attended school, spent much of her working career and retired to the Sacred Heart Convent in 1983.

Within those confines, she has lived most of a full, rich life that shows few signs of diminishing.

''Sister Agnes' bones don't support her, so she moves around in a wheel chair,'' says Sister Beth Murphy, communication coordinator for the Springfield Dominican order.

''Other than that, she has no illnesses, and her mind is sharp and clear.''

The order has had other nuns who lived to be 100, but Sister Agnes Clare holds the longevity record.

''She's amazing,'' says Sister Murphy. ''She continues to live every day with interest and curiosity. She listens to classical music and follows politics and current events on public radio. She reads the large-print edition of The New York Times every day. Recently I dropped by her room to visit and couldn't find her. She had wheeled herself off to art appreciation class.''

Sister Agnes Clare's gaze is steady and assured and her face is remarkably unlined. She occupies a sunny room filled with photos and religious keepsakes. Less than a block away is the former Sacred Heart Academy (now Sacred Heart-Griffin High School), where she worked as a librarian for nearly 60 years.

''No, I didn't plan on becoming a nun,'' she says matter-of-factly. ''I always thought I'd have a lot of children and live in a fairy-tale house. No one lives that way, of course.

''I always loved books, so when I graduated I went across the street from my family's home and got a job at Lincoln Library. The librarians were patient and put up with me while I learned how to do the work. One day I was alone when a man with a gruff voice and a face that looked like leather came in and asked to see the books written by Jack London. Of course, we had 'Sea Wolf' and 'Call of the Wild' and all the popular London books. I showed him, and then I asked who he was.

''He said he was Jack London. I was so astonished, I forgot to ask for his autograph.''

Sister Agnes Clare brushes aside any suggestion that she was a writer, despite her essays published in Catholic Digest and other publications. She once sold an article to The Atlantic Monthly. The piece was a rebuttal to one written by a nun critical of convent life. The editors asked for more of Sister Agnes Clare's work but World War II intervened and life became too busy for writing articles.

She has been a prolific letter writer to four generations of Grahams. Carolyn Graham, another grand-niece says each of her four adult children treasures letters from their Aunt Agnes.

''Whenever my kids come home,'' she says, ''they always check in with her. They think she's extraordinary and she is.''

After a lifetime that has seen wars and sweeping societal changes and the invention of everything from airplanes to the Internet, Sister Agnes Clare isn't offering any advice on how to live longer than 100 years.

An academically engaged life with good health habits probably has helped, and so has genetics. She comes from a long-lived family. Her father lived to age 93 and her brother Huge died at 95. A nephew, Dr. James Graham, continues to practice medicine at age 91.

There are, she admits, perks attached to being among the rare triple-digit individuals called centenarians.

''People ask you questions when you get to be my age,'' she says, smiling. ''They even listen to my answers.''●

LEGISLATION CONCERNING DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

● Mr. COVERDELL. Mr. President, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an extraordinary man who left a legacy for each of us as Americans and also as Georgians. On a hot summer day, August 28, 1963, Dr. King delivered his now famous and unforgettable ''I Have A Dream'' speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. His words will always stay with us and help remind our Nation that we must look to our own home and family, friends and community, to see what we can do to make a better world for all. As Dr. King himself said, ''When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, Black men and White men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to join hands and sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, Free at last, Thank God Almighty, We are free at last.' ''

Thousands of visitors come to our Nation's capital to see where Martin Luther King delivered the ''I Have A Dream'' speech. Unfortunately, there is not a marker or words to show where he helped change the course of our country's history. To commemorate this historic event and truly honor Dr. King, today I am introducing legislation which directs the Secretary of the Interior to insert a plaque at the exact site of the speech on the steps of the LINCOLN Memorial. It is my hope that this marker will preserve Dr. King's legacy for generations to come. The Secretary of the Interior may accept contributions to help defray the costs of preparing and inserting the plaque on the steps. This legislation is noncontroversial and is consistent with what has been done previously at the Memorial to commemorate similar events. The bill is a Senate companion to legislation introduced by Representative ANN NORTHUP of Kentucky. I look forward to working with her on securing its enactment.●

RETIREMENT OF KEITH McCARTY

● Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, 2½ years ago, when the Balanced Budget Act (BBA) was enacted, few Members of Congress paid much attention to a small section in the BBA that created a new program for hospitals in frontier and rural communities.

This program, called the Critical Access Hospital, was buried among hundreds of provisions affecting Medicare. Yet, in many ways, it may well be one of the most lasting achievements of that session of Congress.

The Critical Access Hospital idea is based on a very successful demonstration project in Montana. This project, called the Medical Assistance Facility